Cultural politics in critical action learning: a Bourdieusian analysis of a management development program in Tanzania

Ulrike Martina Burger

(MA International Business, MA in Management and Consulting)

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Department of Organisation, Work and Technology

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Declaration

I declare that this Ph.D. thesis, entitled “The cultural politics of critical action learning: a Bourdieusian analysis of an organisational management development program in Tanzania”, is my own work and has not been submitted in the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

Ulrike Burger

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Abstract

Critical action learning (CAL) is a collaborative approach to management learning that uses sets of managers and a cyclical process of action and reflection on real-life managerial problems to create learning that has the potential to transform managerial practice. What distinguishes CAL from conventional approaches to action learning is its explicit focus on critical reflection and the exploration of the political and emotional dynamics that are mobilised in the sets as a source for learning.

Studies have shown that the broader local context in which CAL participants are embedded has the potential to mobilise political dynamics in the sets that promote or constrain learning from critical reflection. In this research, I investigate the impact of participants' local cultural context on CAL in an organisational program in Tanzania. To date this is a neglected phenomenon in academic research, where studies exploring such dynamics have been almost exclusively conducted in Western settings. I argue that to understand the potential and limitations of CAL in non-Western contexts, it is important to gain insight into the cultural politics that are mobilised in the participants' experience with a CAL design and the ways in which they constrain or promote learning.

The research has originated from my own professional experience as a Learning and Development Consultant working across the globe, and I use my own work as a vehicle for the study. Using an ethnographic approach, I examine the introduction of a CAL-based leadership development program (LDP) for middle managers in a microfinance institution (MFI) in Tanzania, in which I had a leading role in designing and facilitating.

To explore the cultural dynamics in the LDP in some depth and a systematic manner, I draw on a Bourdieu's theory of practice (1992) to analyse the assumptions about learning and managing that underpin the LDP (field), the participants' local culture (habitus), and the participants' tendencies to act in the CAL sets (practice).

The analysis surfaced three cultural dynamics that have limited learning. These were rooted in the participants' experience of the CAL design as threat to their positioning in both the organisation and their communities and manifested themselves in their strategies to protect the recognition of their managerial authority, the harmony in their peer relationships, and their financial income. These strategies significantly limited critical reflection in the LDP and were sustained by my own facilitation practice.

This study contributes to knowledge in several ways: First, it surfaces how in Tanzanian organisations, set members meet as 'experts and apprentices with commonalities' rather than as 'comrades-in-adversity' (Revans, 1982b) or 'adversaries with commonality' (Vince, 2004). Second, it highlights the value of a socioeconomic lens to make sense of CAL practices in Tanzanian organisations, which so far has been unexplored. Third, it sheds light on an underdeveloped area of Bourdieu's (1992) concept of illusio by surfacing the embeddedness of a field illusio in a hierarchical system of several illusio, which shapes how it is enacted. Fourth, it deepens our understanding of the emotional and political dynamics of CAL facilitation, by foregrounding how diverse roles and positionings have shaped my facilitation practice.

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Introduction

Origins and rationale of the study

The origins of this study lie in my own professional experience and the challenges I faced as a learning and development consultant involved in social banking projects in Latin America, Africa and Asia. In this role, I had the opportunity to design and implement management development programs in several institutions across different countries. Most of my assignments brought me to low-income countries, where managers operated under politically and economically unstable conditions and had to deal with high degrees of uncertainty and a scarcity of resources to solve complex managerial problems. These difficult conditions created a particularly strong need for management development. The programs usually aimed to enhance the participants' managerial capability through a strong focus on new theories and individual skill development. The assumption was that by increasing their knowledge and developing specific skills, managers would be better equipped for and more effective in their daily work. Most programs were based on the principles of Kolb's experiential learning theory (e.g. Kolb and Kolb, 2008) and usually included theories, case studies, experiential group activities, skills practice and discussions. Although the programs were usually very well received and considered innovative, the impact on managerial practice turned out to be limited. While there were several reasons for this, conversations with participants highlighted an important factor: the managerial theories that underpinned this learning did not necessarily harmonise with the participants' own ideas and the context in which they were working. While they enjoyed the learning events, some made clear that they did not necessarily see fit with their local reality. Such admissions increasingly led me to question the very core of my work. What sense did my work make if it was of no practical use for my clients? How could I design management development programs to make them more sensitive to and effective in local contexts?

In search for some professional refill, I enrolled in a master's program at Lancaster University, where I became attracted to a variety of action-based pedagogies through both my student experience as well as the literature. I was drawn by their context-sensitivity and potential to facilitate alternative perspectives that rested upon their

focus on collaborative inquiry rather than the accumulation and application of theory. In particular, action learning had caught my eye due to its strong focus on learning and sense-making, and I saw great potential for such an approach in my work with managers across the globe.

Action learning as inquiry-based approach to management learning aims to facilitate the construction of new knowledge that is both contextual and practical (Revans, 1982b). In action learning, managers inquire into real-life challenges they encounter in their daily work and engage in an iterative process of action and reflection, supported by a group of fellow managers and a facilitator (Revans, 1982b; McGill and Beaty, 1992; Weinstein, 1999; Marquardt, 2004). Given this focus on inquiry, action learning is commonly praised as a context-sensitive learning approach (Brook, Pedler and Burgoyne, 2013) and as such has gained popularity as critical alternative to traditional approaches to management education and development. Since its origins in the British coals mines in the 1940s, action learning has travelled beyond the borders of its UK homeland and is practised all over the world (Boshyk, 2002; Boshyk and Dilworth, 2010).

Today, a variety of approaches to action learning exist, informed and shaped by different theoretical perspectives. One of these approaches is critical action learning (CAL), an approach to action learning which aims to promote its emancipatory potential by combining the radical process with radical social theories that serve as food for thought to instigate critical reflection, that is: the questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions and the social relations that underpin them (Willmott, 1994, 1997c; Reynolds, 1999a). A particular focus of CAL is the critical reflection on the social dynamics that play out in the learning groups (Reynolds and Trehan, 2001; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Vince and Reynolds, 2004; Trehan and Rigg, 2015). This practice is based on the assumption that learning in action learning is frequently constrained by the very social context in which it takes place, which is mirrored in the learning sets and which has the potential to create tensions and contradictions that mobilise political strategies that limit learning (Willmott, 1994, 1997c; Reynolds and Trehan, 2001; Vince, 2008). This assumption resonates with my own experiences of the politics of learning in culturally diverse settings and made this approach to action learning particularly

appealing. I felt that the explicit critical engagement with the local context would be helpful in addressing such dynamics and facilitate learning from action learning.

However, whilst I was drawn to CAL due to its potential to create meaningful, contextualised knowledge through sense-making, I was sceptical as to its fit with the managers' cultural background in many of the countries I had worked in. My concerns were related to the very inquiry-based approach that is at the heart of action learning, and particularly of CAL. For example, such an approach requires an openness to both providing and accepting critique, which felt antithetical to the importance of face-saving that was prevalent in many of the countries I had worked in, particularly in organisational settings. At the same time, some proponents of action learning suggest that some components of the process might be more compatible with the cultural context in countries of the Global South (Marquardt, 1998; Dilworth and Boshyk, 2008). Therefore, for me, considering using AL or CAL in such contexts raised several questions: How would participants engage with such an approach? Can CAL really unfold its transformative potential in settings in the Global South? How can such a program be designed in a way that accounts for the specifics of the local sociocultural context?

I began searching for examples and experiences of introducing action learning and CAL in non-Western contexts, whose insights could inform the design of such a program in the countries I had worked in. My primordial interest was in experiences with CAL in East African settings, which was the geographical focus of my then current work as consultant. However, such literature was scarce at the time and continues to be limited. Until today, insights from introducing CAL are mainly constrained to programs in Western European settings, with the recent notable exception of Mughal, Gatrell and Stead (2018), who explore the cultural politics of CAL in a business school in Pakistan. However, this study is situated in an academic setting which, as Rigg and Trehan (2008) highlight, represents a considerably different context for CAL than a corporate setting, where relationships are more complex and interests more diverse. Studies that share insights into action learning experiences in the Global South mainly focus on conventional approaches and are predominantly concerned with description and outcomes rather than an analytical engagement with the political dynamics that

emerged in the process. While several include some reflections on the impact of local culture, these insights read like by-products of the experience, based on anecdotes and hunches rather than a systematic analysis (e.g. Loeve, 2007; Lustig and Rai, 2009; Stevens and de Vera, 2015; Ussivane and Ellwood, 2020). The few articles that are explicitly concerned with the role of local culture in the action learning process (e.g. Marquardt, 1998; Dilworth and Boshyk, 2008) are based on theoretical rather than empirical analyses and draw on simplified notions of culture that assume a somewhat mechanistic relationship between culture and practice, and turn a blind eye to the participants' actual sense-making in practice.

The absence of systematic, empirical research on the impact of the local context on CAL in the Global South is surprising, since this impact is the very rationale that has furthered the development of CAL, and several studies suggest that CAL can be limited by the very conditions it aims to address. Therefore, I argue that empirically exploring the cultural politics that are mobilised by the local context in organisations in the Global South is critical to gain a deeper understanding of the potential and limitations of CAL in such settings.

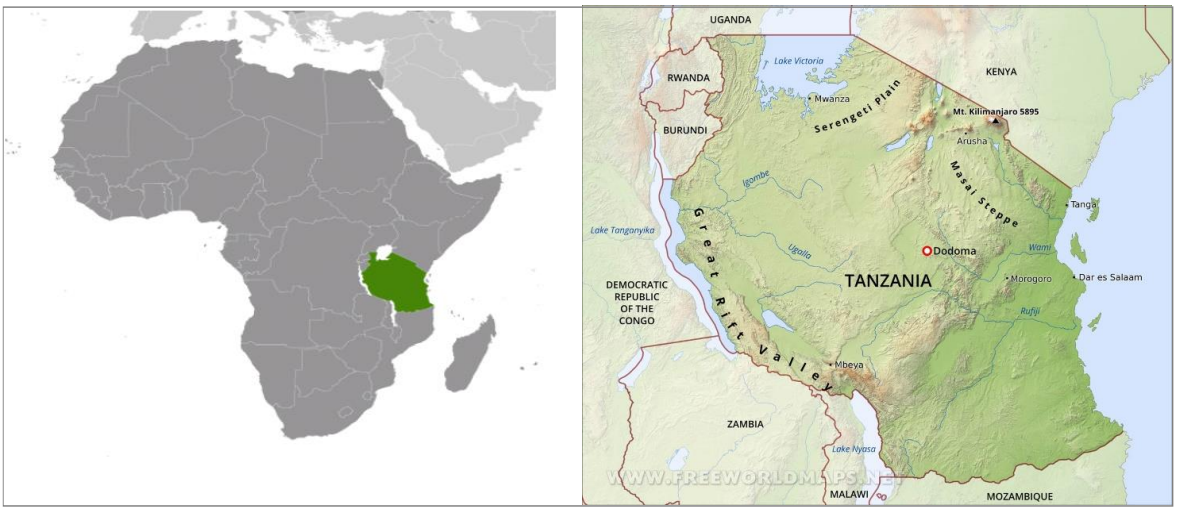
With this study, I intend to contribute a Tanzanian perspective to the conversation. The choice of Tanzania was facilitated by the practical opportunity my own work in this region presented. In the spirit of action learning, I decided to use my own work as a vehicle for inquiry by examining the introduction of a CAL-based leadership development program (LDP) for middle managers in a Tanzanian microfinance institution (MFI), in which I had a leading role in both design and facilitation. In this sense, I seek to contribute to a deeper understanding of and implications for CAL in Tanzanian organisations. Furthermore, I want to contribute to rectify the inequal representation in the academic discourse on action learning and CAL, which currently is characterised by a stark dominance of Western experiences over those from participants in the Global South. Given the emancipatory spirit of CAL that is embodied in the critical social theories that underpin it, such a political endeavour seems to sit well with the very core of CAL.

Research context and participants

Tanzania

Tanzania is one of the largest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. With an extension of roughly 945,000 km^2, it is four times the size of Britain and home to almost 61 million people (2019) – an increase of 10 million people in the last five years. It is located at the Indian Ocean, and borders with Kenya and Uganda in the North, Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the West, and Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique to the South (see Figure 0.1).

Figure 0.1: Tanzania - map and location



Tanzania has been under foreign rule for most of its time. It has been heavily colonised and was economically exploited successively by Portugal, Germany and Britain until becoming independent in 1961 (Tanganyika) and 1963 (Zanzibar), respectively. In 1964 both territories (Tanganyika and Zanzibar) united to form the United Republic of Tanzania. While Tanzania is fragmented into many tribes with more than 100 different languages across the country, Swahili has been established as its official language unifying the different tribes and creating the vision of one united Tanzania. This shared identity has provided relative internal harmony and stability in comparison to other countries in the region, which are still struggling with tribal animosities, such as Rwanda or the Republic of Congo.

According to the World Bank's development indicators[1] of 2014, the time of this study, Tanzania ranked at 82nd in the world with a GDP of USD 44.6 billion (compared to USD 2.8 trillion in the UK). Despite high GDP growth rates of 6-7%, Tanzania was classified as low-income country with a GDP per capita of USD 920 with roughly 50% living below the World Bank poverty line of 1.90 USD a day. Life expectancy at birth was at 62 years (compared to 81 years in the UK) and child mortality under-5 amounted to 60 deaths per 1000 live births (compared to 4.5 in the UK).

The Microfinance Institution (MFI)

The MFI, where the CAL program has taken place, provides formal financial services to people with low income. This target group is usually not only short of money, but also lacks control over their financial circumstances. They often have a volatile income and struggle to satisfy their needs in terms of food, housing, health or education. This has created a demand for simple and accessible financial services that help with setting money aside on good days and allow taking small loans to invest in the family business. According to the MFI's vision statement, it endeavours to enhance the Tanzanian local financial system through the improvement of financial services and strengthen the local economy through financial inclusion and job creation. To do so, the MFI strives to be a socially responsible bank for people with low or middle incomes. It offers a wide range of financial services for both micro and small enterprises and values long-term relationships with its customers. In doing so, it follows a social for-profit business model aiming to maximize a double bottom line of social mission and profitability to invest in extending its outreach to more remote and rural areas. It is part of a larger network of MFIs in Africa, Latin America and Asia, which is backed by a set of international shareholders from both the public and the private sector with a proven long-term investment interest and who share the MFI's socio-economic vision.

Local capacity building and staff development has always played an important role in the network, mostly focusing on technical training for loan officers and credit advisors. In 2009, there was a strategic change in its approach to capacity building and management development came to the fore, a change that was mirrored in the entire

[1] World Bank development indicator, https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators, accessed June 7, 2016.

sector to address the leadership vacuum in the microfinance industry, particularly at middle management level. In the Tanzanian MFI, a network-wide, modular management development program has been implemented from 2010 onwards. The leadership development program that builds the foundation of this study represents the continuation of the management development efforts that focused on the middle managers in the MFI.

The leadership development program (LDP)

The objective of the LDP program, was to foster the middle managers' managerial problem-solving capacity by developing their individual and collective competence for critical reflection. The rationale that underpinned the program was to foster the initiative and independency of the participating middle managers, which was rooted in the current way of decision-making in the MFI, where problem-solving was centralised and usually promoted by top management. This had become a growing concern, particularly since the MFI was expanding into rural areas and had been facing increasing performance pressures. The MFI's business model and the increasing diversification and digitalisation of their financial services required strong middle managers who were able to drive the business and lead their teams. However, the CEO and other top managers felt that there was a general lack of initiative and that middle managers were too dependent on top management. The CEO was clear about his wish to enable middle managers to display more active leadership:

> We want them to take on a more strategic role, to act more independently like a kind of CEO in their department or branch. We cannot take care of everything. So, we need them to be more proactive in their problem-solving and not just wait until we tell them what to do. (Fieldnotes, January 14, 2014).

The LDP was expected to support this strategic goal by enhancing the middle managers' capability for problem-solving and decision-making.

To achieve these goals, the LDP was based on a critical action learning design, where the middle managers would meet in small sets to explore the challenges they were facing in their daily work. Set members would act as critical friends and support the creation of new knowledge to address the problems by providing alternative views on

the issue. Additionally, the program was intended to use the dynamics that played out in the learning sets as a source of learning. By scrutinising what was happening in the set, it was hoped that participants would learn about their own practices of problem-solving, their own and others' political behaviour and what mobilised it. The choice of CAL as pedagogical approach was rooted in the belief that collaborative critical reflection was an effective approach to problem-solving. Furthermore, I felt that such an approach was congruent with the rationale that underpinned the program, since it allowed the managers to take a more active and self-directed role in the construction of knowledge.

The program took place between June 2014 – December 2015 and consisted of two phases (see Table 0.1). The first phase was intended as an introduction to the critical action learning approach and managers were working on individual challenges. The second phase emphasised collaboration and organisational learning with the managers working together on shared organisational problems. Given the timeframe and scope of this thesis, this study is based only on data from the first phase, which consisted of four learning cycles and stretched over the duration of six months. Between the set meetings, there were 4-6 weeks during which participants were expected to implement their action plans and observe the consequences of their actions.

Table 0.1: Overview program planning

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2014						Set meetings Phase 1		Set meetings Phase 1	Set meetings Phase 1			Set meetings Phase 1
2015			Set meetings Phase 2		Set meetings Phase 2		Set meetings Phase 2			Set meetings Phase 2		Set meetings Phase 2

The research participants

The leadership development program was addressed at all middle managers in head office and branches and included heads of department, branch managers, as well as head office team leaders. All participants were originally from Tanzania and deeply rooted in the Tanzanian culture. They speak both Swahili and English and have been socialised and educated in the local context. At the time of the study, they had worked

in the MFI between 3 to 8 years. 19 out of 21 middle managers participated in the program, of which 17 have agreed to participate in this study.

Research questions and design

The objective of this study is to systematically investigate the cultural politics that are mobilised in the LDP in the Tanzanian MFI. Thereby, the research is guided by the following questions:

1. What tensions and/or synergies did participants experience between the cultural requirements of the CAL design and their local culture?
2. How did these tensions and/or synergies shape participants' practices in the LDP?
3. How did these practices promote or constrain learning through critical reflection in the LDP?

To explore these questions in some depth and a systematic manner, I draw on Bourdieu's theory of practice (1992) as conceptual framework. As I discuss more in detail in chapter 2, I conceptualise the cultural tensions the participants experience in relation to the design as incongruity between the behavioural requirements of the assumptions that underpin the LDP design (field) and the participants' local culture (habitus), and the cultural synergies as congruity between the two. Furthermore, I take the participants' practices in the action learning sets as strategies that pursue specific interests. Drawing on this framework, I operationalise the behavioural requirements in the LDP as shaped by the cultural resources that are seen as valuable to effectively participate in the CAL program (capital) based on the assumptions about learning and managing that underpin the design. I operationalise the habitus as the participants' incorporated dispositions to act that have developed based on their logic of managing and learning, which is characterised by the incorporated internal and external field relations and the appreciation of specific resources that function as mechanisms of distinction (capital). To construct these concepts, I use an ethnographic approach where I collect material through different forms of participant observation and ethnographic interviewing, and analyse it using reflexive thematic approach, which mainly draws on the work of Braun and Clark (2006, 2021).

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is structured as follows. In the first chapter, I present my argument why studying the cultural politics in organisational CAL programs in the Global South is worthwhile. To do so, I provide an analysis of the action learning literature with a particular focus on critical action learning. Drawing on this review, I develop a conceptual framework that visualises the relationships between design, context and practice. I then criticise the paucity of studies that address the cultural politics in CAL in the Global South in general and in organisational settings in particular, before explicating how my study will contribute to addressing this gap.

In chapters 2 and 3, I present the research design of my study. In chapter 2, I provide insight in the theoretical foundation that underpins the empirical design of my study. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice, I re-frame the conceptual framework developed in chapter 1, through the lens of habitus, field, and capital, leading to three concepts that are at the heart of my analysis: the behavioural requirements in the LDP; the participants' incorporated dispositions to act and the participants' tendencies to act in the LDP. In chapter 3, I elaborate on the empirical design of my study, where I describe my approach to ethnography and provide insights into the experience of fieldwork, as well as my approach to analysis. In doing so, I highlight the methodological challenges that stem from both my approach and the research context and indicate how I have addressed them in practice.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6, I present the results of my analysis. In chapter 4, I present the analysis of the behavioural requirements in the LDP, including the assumptions about learning and managing that underpin them. In chapter 5, I present the analysis of participants' tendencies to act in the action learning sets in relation to the behavioural requirements presented in chapter 4 and highlight how these practices have limited learning through critical reflection. In chapter 6, I present the results of the habitus analysis in terms of the participants' dispositions to act and the mechanisms of distinction that underpin these dispositions.

In chapters 7 and 8, I interpret and discuss the results of my study and draw a conclusion to the thesis. In chapter 7, I answer the research questions by providing

insight into three cultural dynamics. In doing so, I surface the tensions and contradictions participants experienced in the LDP and how these shaped participants' sense-making of the CAL design as threat their positioning in the organisation and their communities, which manifested itself in practices in strategies to their managerial authority, and the harmony in their peer relations, and their financial income.

In chapter 8, the final chapter, I discuss these findings in relation to existing literature, explore the implications for introducing CAL in Tanzanian organisations and offer my concluding thoughts to the thesis. I foreground how my findings contribute to our understanding of CAL in Tanzanian organisations and beyond by discussing four points: the structure of peer relations in CAL sets in Tanzanian organisations, where set members meet as 'experts and apprentices with commonalities'; the value of a socioeconomic lens to make sense of CAL practices in Tanzanian organisations; the embeddedness of Bourdieu's (1992) concept of illusio in a hierarchical system of diverse illusio; the emotional and political dynamics of CAL facilitation. In the second section, I draw out the implications of my findings for both CAL program set up and facilitation. In section 3, I provide a conclusion to my thesis, where I summarise my findings and contributions, highlight avenues for future research, and engage in conclusive reflections on both my roles and positioning in the study well as on my own learning for my practice as a management development practitioner, which was the starting point for this study.

1 Literature Review

Action learning is closely associated with Reginald Revans, who is commonly credited as founder of action learning (Brook, Pedler and Burgoyne, 2013). Revans began to work with early ideas of action learning in the 1940s in an attempt to enhance managerial problem solving in the British coal mines (Revans, 1982b). He describes action learning as:

> "a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical, that requires its subjects through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problems, to achieve intended change sufficient to improve observable behaviour henceforth in the problems field." (Revans, 1983, p. 4).

Today, action learning is used for a multitude of purposes and in a wide array of settings. For example, it has been used to foster management and leadership development (Boshyk, 1999; Rigg and Trehan, 1999, 2008; Marquardt, 2000; Trehan and Pedler, 2009; Soffe, Marquardt and Hale, 2011; Blanchard and Carpenter, 2012), enhance organisational learning (De Loo, 2002; Donnenberg and De Loo, 2004; Vince, 2004; Hardless, Nilsson and Nuldén, 2005; Swan, 2007; Cho and Bong, 2011; Edmonstone, 2011; Nicolini *et al.*, 2017), develop learning organisations (Zuber-Skerritt, 1995), facilitate strategy development (Oliver, 2006), support entrepreneurship (Weinstein, 2005; Ram and Trehan, 2009, 2010), improve stakeholder cooperation (Ussivane and Ellwood, 2020) or strengthen inter-organisational coordination and sector development (Coughlan and Coghlan, 2004; Rigg, 2008). It has also increasingly gained foothold in Higher Education (Bourner and Frost, 1996; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Yeadon-Lee and Worsdale, 2012), and, due to its participatory ideas, in community development (Park, Cho and Bong, 2020; Zuber-Skerritt, Wood and Kearney, 2020).

On a broad level, action learning can be described as a self-directed, collaborative approach to the development of people and organisations, where the real-life managerial task is the vehicle for learning and where, through a process of inquiry supported by a group and organised in iterative cycles of action and reflection, participants learn about problem solving and managing while being in the midst of it.

Or, to put into more catchy words: in action learning real people take action on real problems in real time and learn while doing so (Weinstein, 1999; Marquardt, 2004).

The approach has travelled in some new directions and today action learning means different things to different people (Marsick and O'Neil, 1999; Weinstein, 1999; Yorks, O'Neil and Marsick, 1999; Pedler, Burgoyne and Brook, 2005; Brook, Pedler and Burgoyne, 2013). Notions of critical action learning (Willmott, 1997c; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Trehan and Rigg, 2012), action reflection learning (O'Neil and Marsick, 1994), business-driven action learning (Boshyk, 1999, 2000), auto-action learning (Learmonth & Pedler, 2004), self-managed action learning (Beaty, Bourner and Frost, 1993; Hara, Bourner and Webber, 2004), virtual action learning (Pedler, Burgoyne and Brook, 2005; Dickenson, Pedler and Burgoyne, 2008) or online action learning (Currie *et al.*, 2012) have emerged.

This diversity has generated a controversial debate in the field. Whilst some praise the context-sensitivity and adaptability of action learning (Dilworth, 1998; Zuber-Skerritt and Farquhar, 2002; Waddill, Banks and Marsh, 2010), others warn that the term 'action learning' has become a "buzz word that means everything and thus nothing"(Marsick and O'Neil, 1999, p. 159), which leads to confusion about what action learning really is (Marsick and O'Neil, 1999; Willis, 2004). Pedler *et al.* (2005) propose the notion of an action learning ethos, a strong philosophical core that transports the spirit of action learning while allowing for different theoretical perspectives and a large variety of designs living side by side.

In this chapter, I critically review the literature on action learning and critical action learning (CAL) to locate my study in the landscape of action learning literature, highlight its relevance and create a theoretical foundation that serves as backdrop for discussing the results of my study. In section 1.1, I explore the foundations or ethos of action learning by exploring the assumptions about learning and managing that underpin it and situate it as an alternative approach to traditional management education and development. Particularly, I highlight the self-directed, reflective, and collaborative nature of action learning and its potential to create new knowledge to complex managerial problems that is contextualised and practical.

In section 1.2, I focus on critical action learning (CAL) as one approach to action learning, which is the approach that has informed the design of the leadership development program that is the basis of my study. First, I surface the assumptions about managing and learning that distinguish it from more conventional forms of action learning. Notably, I emphasise CAL's assumption that the social context of both managing and action learning shapes the way in which participants make sense of and act upon their experiences. Then, I highlight the design principles that flow from these assumptions, specifically CAL's commitment to work with the social and political dimensions of both managing and learning, which is embodied in the design by its focus on critical reflection to surface the relations of power that underpin practice, its engagement with the emotional and political dynamics in the set as a source for learning and a more active approach to facilitation. I then highlight the limitations to CAL which are rooted in the very political and emotional dynamics the approach aims to address.

In section 1.3, I build the argument for my study. First, I take stock of the literature analysis so far by visualising the relationships between design, culture, and context in the generation of CAL practice in a conceptual framework. Then I discuss literature that provides insight into the impact of local culture on action learning in non-Western settings. The analysis shows that action learning might be both constrained as well as promoted by cultural contexts in the Global South and suggests that the nature of cultural dynamics that are mobilised ultimately depends on the interplay between the specific design in a specific cultural context. Given the paucity of studies that explore the cultural politics in Tanzanian organisations, I argue that my study is a pertinent and worthwhile endeavour. I conclude the chapter with presenting the research questions of my study, which I draw from the previously elaborated conceptual framework.

1.1 Fundamentals of action learning

Action learning is an approach to management learning that is underpinned by a belief in managers' capacity to learn from and act upon their own professional experience (McLaughlin and Thorpe, 1993; Raelin, 1997; Weinstein, 1999). In contrast to traditional approaches to management education and development that frame managers as passive recipients of management knowledge, in action learning it is the

managers themselves who are the creators of their knowledge. This belief is reflected in the self-directed approach that underpins action learning, which is foregrounded by McLaughlin and Thorpe:

> "Action learning, in contrast, takes the opposite view in that managers must take responsibility for their own development in deciding what to learn, when and how to learn, including when to stop and how to evaluate what has been learned." (McLaughlin and Thorpe, 1993, p. 21).

Action learning takes a starting point in the real-life conditions of practising managers, where they are confronted with complex challenges. Revans (1982b) categorises managerial challenges into two groups: puzzles and problems. Puzzles are technical challenges that may have predefined solutions and can be solved by consulting an expert in the matter. In contrast, problems are often novel and undefined and have "no right answer, no existing code or program - nobody can find an existing reference to precisely what should be done" (Revans, 1982b, p. 657).

It is in addressing such 'wicked' problems that action learning is most suitable to unfold its potential (Brook, Pedler and Burgoyne, 2012). Thereby, participants may work on individual challenges or organisational projects (McGill and Brockband, 2004); these challenges may be familiar or unfamiliar and be embedded in familiar or unfamiliar settings (Inglis, 1994). Revans' differentiation between puzzles and problems casts the spotlight on the complexity that pervades much of managers' tasks and takes this as a starting point for the learning process. This represents a departure from traditional approaches to management education and development, which have been criticised for their reliance on universal theories, best practices, tools and competences, which are identified by academics or management gurus and transferred, in neat disciplinary packages, to managers who then are expected to apply them in their daily work (Fox, 1997; Chia, 2005; Perriton and Hodgson, 2012). It is argued that such conventional approaches imply a notion of management as technical routine activity (Schön, 1991) and disregard the complexity, messiness and ambiguity of managerial practice (Grey & French, 1996: 2) as well as the relations of power that underpin it (Reed and Anthony, 1992; Grey and French, 1996). In contrast, action learning brings to the fore managers' lived experience and recognizes the social world

of work and life, of which they are part (McLaughlin and Thorpe, 1993; McGill and Brockband, 2004).

Problem-solving in action learning is based on iterative cycles of action and reflection with the aim to create knowledge that is both contextual and actionable. Revans argues that such knowledge must be derived from action in real life rather than the study of books, because:

> "[a] man may well *learn to talk about taking action simply by talking about taking action* (as in classes at a business school) but to learn *to take action* (as something distinct from learning to talk about action) then he needs *to take action* (rather than talking about taking action) and to see the effect, not of talking about taking action (at which he may appear competent), but of *taking the action itself* (at which he may fall somewhat short of competent)." (Revans, 1971: 54, cited in Pedler, 2005 p.130 - original emphases).

Hence, action is imperative to action learning, since taking action carries true, personal risk, which is a perquisite for learning (Trehan and Pedler, 2011). This also highlights the moral dimension of action learning, for to take real action managers must become aware of their value systems and test their commitment and true beliefs, which is different to what one may argue in case studies (Revans, 1982b). Hence, learning in action learning takes place experientially from the attempts to solve managerial problems, and "[t]here is – and can be – no difference between managing and learning how to manage" (Revans, 1982b, p. 635).

At the heart of action learning is a process of inquiry into managerial experience and action. Revans (1998, p.13) describes learning as L = P + Q: learning (L) in action learning is a combination of programmed or expert knowledge (P) with a questioning insight into one's own actions (Q). Thereby, it is particularly the inquiry into managerial practice, that leads to meaningful learning (1982a, p. 21). Such an inquiry approach requires managers' recognition that their perception of what is going on is flawed (Revans, 1981: p. 137, cited in Lessem, 1982), an openness to alternative perspectives that help to reframe the situation (Raelin, 1999; McGill and Brockband, 2004) and consideration of how to act in the future (Weinstein, 1999). Hence, the idea of learning that underpins action learning is not one of knowledge assimilation as in traditional

approaches to management education and development, but one of sense-making, where programmed knowledge plays a subordinate role to the process of reflective inquiry. This inquiry is structured as an iterative process of action and reflection, where managers act and reflect on the outcome of their actions to decide on new actions to achieve the best practical solution within the possibilities and limitations of their given context.

Thereby, inquiry in action learning is seen as a collaborative process, where small groups of four to seven peers (the set) support the reflective process of the problem-holding manager (Revans, 1981). Hence, questioning insight is a social and discursive process rather than an individual one. Revans (1982b, p. 720) calls the members of such a set "comrades in adversity", who are united in their attempt to learn. He highlights that in this process of collaborative inquiry, all are equal, and no one has the monopoly for knowledge: As Revans clarifies:

> "[…] in true action learning, it is not what a man already knows and tells that sharpens the countenance of his friends, but what he does not know, just as that same friend does not. It is the recognised ignorance, not programmed knowledge, that is the key to action learning: men start to learn with and from each other only when they discover that none among them know but all are obliged to find out" (Revans, 1982a, p. 21).

Weinstein (1999) highlights the importance of the set as a learning group, which not only provides support and challenge to advance the problem, but also represents a safe space to experiment with new ways of behaving and practise concrete competences.

With a few exceptions (e.g. O'Hara, Bourner and Webber, 2004), action learning sets are usually accompanied by a facilitator or set advisor, who assists the group members in the learning process. How this role is conceptualised varies from the approach to action learning. For example, Revans (1982b) conceptualises the facilitator as an 'accoucheur', who helps the group to start the process and then withdraws. Others envision a more active role throughout the program to foster learning and support the development of new skills by modelling listening and learning skills and helping the set to reflect on how the process works and how it can be improved (Marsick and O'Neil,

1999; Weinstein, 1999; Marquardt, 2004; Ram and Trehan, 2009). Weinstein (1999) highlights the importance of the facilitator to create a cohesive group where trust and openness develop as members get familiar with each other.

In summary, action learning is different to traditional approaches to management education and development in that traditional learning relationships are transformed, and learners themselves create contextual and actionable knowledge through collaborative inquiry in real-life situations and taking real action. In this sense, action learning has the potential to contribute to both learning and business results. There is, however, disagreement on whether emphasis should be placed on action or learning. For example, Boshyk (1999, 2000) is a fierce defendant of the action component in action learning. He proposes an approach he calls business-driven action learning (BDAL), which is primarily interested in the strategic contributions action learning can make to business success through the promotion of business solutions and the exploration of new opportunities. He argues that an overly learning-oriented stance on action learning loses sight of productivity and growth, which are an important return on investment. While he sees learning as precondition for change, he considers it a necessary by-product that happens automatically, since "organisational and individual learning is always greater than the rate of change" (Boshyk, 2002, p. 39).

For others, action learning's value stems precisely from its potential to further individual and organisational development. For example, Weinstein (2002, p. 6) sees the main purpose of action learning in finding ways to learn "about oneself by resolving a work-focused project and reflecting on that action – and on oneself – in the company of others similarly engaged". It is argued that a focus on action and business results makes it more difficult for learning skills to emerge and risks to turn action learning into a task force (Bourner and Weinstein, 1996; Brook, Pedler and Burgoyne, 2012). In a similar vein Marquardt (2004) underlines the importance of a commitment to learning, arguing that the strategic long-term value of individual and organisational learning from problem-solving outweighs the immediate, short-term benefits of merely solving existing problems. These diverse ideas about the potential outcomes of action learning have furthered the development of different approaches.

In the next section, I explore critical action learning (CAL) as a learning-oriented approach to action learning that aims to leverage its emancipatory potential. It is this approach that underpins the design of the program that is the vehicle for my study.

1.2 Critical action learning (CAL)

Critical approaches to action learning have developed as response to several lines of criticism on conventional action learning. One approach is critical action learning (CAL), which is unique in its commitment to grasp the complexity and intricacies of the lived experience of both managerial work and the attempts to learn. CAL does this by focusing reflection more explicitly on the broader power relations underpinning practice and the political and emotional dynamics that are mobilised by them. As Ram and Trehan (2009, p. 306) put it:

> "[CAL] attempts to supplement an individual's experiences of action (learning from experience) with the reflection of existing organizational and emotional dynamics created in action (learning from organizing)."

In doing so, CAL aims to promote critical management thinking to prepare managers for responsible citizenship and personally and socially rewarding lives and careers (Willmott, 1997b; Rigg and Trehan, 2004).

1.2.1 Limitations of conventional action learning

As elaborated above, action learning has the potential to transform managerial practice by promoting critical inquiry into the underpinning assumptions of managerial action. From the beginning, Revans has highlighted the critical potential of action learning in his 'Principle of Insufficient Mandate', where he maintains that:

> "managers who cannot change their predispositions of their own resistance to problems during their effort to treat those will never be able to make progress." (Revans, 1982b, p. 638).

Similarly, early on McLaughlin and Thorpe highlight action learning's potential to create awareness of political dynamics that are at play in an organisation, when they say:

> "Managers may become aware and can come to know themselves and their organisation much better. In particular, they can become aware of the primacy of politics, both macro and micro, and the influence of power on

> decision making and non-decision making, not to mention the 'mobilisation bias.'" (McLaughlin and Thorpe, 1993, p. 25).

However, proponents of critical approaches to action learning criticise that conventional approaches do not always harness the emancipatory potential that is inherent in action learning. For example, O'Neil and Marsick (1994) suggest that people do not necessarily innately know how to learn this way and contend that to achieve the transformation of presuppositions as envisioned by Revans, it is essential to intentionally incorporate critical reflection in the design. Drawing on Mezirow's work on critical reflection, they promote action reflection learning (ARL), a model that follows the central thrust of action learning, but which, in application, concentrates on the facilitation of critical reflection to deliberately put into question hidden assumptions, values and organisational norms.

Others argue that the potential of conventional approaches to action learning is limited due to their focus on individual performativity and outcome rather than critical reflection (Willmott, 1997a, 1997c; Vince, 2002a; Reynolds and Vince, 2004; Trehan and Rigg, 2012). For example, Willmott (1997a, 1997c) criticises that many forms of action learning tend to treat problems as purely technical, turning a blind eye to the social relations in which they are embedded. Drawing on Critical Management Studies and Critical Theory, he maintains that this limits the emancipatory potential of action learning, since it locates problems and solutions in individuals failing to:

> "appreciate how the problem-solving capabilities of individuals are conditioned – enabled and constrained – by their development and embeddedness within structures of social relations." (Willmott, 1997a, p. 171).

He points to the inherently conflicting nature of social relations in organisations and the intrinsic dilemmas and tensions in managers' identity. He argues that managers are victims as well as perpetrators of the system they design and operate. While generally concerned with notions of change and empowerment for the sake of long-term organisational survival, they have at the same time an inherent self-interest in maintaining the status quo to secure their own power and identity. These tensions can obstruct desires for critical reflection, which aims to transform the very power

relations that are their source of power. Therefore, he argues that more attention needs to be paid to the issues of power and politics that form part of managerial reality and coins the notion of critical action learning (CAL).

Extending Willmott's notion of CAL, others suggest that in conventional approaches, little attention is paid to the emotional and political dynamics that are mobilised by the attempt to manage and learn and have the potential to considerably limit critical reflection. Vince and Martin (1993) for example suggest that participants in action learning enter emotional and political cycles, which take as starting point the participants' experiences of anxiety and either promote or limit learning. In cycles that promote learning, anxiety turns into uncertainty, a "feeling of being at the edge of change" (Vince and Martin, 1993, p. 209), where managers become aware and struggle to finally gain insight or increased authority. When participants enter cycles that discourage learning, they are not ready to face the challenges posed by action learning and engage in denial, avoidance and resistance to deal with the uncertainty they experience, and thus willingly remain in a state of ignorance.

These dynamics can be mobilised by a variety of factors. For one thing, there is abundant literature that highlights the emotional challenges of critical reflection, which is often experienced as profoundly threatening since it disrupts routine practice and calls into question deeply rooted beliefs and assumptions (Reynolds, 1999b; Brookfield, 2005). At times such a disruption can create strong feelings of uncertainty, fear or frustration that it might mobilize resistance to critical thinking (Mezirow, 1997; Reynolds, 1999b; Rigg and Trehan, 2004; Brookfield, 2005). Furthermore, critical reflection can generate anxiety about its consequences, such as being isolated, the feeling of being an imposter or committing cultural suicide (Brookfield, 1994), as well as the "production of cultural misfits", who face re-entry problems on their return to work and feel powerless with the newly gained awareness (Reynolds, 1999b).

Vince (1993; 2004) argues that people are positioned unequally in both organisations and action learning sets due to the ways in which their identity is constructed. He dismisses the idea of action learning sets as places of harmony, equality and shared interests, and challenges Revans' notion of managers as "comrades-in-adversity"

(Revans, 1982, p. 720), suggesting that participants are rather "adversaries with commonality" (Vince, 2004, p. 64), who stand in competition to each other in terms of interests and resources. Reynolds and Trehan (2001) further the same idea and illustrate how differences in race and gender, but also in different approaches to learning can create asymmetrical power relations. They propose the notion of 'the classroom as real world', which conceptualises action learning sets as microcosms that mirror larger social relationships. These power relations mobilise emotional and political dynamics that limit learning from action learning:

> "participants in learning sets also have (conscious and unconscious) knowledge, fantasies and perceptions about when it is emotionally and politically expedient to refrain from action, when to avoid collective action, and the organisational dynamics that underpin a failure to act." (Vince, 2008, p. 93).

Rigg and Trehan (2004) make a similar point when they illustrate how dynamics of class, race and gender can be reflected in the action learning sets, generating feelings of exclusion, isolation, rejection, and powerlessness that mobilise strategies of avoidance or overcompensation. Such experiences render the notion of a learning *community* problematic.

In this sense, Vince (2008) argues, action learning can generate both *learning-in-action,* which has the potential to transform managerial practice, as well as *learning inaction*, where learning is prevented, and existing practices are reinforced. He differentiates three forms of learning inaction: making inaction (reducing the scope of learning in action), organising action (prioritising action over reflection, which leads to inaction) and settling for action (acting for the sake of action and at the expense of learning). He further argues that a failure to explore such dynamics limits the power of action learning to extend learning beyond the set and suggests that for organisational learning to take place, action learning needs to include an inquiry into the politics and emotions that are mobilised by the processes of organisational learning (Vince, 2008, 2012). In a similar manner, Reynolds and Trehan (2001, 2003) argue for a 'pedagogy of difference', which recognises differences as source for learning and, instead of reinforcing consensus, actively surfaces differences. Such an approach has also a performative benefit in that learning from and about emotion, power and diversity

helps managers to navigate the complexity of everyday politics in organisations (Rigg and Trehan, 2004).

However, conventional approaches to action learning are predominantly designed as rational process, underpinned by an intellectual process of reflection to review experience. For example, Revans (1982b) highlights the intellectual nature of his approach to action learning, which he conceptualises as scientific method based on iterative cycles of observation, provisional hypothesis, trial, audit and review. Similarly, Kolb's experiential learning cycle, which is the theoretical foundation for many learning-oriented action learning approaches (Marsick and O'Neil, 1999), inherently conceptualises learning in action learning as a predominantly rational process that is a based on an intellectual engagement with a problem. Such designs turn a blind eye to the emotional and political processes that are mobilised by the attempt to learn from action learning (Vince and Martin, 1993).

1.2.2 Critical by design

CAL aims to address the limitations of conventional action learning by incorporating an explicit focus on critical reflection to surface existing beliefs, organisational practices and social structures, assess their impact on managerial practice and create awareness that these assumptions are socially and personally constructed in a specific historical cultural context (Brookfield, 1988; Reynolds, 1999; Vince and Reynolds, 2004; Rigg, Trehan and Rigg, 2008). In other words, CAL programs are "critical by design" (Ram and Trehan, 2009, p. 316) and promote the application of critical ideas to both content and process.

Willmott (1997a) argues for incorporating critical social perspectives to provide alternative perspectives that support participants to make sense of and change interpersonal and organisational practices. This represents a shift from the way Revans has envisioned action learning, who, while not dismissing programmed learning entirely, attributes a very subordinated role to it. He explicitly criticises Revans' disregard of theory arguing that pure reliance on lay theories limits possibilities of learning in the same way as does an over-reliance on functional theory. Rather, for

action learning to realise its transformational potential, it is necessary to challenge and replace those limiting theories that guide established practices and offer alternative explanatory frameworks.

Vince (2008) and Rigg and Trehan (2004) highlight the importance of an emphasis on the way in which learning is supported, avoided and/or prevented through power relations by promoting questioning insight to complex emotions, unconscious processes and relations. From this perspective, critical reflection in CAL programs is designed as a collective process, where critical reflection is seen as an "integrant part to organizing, rather than the providence of individuals" (Vince, 2002b, p. 67). Vince and Reynolds (Vince, 2002a; Reynolds and Vince, 2004) propose the notion of CAL as a process of 'organising reflection', where participants in the set collectively inquire into their own practices of reflection and problem-solving with the intention to surface assumptions about relations of power and explore the political and emotional dynamics in the learning set to ultimately change the way in which participants engage with both organising and learning. Vince (2012, para. 213) extends Revans' learning equation to L = P+Q+O, where O is organising insight, to emphasise the importance of inquiring in the ways in which organising creates limits and possibilities for learning. Hence, in CAL the members of an action learning set do not only act as a sounding board for the individual manager who works on a problem but also entail a collective responsibility to contributing to organising insight by engaging in public reflection about the learning process and the modification of the design, procedures and ways of working (Ram and Trehan, 2009).

Such a focus on critical reflection and organising reflection has also implications for the role of the set facilitator. Vince (2008) and Ram and Trehan (2009, 2010) depart from Revan's notion of set facilitators as mere 'accoucheurs' (Revans, 1982b) and promote a more prominent role. Similar to other learning-oriented approaches to action learning, they frame the role of CAL facilitators as process consultants, who help the learning set to work on process issues and solve its own problems by raising awareness about group processes and their likely consequences. However, rather than focusing on the efficiency of the process, CAL facilitators aim to promote questioning and organising

insight by illuminating the complex dynamics that limit collective reflection. As Ram and Trehan highlight:

> "[w]ithin CAL, facilitation is not only concerned with supporting the learner in challenging or changing the discourses that generate positions of marginality; equally important is the capacity to illuminate the ways in which participants resist or reinforce power relations that develop from learning inaction." (Ram and Trehan, 2009, p. 315).

This requires real commitment and skilled facilitation, since it implies recognising, surfacing and actively engaging with the social, emotional and political dynamics, rather than simply 'managing them' (Ram and Trehan, 2009). Rigg and Trehan (1999) emphasise that facilitation in CAL, therefore, requires high levels of reflexivity with regard to their constructions and practices, e.g. in relation to race and gender issues.

1.2.3 Limitations of CAL

Vince (2008, p. 103) notes that "[a]ll attempts to organize learning are prone to the creation of activities that are potentially self-limiting as well as developmental". This is also true for CAL where, despite its explicit focus on critical reflection and the attempt to support critical reflection by purposefully examining the social conditions that limit it, critical reflection is frequently resisted.

For example, Rigg and Trehan (2008) report the withdrawal of some participants from critical reflection in an organisational CAL program. Reflecting on their experience, they argue that critical reflection might be limited by the ways in which dissonance, that is part and parcel of critical reflection, is construed. They highlight the importance of a belief in and commitment to critical reflection, not only by the participants, but also by other stakeholders involved in the process. Vince and Saleem (2004) report on an organisational CAL program where they found that organisational patterns of caution and blame undermined the readiness of managers to engage in critical reflection and their desire for change and action due to their fear of the consequences of criticism. Elsewhere, Vince (2008) shares experiences from a CAL program, where the construction of the managerial role in an organisation generated implicit rules about when and when not to engage in critical reflection and action. For example, he

found that in the organisation the managerial role was constructed in a way that carried a tension between keeping control and making change happen, promoting an implicit rule that learning is important as long as it is not disruptive. As a result, managers settled for action rather than reflection and change. He also shows that dynamics in the organisation created implicit rules that there is not enough time to invest into learning, which has promoted managers' prioritisation of action over reflection/action. Additionally, he found that the insecurity inherent in the managerial role promoted comparison and conflict with others, leading to a tendency to avoid learning when it involved working through conflicts.

Several studies have also highlighted how the group context, which is at the heart of action learning, has the potential to further limit dynamics given participants' construction of their positioning in relation to others in the set. Central to these dynamics lies the participants' embeddedness in diverse networks of social relationships in and outside the CAL program, which shapes their construction of their diverse roles and identities. For example, Rigg and Trehan (1999) report on a CAL program, where some participating black women found the experience of CAL disempowering due to gendered group relations. They show how constructions of race and gender have created conflicts and tensions that resulted in a loss of confidence, and a reinforced sense of powerlessness, which mobilised participants' reluctance to participate in collective critical reflection. Similarly, Mughal, Gatrell and Stead (2018) report on a CAL program that was part of an MBA program in a university in Pakistan and argue that broader social constructions of gender relations were reproduced in the action learning set, limiting the interaction of participants of different sexes. In the same study, Mughal and colleagues found that the participants' past learning experiences, which were characterised by traditional hierarchical learning relations, had shaped their construction of the set facilitator as an authority figure who was not to be challenged but respected as expert. This led to dynamics in the learning set that limited participants' engagement with critical reflection.

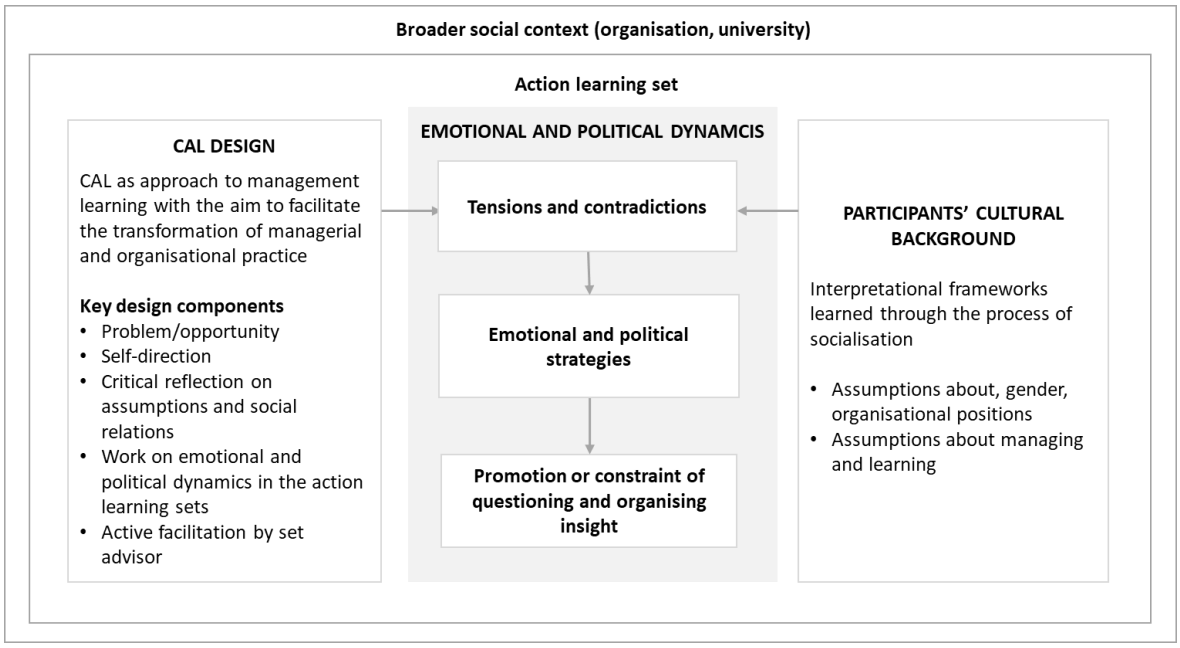
These studies provide examples of how CAL, which aims to address the social conditions that limit critical reflection is, indeed, frequently constrained by the very

dynamics it aims to address. As Rigg and Trehan (2004, p. 161) conclude: "[c]ritical action learning has potential to be transformational, although not inevitably so."

1.3 Action learning in the Global South

So far, I have highlighted CAL's potential to transform managerial practice through a critically reflective engagement with managerial problems and the political and emotional dynamics that emerge from the very attempt to learn this way. Furthermore, I have highlighted how, despite CAL's intention to surface and work through these dynamics, critical reflection in CAL is frequently limited by the very social relations it aims to address. Figure 1.1 visualises these relations in a conceptual framework.

Figure 1.1: The relationship between CAL design, context and practice



Interestingly, with the notable exception of Mughal *et al*. (2018), all studies that highlight limitations of CAL do so from a Western perspective, analysing programs that took place predominantly in the UK. This raises questions about the potential of CAL in relation to settings in the Global South. As elaborated above, CAL's focus on critical reflection is underpinned by notions of democracy, autonomy and self-direction and

promotes ways of acting and relating that I consider to be inherently Western. Settings in the Global South are culturally distinct and, therefore, structured in different ways. People may have different, even opposing assumptions about managing and learning and neither share CAL's underpinning values, nor consider the behaviour promoted by a CAL design as appropriate or desirable. Hence, participants in such culturally distinct settings may experience CAL as a pedagogical approach that is deeply countercultural. Depending on the extent to which their values, ideas and assumptions are congruent, these distinct cultural frameworks of interpretation may promote emotional and political dynamics that support and/or limit learning from CAL. This argument is supported by Mughal *et al*.'s (2018) above-mentioned study in an MBA in Pakistan, where they found that the values and practices that were promoted by CAL were at odds with those Pakistani managers had learned to embrace. As a result, the participants employed political strategies that limited critical reflection in the action learning sets.

Furthermore, there is some evidence from more conventional approaches to action learning, which highlight cultural tensions and provide insights into how these have limited participants' engagement with the action learning design. For example, Ussivane and Ellwood (2020) offer reflections on how the organisational hierarchy in a food program in Mozambique has prompted power dynamics that limited the action learning process. They describe how participants avoided challenges and disagreement, suggesting that questioning was not seen as acceptable behaviour, especially towards superiors to whom this would represent a loss of face. Additionally, they suggest that the unfamiliarity with action learning made people feel ambiguous and confused, leaving them longing for more conventional sessions. Stevens and de Vera (2015) share their experience of an attempt to use action learning as support for faculty members who act as learning team advisors in a master's program in Management Development in the Philippines. They report how the process unfolds in unexpected ways with participants being late or not attending, the airtimes being hijacked for other topics (particularly by senior faculty members), which turned the action learning set in a discussion forum. In their reflections, they highlight three cultural differences to make sense of the participants' action learning practice: loss of

face, which made people say things they think were expected rather than providing honest or critical feedback; respect and deference to status, age and seniority; and the idea that time and commitment are two separate constructs. Lustig and Rai (2009) describe the implementation of action learning in a non-profit organisation in Nepal, where action learning was used to accompany a major change process in the way in which people communicate with each other. While they assess the program as successful, they offer reflections on how the perception that action learning was extra work, the newness of the introspective process and opposing internalised values have created resistance to action learning.

From a more analytical perspective, Marquardt (1998) suggests that action learning contains cultural elements which discourage its use in non-Western countries, and that the power of action learning programs needs to be translated to culturally diverse participants. He identifies five central elements of action learning (basic principles, project or task, questioning and reflective process, commitment to action, commitment to individual and organisational learning), which he compares to Western and non-Western paradigms of culture, highlighting the tensions this might create. He concludes that people learn differently in different cultures and therefore action learning needs to be 'acculturized' to be 'user-friendly', which requires "a keen sensitivity to the basic assumptions inherent in those cultures and to the ways in which these people think and act" (Marquardt, 1998, p. 125). Likewise, drawing on Hofstede's work on national culture, Dilworth and Bosyhk (2010) review diverse cultural dimensions such as power distance, uncertainty avoidance or time orientation, and set them in relation to action learning, highlighting potential contradictions. They reach a similar conclusion to Marquardt by identifying a need to adapt action learning to the national and organisational culture involved. Based on their analysis, they provide some practical advice to avoid cross-cultural problems. For example, they suggest some guidelines for the preparation of action learning programs in cultures other to one's own, which include, for example, familiarising oneself with the country, determining previous action learning experience, avoiding the use of humour cross-culturally, discovering the espoused values of the organisation, getting background

information about the people, studying the business with which one will be involved and using back translation to check accuracy of critical remarks.

However, both Marquardt (1998) as well as Dilworth and Boshyk (2010) propose that there is also potential for synergies between action learning and some cultural dimensions prevalent in non-Western countries. For example, Marquardt (1998) suggests that the collectivistic spirit that characterises many countries of the Global South may create synergies with action learning and encourage collaboration in an action learning set, given that team work is valued more than in Western countries, which are often characterised by individualistic tendencies. Dilworth and Boshyk (2010) make a similar argument when they suggest that the tradition of Ubuntu, an "African" approach to management, promotes communalism by highlighting notions of supportiveness, cooperation, and solidarity. Similar to Marquardt, they take this as an indication that action learning might be more compatible with non-Western cultures. Furthermore, Marquardt (Marquardt, 1998) suggests that non-Western cultures, where time is a more flexible concept, might be more conducive to action learning, since participants are more willing to take time to question, reflect and discuss. In a similar manner, Cho and Bong (2011) suggest that the norms of Confucius which are prevalent in South Korea emphasise a family-centred, patriarchal authority, were conducive to foster participants' commitment to investing time in organisational action learning programs, when the organisation's leadership asked for it.

The analysis of studies which provide insights into the cultural compatibility of action learning with the local cultural contexts in non-Western settings highlights two points. First, the local culture in non-Western settings has the potential to both constrain and enable learning in action learning, and the nature of cultural dynamics that are mobilised ultimately depends on the interplay between the specific design in a specific cultural context. This highlights the general value of studies that explore the cultural dynamics that emerge when action learning is introduced in the Global South. Since every context is unique, I argue, it should be in our interest as a community of researchers in and practitioners of CAL to develop a portfolio of cultural analyses in distinct settings, on which we can recur to explore common ground and differences, potentials and limitations, and which provide valuable insights for the design of action

learning programs in diverse settings. However, with the exception of Mughal *et al*. (2018), the literature presented is based on conventional forms of action learning rather than CAL. I argue that an exploration of the impact of local culture on CAL is important since, whilst it shares many of the assumptions that underpin conventional action learning, CAL's focus on critical reflection might be even more countercultural for participants in the Global South, which makes it likely to be even more fiercely resisted, thus neutralising the potential synergies proposed above.

Second, Mughal *et al*. (2018) emphasise that designing and facilitating action learning in a way that takes account of the local culture requires a keen understanding of the cultural dynamics that are mobilised by the attempt to learn through action learning. However, while the insights from the above-mentioned studies are valuable in putting the spotlight on a neglected issue, they are limited in their depth of analysis. The accounts of practice are predominantly concerned with description and outcomes rather than with a deeper engagement of the cultural dynamics. In most accounts, insights into the impact of local culture are anecdotal and read like by-products of the experience, based on hunches rather than a systematic analysis. Likewise, none of these accounts approach the notion of culture with a conceptually sound framework. Those studies who engage more analytically with the role of the cultural context in action learning (Marquardt, 1998; Dilworth and Boshyk, 2010) draw on generic cultural dimensions, assuming a somewhat mechanistic relationship between culture and practice. The underpinning assumption seems to be that practice can be predicted by some generic cultural dimensions, which turns a blind eye to the complex interplay between design, culture and practice, the participants' actual sense-making as well as the diverse manifestations of how these contradictions may unfold in practice. Hence, there is a paucity of studies that provide in-depth insights into the cultural politics in CAL programs in settings of the Global South.

With this study, I intend to contribute to filling this gap by adding a Tanzanian perspective to the conversation. More specifically, I aim to explore in some depth the cultural politics in CAL in the context of a management development program in a Tanzanian organisation. To my knowledge, so far, no study has explored CAL in an organisational setting in the Global South. However, I argue that an organisational

perspective is relevant since, as Rigg and Trehan (2008) emphasise, organisations provide a considerably different context for CAL than a corporate setting, where relationships are more complex and interests more diverse. As such, the cultural dynamics in organisational CAL programs may play out differently compared to those in CAL programs in academic settings, which was the focus of Mughal *et al*. (2018).

Drawing on the conceptual framework above, the research is guided by the following research questions:

- What tensions and/or synergies did participants experience between the cultural requirements of the CAL design and their local culture?
- How did these tensions and/or synergies shape participants' practices in the LDP?
- How did these practices promote or constrain learning through critical reflection in the LDP?

By exploring these questions, I seek to gain a deeper understanding of and implications for CAL in Tanzanian organisations. Furthermore, I want to contribute to rectify the inequal representation in the academic discourse on CAL, which is currently characterised by a stark dominance of Western managers' experiences. Given the emancipatory spirit of CAL that is embodied in the critical social theories that underpin it, such a political endeavour seems to sit well with the very core of CAL.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have critically reviewed the literature on action learning and critical action learning (CAL) to highlight the gap in the literature and create a theoretical foundation that serves as backdrop for the discussion of my findings.

In the first section, I have explored the theoretical assumptions about managing and learning that underpin action learning. In doing so, I have highlighted its emancipatory potential which lies in its self-directed, reflective, and collaborative pedagogical approach. Furthermore, I have briefly elaborated on the vast variety of approaches action learning and the importance to maintain its philosophical core.

In the second section, I have elaborated on CAL as one approach to action learning that aims to leverage the emancipatory potential, which is often left untapped by conventional approaches to action learning. In doing so, I have emphasised the role of social relations that underpin both managing and learning and have the potential to limit learning from action learning. I have highlighted the implications for design that flow from this critique: particularly the integration of critical reflection on the assumptions and social relations that underpin both organising and the attempt to learn from CAL, a keen attention to the emotional and political dynamics in the sets as well as active facilitation. Furthermore, I have illustrated that the introduction of critical reflection in CAL may be problematic and is frequently resisted due to the ways in which participants construct the value and consequences of critical reflection as well as their identities, roles and social relations.

In the third section, I have developed a conceptual framework on the relationship between pedagogical design, culture, and context and how they interact to shape practice. These relationships establish the assumptions on which I have built the argument for my study and serve as signposts and visual aids in the remaining chapters of this thesis. In elaborating my argument, I emphasised the absence of experiences from working with CAL as an approach to management development in organisations in the Global South. I highlighted the potential contributions such studies can make to the theory and practice of action learning, namely by deepening our understanding of CAL in Tanzanian organisations, providing concrete implications for design in such settings and giving voice to Tanzanian participants, whose perspectives so far has been marginalised.

I concluded the chapter by presenting the objective and research questions of my study. This is: to systematically explore the cultural politics that emerge in the program by, firstly, inquiring into the conflicts and/or synergies that emerge between the participants' cultural background and the assumptions that underpin the design; secondly, by investigating how these tensions and/or contradictions shape participants' practices in the action learning sets and, thirdly, by exploring how these practices promote or constrain learning in the LDP.

In the next chapter, I present the conceptual framework I have used to conceptualise the phenomenon.

2 A Bourdieusian lens on culture, design and practice

The objective of this study is to investigate the cultural dynamics in critical action learning (CAL) in a corporate management development program in an MFI in Tanzania. To do so, it is necessary to make explicit the relationship between culture, design and practice, that informed my study design to guide the reader through my analysis and sense-making process. This is critical since culture is an abstract concept whose meaning is always constructed (Abu-Lughod, 1999). It has a long-standing tradition in the social sciences and has experienced multiple shifts in meanings across a variety of disciplines with different theorisations (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952; Reckwitz, 2006). The notion of culture as meaning-making system subsumes a variety of perspectives which alternatively locate culture in people's mind (e.g. Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010), in language and text (e.g. Geertz, 1973) or social practice (e.g. Swidler, 1986, 2001; Bourdieu, 1992). These theories provide different explanations as to how culture shapes social practice and ultimately enable and limit the ways in which culture can be approached empirically.

This study is underpinned by Bourdieu's theory of practice (1992), and the objective of this chapter is to surface how I use the concepts elaborated by Bourdieu to explore the cultural conflicts that were mobilised in the LDP. This will offer readers the opportunity to assess the rigour of the theoretical constructs that underpin this study and the coherence between the theoretical foundations and the methodological design of my research, which Tracey (2010) identifies as an important quality indicator for qualitative research.

The chapter is structured as follows: In section 2.1, I provide my reading of Bourdieu's theory considering those aspects that are particularly relevant to my study. In doing so, I focus on explaining the key concepts of *habitus*, *field* and *capital* and how these concepts interact to shape social practice, before exploring Bourdieu's notions of *doxa* and *crisis*, which represent two different configurations of the relationship between habitus and field and serve as way to conceptualise the cultural tensions and synergies that may emerge in the LDP. I close the section by making the case why Bourdieu's theory of practice is an appropriate and helpful framework for this study. In section

2.2, I show how I have used these concepts as a lens to construct the object of my study and develop a strategy for data collection and analysis.

2.1 Bourdieu's theory of practice

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of culture and practice provides a comprehensive explanatory framework of how the cultural and the social, the past and the present interact to generate social practice. In doing so, he bridges the conceptual divide between objective and subjective explanations of social practice. Thereby, Bourdieu's idea of culture is grounded in an ethnographic understanding, and frames culture as habitus, a system of incorporated dispositions and guiding principles, which shape the way in which agents experience and make sense of the social situation in a specific field and which structures social practice (Bourdieu, 1992; Swartz, 1997). In general terms, Bourdieu describes social practice as outcome of the interplay between habitus and field under the consideration of the capital at hand. In short: [(Habitus) (Capital)] + Field = Practice (Bourdieu, 1986b, p. 101). In this section, I provide my reading of the concepts and their relationship.

2.1.1 Habitus

The habitus is a complex, multi-layered construct, which has evolved throughout Bourdieu's career and writings. In broad terms, Bourdieu (1992) describes habitus as a system of dispositions or schemes of perception, conception and action, that interprets and classifies the social world and defines what is worth and possible to strive for and what actions are appropriate. The dispositions of the habitus are unconsciously assimilated through past experiences and represent the interiorisation of experienced historical relations. Bourdieu terms the internalisation of external conditions *incorporation* to emphasise the bodily dimension of socialisation, which he describes as a chronological, multi-layered and dialectical process of structuring and re-structuring, whereby early experiences are the basis for all subsequent experiences (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Consequently, a group that shares history, shares a similar habitus. The habitus is, thus, a bodily phenomenon, which does not operate on the conscious level, but is pre-reflective (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Since the habitus develops over time through experiences in different social spaces, a person's habitus is not necessarily coherent, but can be divided or torn. Bourdieu highlights this fact with the notion of *field habitus*, arguing that each field of practice produces its own habitus (Bourdieu, 1992; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

The habitus of a group is thus cultural competence and acts systemically as generating principles. That is, the habitus acts as *modus operandi* that gives form to social practice (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 59). In doing so, the habitus creates the space of possibility for members, by constraining the possible thoughts, perceptions and actions to those that were inherent in the particular conditions that have produced the habitus. As a result, the habitus equips actors only for certain structures, generating a tendency to act as learned, even when social conditions change. However, for Bourdieu, the habitus is both determinative and creative, which while it does not continuously create novelty, specific actions cannot be predicted either, making practices a "regulated improvisation" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 57).

Bourdieu often refers to the habitus as a practical sense, a sense of orientation, anticipation or "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 82) that instinctively grasps the opportunity to make the most profitable cultural investments by taking into consideration the "urgencies and pressures, threats and appeals" (Bourdieu, 1992, pp. 81–82) of the practical situation: the social position, its constraints and opportunities, as well as the current and potential subjective resources. In this sense, social practice is to a certain extent strategic. However, for Bourdieu *strategies* are not necessarily rationally calculated or intentional, but the result of the pre-reflective practical sense of the habitus. While practice follows certain regularities, it is not rule-following in a structuralist sense (Marton, 2008). Hence, agents who share a similar habitus do not necessarily utilise the same actions. They might use different, even opposite strategies to enact the same generating principle. In other words, the habitus reproduces practice *forms* and patterns. As such, the habitus produces both the "unity and their

regularity" of practices, as well as their "'fuzziness' and their irregularities and even incoherencies" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 86).

The reproduction of practice that is shaped by the habitus reinforces the social structures, in which practice takes place. However, despite the self-regulation of the habitus, the habitus is not fixed, but has the potential to change (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu explicitly notes the potential of transformation of the habitus:

> "Habitus is not the fate some people read into it. Being the product of history, it is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures. It is durable, but not eternal!" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 133).

The dispositions of the habitus are created through historical praxis in specific social conditions, and these conditions can change throughout life and thus add or modify early dispositions. This can happen naturally through personal "social trajectories" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 133), such as being promoted at work or moving to another country. Or, it may occur in a more intentional and cognisant way via an "awakening consciousness and a form of 'self-work'" (ibid, p.133) that creates awareness of one's own assumptions and habits. The participation in a CAL program, for example, can set in motion such processes, since CAL aims precisely at a transformation of the habitus by surfacing and questioning taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions that underpin participants' practice.

However, Bourdieu recognises that while the habitus has a general potential for transformation, it tends to respond inflexibly to novel and unknown situations. Bourdieu (1992) calls this *hysteresis,* referring to situations in which the social conditions may change, but the habitus takes time to adapt to the change – if it does at all.

2.1.2 Field

For Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1992, 2013; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) the social world neither consists of substance, nor of social interactions, but of social relations. His

focus is neither on individuals and their characteristics, nor the intersubjective relationships between them, but on the individuals in their objective relation with each other, because the individual can only be explained against the background of the social. He introduces the notion of *field* that represents the conceptual counterpart of the habitus as external social structure that becomes incorporated in the habitus and reproduced by it through practice. Bourdieu describes fields as a "network of objective relations" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 97), which are more or less bound social spaces in which practice takes place. Modern societies consist of many different fields, which are related to each other. Bourdieu (1992) highlights that fields do not exist in isolation but are positioned alongside and in relation to each other and mutually shape each other. While fields can be relatively autonomous, no field is completely independent.

In each field, there are different stakes to be won and costs to be paid, which make the game worth playing, and entry into a field requires a tacit acceptance of its objective and rules (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The positions agents occupy in a field are objective in the sense that they are independent of the personal characteristics of the actors who occupy these relations. Rather, the field is structured according to the distribution of valuable resources (capital). Thus, people do not hold their positions due to their properties but based on the resources they possess. Therefore, participants are positioned unequally and engage in a continuous struggle to maintain and improve their position in the field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In other words, participants in a field stand in competition over the production and accumulation of the most valued resources and the legitimisation of their symbolic order. The actors' practices are strategies that aim to protect and accumulate different forms of capital to improve their social position in a field and maximise the outcome of practice.

Bourdieu compares fields of practice with a playing field in which a game is played (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Each field has its own logic, rules, and structures, which provide a horizon of possibility that is interpreted by the habitus in relation to the subjective resources of which actors dispose and their perceived position in the field. It is this logic of practice that is incorporated into the habitus and generates agents' dispositions to act.

2.1.3 Capital

The concept of capital plays an important role in Bourdieu's theory and highlights the political nature of practice. At its heart, capital in the Bourdieusian sense is both the basis and necessary resource of social action (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). As such, capital and their rules of conversion provide the logic that structures practice. To play the game and benefit from what is at stake in a specific field, players need specific combinations of resources for action or 'trump cards' that function as weapons. Bourdieu (1986a) calls these resources capital, once they function as source of power, that is, when they are valued in the field and become objects of struggles. This is a "conceptual strategy" (Swartz, 1997, p. 66) to highlight that all practices, including those oriented towards non-material stakes, are interested and "never cease to comply with an economic logic" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 123). In other words, social action in the Bourdieusian sense is never neutral, but always directed to maximise material, cultural and/or symbolic profit.

In any field, resources for action are distributed unequally, structuring the field by the distribution of the different types and subtypes of capital at a given moment in time (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 241). That means that actors play the game with various degrees of power and therefore have "diverse probabilities of success to appropriate the specific products at stake in the game" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 102). As sources of power, the relevant forms of capital represent the logic of classification and distinction from others, and actors in a field stand in competition over the most valued resources. Their strategies are directed at maximising the accumulation of capital to maximise the benefit of what is at stake in the practice.

The value of different forms of capital depends on the logic of conversion, that is on how easy or difficult, cheap or costly, likely or unlikely these resources are expected to convert into other relevant forms of capital and/or the stake(s) of the field. In this sense, the value of specific types of resources is relative and always bound to the specific field. Bourdieu (1986a) broadly distinguishes between economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital, but highlights that any other form of resource can function as capital depending on the field.

Economic capital refers to all forms of financial resources and material possessions that can be traded with money – that is, capital in the traditional sense. Cultural capital exists in three states: in an objectified, an institutionalised and an embodied state (Bourdieu, 1986a). In its objectified state, cultural capital refers to the "cultural goods" (Bourdieu, 1986a, p. 15) such as books, works of art, tools and scientific instruments that need specialised cultural abilities to use. Institutionalised cultural capital refers to formalised educational credentials and academic titles. Embodied cultural capital is linked to the habitus and refers to the knowledge, skills and dispositions to act, e.g., reading and writing skills, language skills, general cultural awareness, the familiarity with what is valued in a specific field. This form of capital is particularly important in relation to this study since it plays an important role in education and learning. Bourdieu (1990) argues that the learners' repertoire of skills is shaped by their past experiences, since agents develop those cultural competences that serve as capital according to the prevalent rules of learning, which can lead to a gap between cultural requirements of learning and the agents' cultural equipment with cultural capital, if a new approach to learning is introduced – which is the case in the LDP. Social capital includes informal social networks (e.g., friends, business partners) as well as institutionalised memberships in groups (e.g. a professional association, a political party or a country/golf club) a person has, and which provide some form of benefit that is relevant for practice. These three forms of capital can convert in what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital and which refers to the level of social recognition and prestige that is gained, for example, through the acquisition of status symbols, the membership of a group, university degrees or money.

2.1.4 Doxa and crisis

The relation between habitus and field is a "meeting of two evolving logics or histories" (Maton, 2008, p. 52). Both are structured, and it is the relationship between these two structures that give rise to practices. Conceptually, Bourdieu has captured two possible states of aggregations in the relationship between habitus and field. On one hand, Bourdieu refers to *doxa*, a belief in a "common-sense world" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 58) that is characterised by the convergence of habitus and field, an "ontological complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 128), where the external

structures of the social field are identical or similar to those that have produced the habitus. The doxic belief is not recognised as such, and the social order and practices remain largely unquestioned and accepted as natural, generating a positive sense of place. A doxic state reproduces practices, which in turn reproduce and reinforce both the incorporated and external structures.

However, on the other hand, Bourdieu explains that the blind harmony of the doxa can be broken and be replaced by a *crisis*, a habitus-field conflict, when suddenly habitus and field are out of sync (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). As mentioned above, such crises can be provoked when individuals enter new fields (e.g. when they start a new job or travel to culturally distinct places) or when new players, who do not share the same doxa enter the field (like in the case of this study, where I, as a management development consultant, introduce the logic of CAL as approach to management development). Such situations can challenge the prevalent doxa by making people aware of their own habitus and consciously questioning their 'taken-for-granteds'. These crises generate a divergence between habitus and field on an individual or collective level that breaks the doxic beliefs and generates distinct and even antagonistic opinions and beliefs (Bourdieu, 2013). This mobilises struggles that are rooted in the dialectic of orthodoxy and heterodoxy: whereas some members of the group will defend the prevalent doxa and its practical rules, others will attempt to develop a heretic alternative and change the rules in a way that increases the value of the capital they possess. The first group, orthodoxy, tends to employ conservative strategies to maintain the existing rules. The second group, heterodoxy, who perceive the prevalent doxa as detrimental to their own position tend to deploy subversive strategies that aim to change the existing rules of the game.

2.1.5 The case for a Bourdieusian framework

I argue that Bourdieu's theory is an appropriate lens for this study, since it provides a framework that illuminates the complexity of culture and the ways in which it contributes to shaping social action. This is important, since the concept of culture is frequently criticised for simplifying these intricate processes of real-life sense-making

(e.g. Abu-Lughod, 1991). Bruman (1999) aptly summarises the critique made from different perspectives when he says:

> "The major concern of the sceptical discourse on culture is that the concept suggests boundedness, homogeneity, coherence, stability, and structure whereas social reality is characterized by variability, inconsistencies, conflict, change, and individual agency." (Brumann, 1999, p. 1).

These concerns, I believe, certainly resonate with the notion of culture implicit in Hofstede's work, which underpins most of the few cultural analyses in action learning literature, and which I have criticised in chapter 1. His cultural dimensions, which claim to be an objective representation of a national culture, transport the idea that a nation is a bounded group of people, who share a homogenous, coherent, and stable 'programming of the mind' (Hofstede, 1980), which to a certain extent allows predicting the behaviour of the members of this nation.

In contrast, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of culture and practice provides a more comprehensive explanatory framework of how the cultural and the social, the past and the present interact to produce social practice. For example, from a Bourdieusian perspective, social practice is not purely determined by and predictable through some guiding structures or values, as Hofstede's theory implies, but practice is shaped by the interplay between both the historical-cultural, which is a property of the agent, and the current social. Such a conceptualisation frames people not as mere passive products of their culture, but as active agents who have good reasons for acting the way they do, leaving space for more individual agency. At the heart of his theory is the dialectical relationship between the cultural and the social: on one hand, the habitus is a "structured structure" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 53) that is formed by the historical conditions of a group situated in a field of social relations. On the other hand, the habitus functions as "structuring structures" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 53), a system of generating principles that provides internal logics and meaning to its members. Thus, for Bourdieu the generation of practice is an active process mediated through the dialectical relationship between habitus and field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). While he has at times been criticised for being too deterministic (e.g. Jenkins, 1992), in

my reading of his work, the active construction of social practices clearly leaves room for individual agency.

Additionally, by bridging the conceptual divide between objective and subjective explanations of social practice, Bourdieu leaves the possibility for cultural differences among and within social groups: no habitus is exactly the same, and a person's habitus is not necessarily coherent (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Furthermore, Bourdieu's theory of culture leaves room for both reproduction and change. While his work was initiated with an interest in explaining the regularity of social practices, his concepts allow for the possibility of change and learning on both the individual and collective level, which becomes evident in his concept of *crisis* and the possibility that this crisis leads to the transformation of the habitus and thus the practices produced by it.

Lastly, and particularly relevant for my study, Bourdieu highlights the political nature of culture. He does not uncritically accept culture as something neutral but unravels the political dimension and the power processes involved in the reproduction of the habitus, as well as the reproduction of social practice. This sits well with the view of social practice that underpins CAL and allows to investigate the power relations and political dynamics that are at play in the LDP, which is at the heart of my study. His concept of crisis offers a helpful lens to analyse the tensions and contradictions that arise between the participants' habitus and the CAL design that underpins the learning program. Hence, Bourdieu's theory allows for more variability, incoherence, change and individual agency and thus addresses many of the concerns that are expressed about working with the concept of culture, providing a more appropriate explanatory power.

2.2 My use of Bourdieu

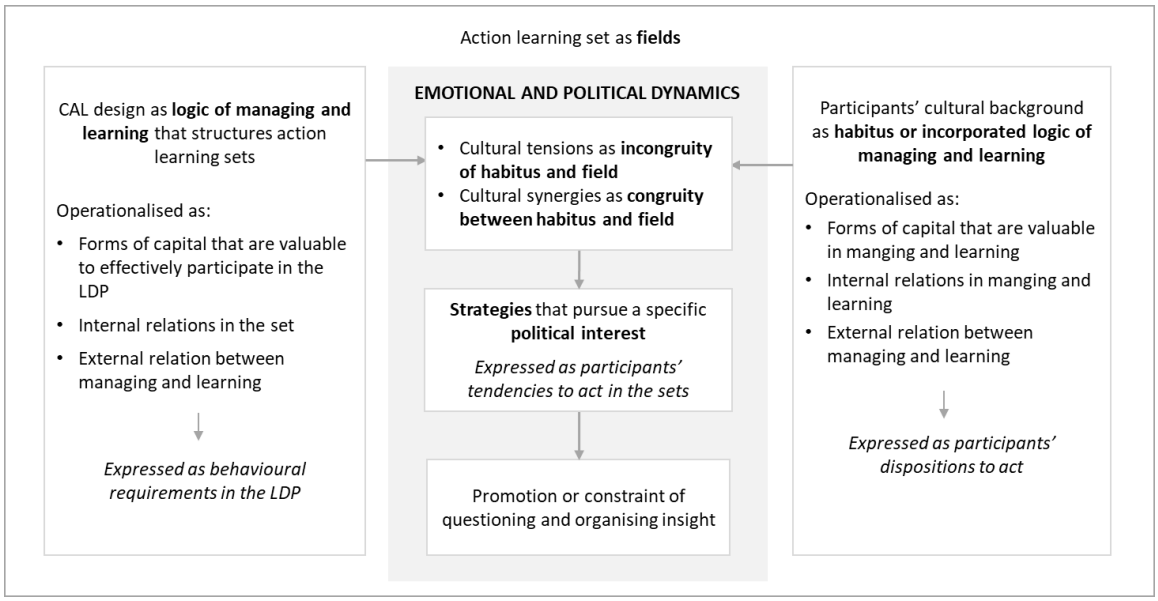
As argued above, Bourdieu's theory provides a helpful lens and analytical tools to explore the cultural politics in the LDP in Tanzania. However, Bourdieu explicitly refrained from narrowly defining his concepts to leave space to creatively use them in

practice. He sees these concepts more as food for thought, which instigate a specific relational way of thinking, rather than rigid, prescriptive concepts:

> "The main thing is that they are not to be conceptualised so much as ideas, on that level, but as a method. The core of my work lies in the method and a way of thinking. To be more precise, my method is a manner of asking questions rather than just ideas. This, I think is a critical point.." (Bourdieu, 1985, quoted in Mahar, 1990).

This marks a great difference to Hofstede's theory, which narrowly and rigidly predetermines specific dimensions of culture. However, this brings the challenge that to use these concepts empirically requires finding ways to construct the object of study through the lens of these concepts. It is therefore pertinent to make explicit how I used these concepts in my study. Figure 2.1 provides an overview of my use of Bourdieu's theory by presenting the conceptual framework elaborated in chapter 1 through the lens of Bourdieu's theory of practice.

Figure 2.1: The introduction of CAL through a Bourdieusian lens



The objective of my study is to explore the cultural politics in the LDP that are mobilised by the tensions and/or synergies participants experience in relation to the CAL design, and to do so in some depth and a systematic manner.

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory presented above, I take the action learning sets in the LDP as *fields*. I argue that such a conceptualisation is in line with Bourdieu, who has used the notion of field not only for functional domains of society, such as education, but also for relatively autonomous groups of people who are joined in the pursuit of a specific practice and positioned towards each other in a network of objective relations, such as families or villages (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In this sense, each action learning set can be seen as a field, where participants are related to each other in the *practice of managing and learning about managing.* As elaborated above, every field has its own logic, which in this case I take as embodied in the assumptions of learning and managing that underpin the CAL design of the LDP.

Furthermore, I take participants' cultural background as habitus. Following from this, I conceptualise the cultural conflicts as incongruity between design and habitus *(crisis*), and the cultural synergies as congruity between design and habitus *(doxa*). To identify the tensions and/or synergies, it is necessary to compare the aspired structures of the CAL design with the incorporated structures of the participants' habitus. Additionally, I take participants' practices in the set as *strategies* through which they pursue specific political interests in their attempt to improve their positioning by accumulating those forms of capital, they deem important given their interpretation of the CAL design and the practical situation in the LDP. To identify these political interests, it is necessary to set their tendencies to act in the LDP in relation to the cultural conflicts and/or synergies that have emerged.

Hence, to explore the cultural politics in the LDP, I set out to identify the logic of managing and learning that underpins the LDP, the participants' habitus and the participants' tendencies to act in the action learning set. Such an effort requires operationalising the concepts of field and habitus to make them accessible for empirical research. In the following paragraphs I show how I have approached this task.

Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory described above, I operationalise the logic of managing and learning as the mechanisms of distinction (capital) that underpin practice, which are expressed in the behavioural requirements posed by the design. To

participate effectively in the LDP and achieve what is at stake requires a specific combination of resources (forms of capital). These forms of capital gain their value based on the positioning of agents in the field and therefore can only be constructed hermeneutically (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, to explore the forms of capital that are valuable in the LDP, it is necessary to also explore the relations between participants and set advisor, and among participants, as well as the relationship between managing and learning that the design aims to promote.

The operationalisation of the habitus was challenging, since, as mentioned above, Bourdieu refrained from clearly defining habitus. While at times, Bourdieu speaks of the habitus as 'dispositions to act', other times he refers to it as 'schemes of perception, conception and action'. Maton (2008, p. 62) highlights the challenge in operationalising habitus:

> "More important [than defining the habitus] is the question of the structure of the habitus. This is to ask: if habitus highlights a generative structure, then what is the internal structure of that structure? The task for the researcher is to analyse practices so that the underlying structuring principles of the habitus are revealed. […] to achieve operative relational concepts requires being able to state the internal structure of a habitus separate from a description of the practices it gives rise to".

Hence, to reveal the underlying structuring principles, it is important to not just analyse the participants' observable dispositions to act, but also the mechanisms of distinctions and the incorporated relations that underpin them. Such an approach provides a deeper explanatory power and facilitates a better understanding of the cultural politics in the LDP.

Furthermore, Bourdieu argues that any field develops its own field habitus. Hence, the conceptualisation of the habitus depends on the field of practice. In this study, the fields of practice are the action learning sets in the LDP. However, the LDP program is newly established, and participants have not previously been part of it. Therefore, they have not yet developed a corresponding field habitus. Similarly, the use of a more generic management development habitus was also not appropriate since management development efforts in the organisation were scarce, and not all

participants had participated in the few occasions that were provided. Hence, since action learning connects managerial practice with managerial learning, it seemed pertinent to inquire separately into the past experiences participants have made with managing and, respectively, learning.

In terms of managing, the participants' experiences were almost exclusively made in the specific context of the Tanzanian MFI, since given the internal policies in the MFI, most participants have started at an entry level and climbed up the internal ladder to achieve their managerial position. Hence, I argue that the notion of participants' managerial habitus can be seen as expression of a specific field habitus. Given the participants' limited experience with management development, I decided to analyse their generic learning habitus, since all participants had made experiences in diverse fields, for example, in the formal education system (school and university), as well as in the MFI (corporate technical trainings). This is not a strict application of Bourdieu's notion of field habitus, since participants have made these learning experiences in different fields, and therefore, in theory, could have developed different learning habitus in different fields. However, given the practical constraints, this seemed like a pragmatic solution. While this theorisation somewhat stretches the notion of field habitus, I argue that this conceptual imprecision is still in alignment with Bourdieu's ideas, who highlights the importance of adapting the concepts to the practical conditions of research. Drawing on participants' learning experiences in various fields still allows to explore their fundamental assumptions about learning, since all these fields are firmly situated in a Tanzanian context, and as such are likely to share similar characteristics. It requires, however, to pay attention to potential differences.

2.3 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide insight into the conceptual framework that informs the research to facilitate a shared understanding and guide the reader through my analysis and sense-making process. To do so, I have presented my understanding of Bourdieu's theory of practice and have explicated how I used this framework to construct the object of my study.

I have established three concepts, which I explore in some depth in chapter 4, 5 and 6. In chapter 4, I present the analysis of the behavioural requirements of the LDP and the logic that underpins it. In chapter 5, I provide insight into how the participants enacted this logic by exploring their tendencies to act. In chapter 6, I present the participants' dispositions to act and the mechanisms of distinction that have structured them. In chapter 7, I bring all the analysis strings together to explore the cultural politics that have emerged in the LDP by providing my interpretation of the participants' practical logic. However, before presenting my analysis, in the following chapter 3, I present the empirical design of my study to make explicit the ways in which I have arrived to these results.

3 Research methodology

In the previous chapter, I have developed the conceptual framework I am using to inquire into the research questions. In this chapter I show how I approached the research empirically by explicating the methodological design of my study.

Methodology is the rationale that lies behind the way in which researchers conduct a study and links the choice and use of methods to the desired outcome (Crotty, 2003). In this sense, the methodological approach of a study must suit the kind of knowledge sought (Griffith, 1998). My approach to research can be characterised as practitioner ethnography. In this study, I am positioned in multiple webs of social relationships that are characterised by diverse, sometimes contradicting interests and which shape my positioning in relation to the research participants and other stakeholders. As such, the research context brings with it several methodological concerns, which are rooted in my triple role as researcher, consultant, and CAL facilitator, as well as me being a white European conducting research in a postcolonial setting. Key issues that need to be addressed in my research design and practice are the subjectivity of the research process and the ethical concerns associated with doing research as a European person in a postcolonial context.

The chapter is structured as follows. In section 3.1, I discuss ethnography as the methodological approach that underpins my study. In doing so, I highlight the key features of ethnography, explain what makes this approach particularly suited to inquire into the cultural politics in the LDP, and explore the different approaches to ethnography, before explicating my own approach. In section 3.2, I provide insights into my research practice and my experience of fieldwork by describing my strategies to negotiate access, manage field relationships and collect material through different forms of participant observation and ethnographic interviews. In doing so, I highlight the practical challenges I encountered in my fieldwork and the political and emotional dynamics that have emerged in the process. In section 3.3, I discuss my approach to data analysis, which was based on the principles for reflexive thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clark (2006), and explicate how I worked with the material to construct the three concepts established in the previous chapter.

The presentation of my approach to the research may read like a clean account, packed in neat sections. However, it is important to highlight that the process was complex and messy, with a constant back and forth between the data collection and analysis, renegotiations and adjustments.

3.1 Ethnography as methodology

For this study, I chose an ethnographic approach. In this section, I first highlight some key features of ethnography and argue why the choice of ethnography was appropriate for this study. Then I explore different approaches to ethnography by illuminating some debates in relation to the kind of knowledge created and the nature of knowledge claims that are made. I close the section by presenting my approach to ethnography. In doing so, I surface my ontological and epistemological assumptions, explore some methodological challenges that stem from these assumptions and my positioning in the context of this study, and discuss my approach to reflexivity that was a critical part of my research design and practice.

3.1.1 Key features of ethnography

In broad terms, ethnography can be described as an approach to qualitative inquiry that aims to understand cultural phenomena from the participants' perspective through the researcher's immersion into people's life through an extended period of time (Spradley, 1980; Burgess, 1982; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Neyland, 2008).

A distinctive feature of ethnography is its concern with cultural interpretation by seeking to understand how a group of people makes sense and acts upon their experiences to manage their day-to-day situation (Van Maanen, 1988; Neyland, 2008). Therefore, ethnographic understanding is created through first-hand experiences from extensive fieldwork, which is primarily based on some form of participant observation but may include a variety of other methods (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Fieldwork allows the researcher to immerse in the cultural practices of a social group in their natural settings and explore social events and processes in terms of their relationship to the context in which they occur to capture the social meanings that generate them (Burgess, 1984; Hammersley, 1990; Fetterman, 2010).

The primacy of observation in fieldwork is underpinned by the assumption that culture is a shared reality which is produced and re-produced as it is lived and practised and as such is observable in daily practices (Geertz, 1973; Van Maanen, 1988; Neyland, 2008). People acquire meaningful cultural knowledge about the social world through observation and engagement with their social environment. However, this cultural knowledge cannot always be articulated, and ethnographers cannot create meaningful knowledge about how people create, experience, and understand their worlds without engaging into extensive observation (Bourdieu, 1992; Mason, 2002). In this sense, extended fieldwork provides the possibility to be pragmatic in the production of material by using various methods such as observing, listening, and asking questions, which is, as Watson (1994a, p. 8) argues, an extension of everyday activities:

> "Ethnographic research involves feeling one's way in confusing circumstances, struggling to make sense of ambiguous messages, reading signals, looking around, listening all the time, coping with conflicts and struggling to achieve tasks through establishing and maintaining a network of relationships. But that is what we do all the time as human beings.".

Wolcott (1999) distinguishes between ethnography as process and outcome. He sees ethnography as a way of seeing and suggests that whereas researchers may use ethnographic methods such as observation in other approaches, a genuine ethnographic approach encompasses both the use of ethnographic methods and a concern to explain the material from a cultural perspective.

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that ethnography is an explorative approach that aims to create new knowledge, rather than proving or disproving previously elaborated hypotheses. Ethnographic researchers tend to work primarily with unstructured qualitative data created from observations and conversations in one or few settings, from which meaning is created through inductive reasoning. However, Watson (1994a) highlights that this does not mean that ethnography is free of theory. On the contrary, ethnography includes the deliberate application of researchers' conceptual frameworks to the participants 'every day' thinking. In a similar manner, Wolcott (1999, p. 70) argues that these frameworks are important since:

> "[d]escription can only be accomplished in terms of purpose… we must concede that descriptive data is always theory-laden…There has to be an

> *idea* guiding what we choose to describe and how we choose to describe it…we cannot simply *observe, watch* and *look*, we must observe, watch or look at *something.*"

I argue that ethnography lends itself to this study for several reasons: First, the objective of this study is to explore the impact of the participants' local culture on their engagement with CAL in a management development program in an organisation in Tanzania. As elaborated in chapter 1, little is known about participants' experience of CAL in organisational contexts in the Global South or more specifically in Tanzania. In this context, the aim of this study is to develop an initial understanding that might inform further research rather than testing a theory or proving a hypothesis. Hence, I argue that the explorative nature of ethnography and its focus on cultural interpretation sits well with the objectives and intentions of my study.

Second, ethnography as a process enables me to illuminate the concepts that I have elaborated in chapter 2, namely the logic of managing and learning that underpins the design; the participants' habitus; as well as the participants' tendencies to act in the LDP. To construct these concepts requires interpretative meaning-making of participants' practices and accounts. Hence, extensive fieldwork provides the opportunity to observe these practices directly and in context. Third, I argue that an ethnographic approach to the study sits well with my role as practitioner researcher. Ethnographic methods can be designed in ways that minimise intrusion and the disruption of work or learning and thus may cushion some of the impact of organisational politics. Additionally, ethnography's focus on fieldwork leverages the benefits of my insider role, where I am already on site, and have the possibility to observe, listen and ask questions.

One could argue that ethnography is not the most suitable choice given the broader context of the study. The concerns that may arise are linked to the so called 'crisis of representation', an academic debate that raises the question of who has the right to represent a particular culture, and which has emerged as result of the somewhat complicated history of ethnography, which was forged in the context of colonial expansion, where ethnographers mapped the non-Western world for Western audiences (Catungal and Dowling, 2021). Said (1978), for example, warns of the risk of

reproducing historical relations of power by objectifying research participants as the Other. In a similar manner, Kincheloe and McLaren (2015) raise questions about the nature and belonging of the knowledge created in such studies and call for more participatory approaches to research, where participants have the possibility to exert agency.

Indeed, at the beginning of my research journey, I considered a critical action research approach for this study, which would have enabled participants to play a more active role in the research process and would have provided the possibility to create practical knowledge that could make a real difference for them in the real world. However, given my past professional experiences in the research context, I had serious doubts about the research participants' interest in and commitment to such an approach. Since I conducted this study as part of a doctoral program, my aim was to create new knowledge that would contribute new insights. However, without the participants' active engagement in the action research process, this would not be possible. I, therefore, decided to abandon the idea in favour of an approach that was less intrusive, and less dependent on participants' active contributions.

The choice of ethnography is, however, not the "second best" option. Given its basic features, an ethnographic approach brings real value to create new comprehension in the context of this study. Furthermore, I argue that ethnography can be conducted in an ethical way in postcolonial contexts. Ultimately, the aim of ethnographers is to create knowledge from the participants' perspective by placing them as active agents in their context, and there are examples of ethnographies conducted in postcolonial countries (e.g. Manning, 2016), which strive to address the concerns raised above. As Catungal and Dowling (2021, pp. 24–25) argue:

> "It is not that research cannot proceed when political, social, and cultural differences are present. Simply put, it is impossible to scrub the research process of power and difference. […] We also cannot completely shield our research practices from the presence of these power relations […] What we are compelled to do is ensure that we account for and minisme the negative influence of these power relations in our research, particularly so as to minimise, as much as possible, the harms we might expose our participants and ourselves during the research process".

Therefore, I argue that using an ethnographic approach for this study is appropriate. It requires, however, to address the methodological and ethical challenges that arise from my positioning in the setting, with the aim to minimise the objectification of the research participants. I will discuss these issues when I present my approach to ethnography. First, however, I outline the theoretical foundation by exploring the diversity of ethnography in relation to its approach to knowledge and the claims that are made.

3.1.2 Exploring ethnography

The interest in ethnography as approach has continuously grown, particularly in the light of increasing dissatisfaction with quantitative methods as approach to explore social phenomena (Hammersley, 2018). Originating from an early anthropological interest in the study of culture in 'exotic' societies, ethnography today is increasingly used to study small-scale situations in ethnographers' own societies and has gained foothold in a variety of disciplines (Burgess, 1984; Wolcott, 1999). As Wolcott (1999, p. 12) observes: "Ethnographers today pop up everywhere, studying not only all kinds of people but all kinds of topics". Over time, the approach has been re-invented, generating a multitude of different approaches to ethnography. At its heart, this diversity is linked to questions about what kind of knowledge is created and the knowledge claims that can be made.

When early ethnographies were concerned with pure cultural descriptions, today ethnography usually involves some sort of theoretical analysis. Geertz (1973), for example, proposes the outcome of ethnography as 'thick description', an essentially theoretical description which makes intelligible the conceptual world subjects inhabit. This notion has been particularly influential and is often seen as a key outcome of ethnographic research. However, Wolcott (1987) criticises the idea of thick description, which, from his point of view, does not convey the ethnographic intent of meaning-making and cultural interpretation. For him "[t]he ethnographer's tasks focuses not on recounting events but on rendering a theory of cultural behaviour" (Wolcott, 1987, p. 41). In a similar manner, Tilly (1990, p. 36) argues that the most important task of cultural interpretation is not provide full descriptive accounts, but "to get the connections right".

Furthermore, ethnographic approaches are underpinned by different assumptions about the nature of reality and the claims of knowledge that can be made. For example, in his early writings, Van Maanen (1988, p. 1) describes the outcome of ethnography as a "written representation of a culture", a notion which seems widely accepted. However, the notion of representation conveys the realist idea that there exists an objective reality, which the researcher can discover and objectively describe. From such a perspective, ethnographic accounts are evaluated based on how 'true' and complete the representation of the group and their practices are, which are seen as definitive versions of what is going on.

In contrast, others foreground the problematic status of the ethnographic knowledge created. Drawing on social constructionist ideas about the creation of knowledge, Rosen (1991, p. 1) highlights that "meaning is understood […] to derive from interpretation, [and] knowledge is significant only insofar as it is meaningful". Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993) highlight the interpretive nature of ethnography arguing that an ethnographic account is far from representing an objective truth, but always involves the double interpretation of a social situation, which is co-constructed by the researched and researcher, and where researchers interpret the ways in which individuals and groups make sense of their own realities. Proponents of such a view of ethnography acknowledge the subjectivity of the ethnographic process, which is rooted in the researchers' presence as participant in the field and their influence on the production of knowledge. Pearson, for example, argues that:

> "Ethnography is often said to be a way of 'telling like it is', looking at the social world of the subject as it is seen 'from the inside', telling stories as people might tell these stories themselves. But immediately, it is not (and never can be) that. This is a simplified view of the relations between subject-object, self and other."(Pearson, 1993: viii).

From this perspective, ethnography is seen as a situated activity that locates ethnographers in the social world as persons. For example, Stanley & Wise (1983, p. 162) highlight that relationship is the basis of all research and that this necessarily involves the presence of the researcher as person. Sanjek (1991) makes a similar point when he describes fieldwork as intersubjective communication between the ethnographer and the subject. He argues that the moment ethnographers enter the

field, they enter in relationships with the people they study and become part of the context. He argues that even if ethnographers try to act as fly on the wall, their presence still influences what happens and how things happen. In a similar manner, Pryor (1998, p. 220) highlights that that characteristics of researchers may create differences in relation to research participants, which shape the way in which research relationships are structured:

> "Whatever stance one might elsewhere adopt in reference to issues of researcher reactivity, for a white person in West Africa opportunities to blend into the background can only ever be momentary. In every situation, one's presence has an important impact on what is taking place."

Catungal and Dowling (2021) argue that researchers are subject to an interpretation bias since they are embedded in a network of institutions and structural systems that produce and sustain relations of power and shape what questions researchers ask, what they see and the way in which they make sense of what they see.

Furthermore, highlighting the relational aspects of ethnographic research, May (1993) argues that fieldwork is inherently entrenched with emotions. He criticises that the scientific discourse underlying objectivism is based on pure reason and brackets these feelings. This contradicts the very essence of ethnography, which is about the study of people, their interactions and environment.

The subjectivity of the research process thus raises questions about the truth and validity of ethnographic knowledge, which is articulated through notions of ethnographic writings as stories (Fetterman, 2010; Watson, 2012) and fiction (Geertz, 1993). From such a perspective, the knowledge created through the ethnographic process is recognised to be interpretive, partial and provisional (Hammersley, 1990; Foley, 2002). A 'good' ethnography is one that provides plausible interpretations, which attempt to capture the meaning of social phenomena rather than to provide 'true' or absolute representations (Spradley, 1980; Rosen, 1991).

Davies (1999) argues that conducting ethnographic research from such perspective involves fully acknowledging and using subjective experience as an intrinsic part of research. In this context, critical reflexivity plays an important role. Foley (2002, p. 473) argues that "to make ethnography at least quasi-objective", ethnographers must be

reflexive about their research practices and be attentive to the complex ways knowledge is created, generated, and represented. This involves becoming aware of their own positionality, perspectives and experiences (Griffith, 1998). Lincoln and Denzin (2005, p. xvi) highlight that a certain identity is never possible, but rather it is fluid and changes according to the relative positioning in relation to others, which is why "the ethnographer must always ask not "*Who* am I", but "*When, where*, *how* am I?".

When in more representationalist ethnographies, personal experiences of fieldwork are suppressed to maintain an appearance of objectivity, more recent forms of ethnography are more explicit about the researchers' experience of and influence on the field. Van Maanen (1988) differentiates between three different 'tales from the field': realist tales, where researchers present a matter of fact portrait of a studied culture without providing insight into how this account was constructed; confessional tales, which demystify the fieldwork process by explicating how researchers have come to know what they know; and impressionist tales, which often blur the boundaries between object and subject, making the researchers themselves an object of reflexive scrutiny.

3.1.3 My approach to ethnography

In this study it is not my intention to provide a full descriptive account of CAL practice in the LDP, nor of the participants' practices of managing and learning. Rather it is to discern the relational politics that have guided these practices by understanding the structure of the respective relations and the mechanisms of distinction at play.

My approach to ethnography is firmly rooted in the interpretive tradition. I do not believe that objective knowledge is independent of the perceiving subject and merely 'out there' waiting to be found. Rather, I concur with Watson (1994b) who suggests that social reality is the result of the interpretive work of people, brought into existence through the social and cultural processes whereby human beings make sense of the world. Hence, I take meaning as an "emergent construction" (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 4). In this sense, I see my research as a situated activity which is embedded in diverse fields of power and ongoing histories of social differentiation (Catungal and Dowling, 2021). As such, I recognise it as interactive process that is

shaped by my commitments, personal history and biography, and those of the people in the field.

For example, I cannot claim to be disinterested in the study. This study has developed out of a practical challenge I have faced in my professional role as consultant in the broader context of development work. Additionally, I conducted this research to obtain an PhD degree. These interests have shaped the study in multiple ways. For example, what I studied was shaped by my deep practical interest that the outcome would inform my professional practice as consultant and facilitator. In a similar vein, the university's orientation towards Critical Management Studies has shaped my interests in exploring the cultural politics in CAL to a considerable extent, including my choice of Bourdieu as conceptual framework. The way I conducted the research was also bound by my interest of obtaining a PhD degree, my choice of ethnography over critical action research or other participatory approaches being a case in point. Additionally, I was bound by the standards stipulated by the University and the academic community. Hence this research was not a neutral activity but was shaped by different interests and commitments.

In a similar tenet, I do not believe that researchers should be distant to those they research, nor do I claim that was this was possible given the context of my study. Immersion was central, and I used different forms of participant observation and ethnographic interviewing to collect material. While in the organisational setting, I used a non-participant approach to observe selected business meetings as a 'fly-on-the-wall', the backbone of my study was the participant observation in the CAL program, in which I was actively involved as facilitator, an insider role which has shaped my positioning towards the participants. Furthermore, my positioning was also shaped by my capacity as internal consultant for the holding company. While I was not a full insider in the MFI, I was an insider in the broader network, and as holding company staff, I was close to the networks' centre of command. The fact that I was a white European doing research in Tanzania, a place with a long colonial history, brought an additional political layer to the research.

The high level of involvement and my complex positioning in relation to the participants brought both methodological opportunities and challenges. For example,

my insider position in the broader organisational network brought the advantage that I was familiar with the context, possessed specific knowledge about the MFI and had a deeper understanding of the context in which the MFI operated (Drake *et al.*, 2010). On the other hand, doing research in one's own organisation carries the risk for organisational blindness, where it is difficult for the researcher to make the familiar strange, and where the deep immersion in the context may compromise the researcher's ability to critically engage with information (Goodson, 1992; Neyland, 2008). Similarly, while the shared similarities that are inherent of an insider positioning may facilitate the negotiation of research relationships to gain access, establish rapport and engagement with the study (Neyland, 2008), it also brings complexities through the existing organisational relationships and politics, which might limit participants' actual engagement in the study. For example, Catungal and Dowling (2021) argue that while some might be cautious what stories and views they would share, more powerful members of the organisation may use their positions to make demands of researchers' time or shape their approach.

Additionally, my positioning as European doing research in a postcolonial setting raised several ethical concerns. As mentioned before, from a postcolonial perspective, there is general scepticism about the right of Western researchers to theorise "the Other" (Said, 1978). At its heart is the concern about the risk of objectification of the research participants and the reproduction of historical power relations, as well as the production of knowledge that serves colonial interests (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2015). Important issues in the context are questions of voice, authority and authorship. Key questions that need to be addressed are, for example: How can the researcher respect "the Other" and invite them to speak? Whose voice does the produced knowledge represent? To whom does this knowledge belong? How can the researcher represent "the Other" and their agency?

To address these methodological challenges, reflexivity was an important part of my research practice, not necessarily to minimise the impact of my insiderness and my positioning in the study, but to recognise how these have affected the analysis and the texts produced (Catungal and Dowling, 2021). Hence, throughout the research process, I have taken great care to reflexively engage with my own roles, interests and

positioning, and the ways in which these influenced my research. In this regard, an important tool was my research diary, which served as space to take notes of my reflections, observations, and experiences of the research itself, but also of the experience of the LDP in my role as facilitator, since these two roles increasingly overlapped. In the following sections, I use some extracts from my research diary to provide a glimpse of the emotional, political and ethical aspects of my research practice.

3.2 Fieldwork: managing roles, interests, and relations

In this section, I discuss my experience of fieldwork, highlighting the political, ethical and practical aspects of negotiating access, building rapport and managing field relationships, as well as collecting the material that formed the basis for analysis.

3.2.1 Negotiating access

Access is key in doing ethnographic research (Burgess, 1982). Mercer (2007) argues that in practitioner research, where researchers study a field of which they are a part, access is often facilitated by established relationships. As previously elaborated, I conducted this study in the context of my own work, using a leadership development program I had been designing and facilitating in a partner MFI from the network, with which I had been previously involved in a variety of projects, including management development. The reasons for this were three-fold: First, this study had developed out of my own professional experience in a specific context and given this close connection, it made sense to use my work as a vehicle for research. Second, I had already had discussions with several CEOs in the network about introducing action learning programs as an approach to leadership development. These negotiations provided a unique practical opportunity to conduct the research. Third, I assumed that my work relationships would facilitate access to conduct this study. At the time of the study, I had already worked for more than two years in the organisation and had made professional connections across several network banks. And without doubt, these relationships with both my employer in Germany, as well as with the network banks were conducive to gaining access for the study.

However, entering a field of research is not straightforward, even if initial contacts exist. Burgess (1984) as well as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) call for explicit attention to the multi-dimensionality of gaining access for ethnographic fieldwork highlighting that it is not only a practical matter, but involves exploring diverse political and ethical concerns that may come along with it. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) specify that when negotiating access, consideration should be given to whose permission *ought* to be asked, as well as whose permission *needs* to be obtained. This applies also to research conducted in one's own organisation.

This resonates with my own experiences of gaining access for this study, where I had to negotiate multiple accesses with different stakeholders at different levels, both within and outside the organisation, who had diverse interests and concerns, and with whom I had different relationships and positionings. I identified five different persons or groups of persons whose interest I had to address and balance for undertaking this study successfully and in an ethical manner: the CEO at holding level in Germany; the MFI's CEO in Tanzania; the participants in the leadership development program; my academic supervisors and the University's Ethics Committee.

Additionally, my triple role as researcher, consultant and facilitator brought some complexity due to its potential for role conflicts. In each role I had different, sometimes competing interests: as researcher, I was interested in conducting this research. As facilitator of the leadership development program, I was interested in maximising the learning experience of my participants. As consultant, I was interested in selling a management development program to a client and delivering it to his satisfaction to maintain a long-term relationship.

As a result, I had to take these different, even contradicting interests into account and manage them during the entire research process. This resonates with Watson (1994a, p. 9), who describes the role of a researcher in an organisation as trader:

> "The basic position of the researcher in the organisation is one of trader; offering various things to various parties, formally and informally, in order to be provided with the access, information and experiences which the research requires."

I adopted a five-step approach to gaining access. The first step was to convince my academic supervisors of the opportunities to be found in conducting the study in this specific context. This was at the heart of my initial research proposal. They were open to the possibility, but also highlighted the importance of theoretically engaging with the implications and challenges that conducting the study in this context would entail for research design and practice.

The second step was to convince the CEO in the holding company in Germany, who was my direct manager, to grant me permission to negotiate with one of the network banks. I had previously shared my concerns about our approach to management development, and we had discussed the possibility of introducing action learning as alternative pedagogy and natural extension of current network-wide development efforts. As outlined in the introduction, I had suggested action learning given its focus on inquiry and process rather than content, which I saw as an interesting alternative to contextualise management development and anchor our efforts in the diverse local contexts. Given my past experiences with managers across the network, I had gained some insights in the local contexts and was conscious that such an approach would be novel for all and have the potential to mobilise some resistance. Hence, I had proposed critical action learning, which aims to work with and through the tensions that emerge from the attempt to learn through action learning. I had also previously tested waters and inquired into the general possibility of using an in-house development program as a vehicle for research before I enrolled in the PhD program.

In a formal sales pitch, I proposed to launch a pilot project, which I connected directly with my desire to undertaking doctoral research. This was a moment of huge anxiety, as a memory note from my reflection notes illustrates:

> I did not have breakfast today. If he does not approve the pilot project, then my study is dead. If he does not approve using it for data collection, my study is dead as well. I have to put all my weight in the balance.
>
> (Reflective diary)

My position in the organisation, where I was seen as expert on learning and development gave me room and weight in the negotiations that followed. This became clear when my supervisor agreed to both the pilot and the research with the words:

"Ok, I trust you. You know what you're doing" (Research diary). In return, he expected lessons learned and practical recommendations for further network-wide development initiatives. Together we discussed in which of the network institutions such an initiative would add the most value for all involved. We explored strategic questions about institutional maturity and potential outreach, the interests and openness of the local CEOs in relation to staff development and the study, my previous professional experience as consultant in these institutions, as well as practical concerns about security and visa since this program would require me to be onsite on a regular basis. At the end, we identified the institution in Tanzania, which seemed to match our criteria best.

The third step in the access negotiations was to gain the approval of the MFI's CEO in Tanzania. By that time, I had already a two-year track record with the MFI in my role as internal consultant and had previously designed and delivered different learning events at different levels and supported in other HR-related questions. Again, my expert position and my personal relationship facilitated the CEO's willingness to agree to both the pilot and the study. I shared a number of similarities with him in terms of identity, biography and interests, which created an emotional commonality that was helpful in getting access (Merriam *et al.*, 2010): we were both white Europeans, had both worked in the same niche sector for quite a while (albeit in different areas) and previously were both part of a global expatriate consultant community who had lived and worked on the ground. Furthermore, we shared not only a common interest in developing local middle managers but based on a vivid exchange during my previous assignments, a shared vision of where we wanted to go. When I raised the idea of action learning, specifically of CAL, where critical reflection on both problems and process was an integral part of the design, he was immediately on board (for deeper insight into the critical elements of the LDP design, see chapter 4). While he did not use the term 'critical reflection', the notion resonated with his own thinking about management development, which centred around the idea of supporting managers to develop their capacity to think on their own and take their own decisions.

We agreed that I would prepare a concrete proposal for the action learning program and the study attached to it. To get him on board, I offered to provide the local

management with a concrete analysis and recommendations in terms of further development programs, as well as general observations about organisational processes.

Up to this point, gaining access had been smooth, and my organisational insiderness, existing professional relationships and expert position in the organisation had facilitated this process enormously. However, with the preparations advancing, negotiations became more complex, and I came to appreciate the politics of access that were rooted in the opposing interests inherent in our roles, which I had to balance. While the CEO agreed to both the pilot project and the study, he was not particularly interested in the academic value of my research. Understandably, his key concern was the program's benefit for the participants and its practical value for the MFI, which aligned well with my own interests as consultant and facilitator, where my main interest was to design and deliver a program that would bring the most benefit to my client.

However, in my role as researcher my interest was to collect data that would help to illuminate the impact of the participants' local culture on the enactment of the action learning design. This required an engagement to inquiry that without doubt would have some practical implications for the participants as well as the program, was I to undertake this research in an appropriate way. In contrast, the CEO was interested that the study interfered as little as possible with the participants' time and that it would not create a distraction from the development program. I became acutely aware that my interest in using his institution as research site significantly transformed the power structure in our relationship. With my stakes increasing, the CEO had become more powerful: he was not just my client, but also a critical gatekeeper for my study. He was the one who formulated the terms of access. My dependence on his goodwill for approval entailed the possibility for him to influence the design of my study, where I had to take his interests into account and explore ways to design my inquiry in a way that would minimise intrusion into participants' work life and interference with the program.

At the same time, I had to push through some elements of the research from the outset, which were non-negotiable. For example, as researcher it was my ethical

responsibility to protect potential research participants from whatever consequences a participation in the study might entail. Issues of confidentiality and trust, which were of utmost importance for doing an ethnographic practitioner research risked colliding with my obligations as consultant to report on the program and provide some form of evaluation of the participants. Another important point of negotiation was the question of whether I would conduct my research overtly or covertly. Since the CEO was interested in that the study would interfere as little as possible, he suggested conducting a covert investigation, so as not to influence the participants' behaviour in the learning program. However, given my previous two-year long experience and the trustful relationships I had established with many of the potential program participants, I felt that not disclosing my intentions was some form of betrayal of the trust I had gained in the last years. Furthermore, doing covert research would objectify them to mere objects of study and violate the informants' privacy without their informed consent, which is of questionable ethics (Bryman, 2008), particularly given the historical relations at play.

These discussions were also intertwined with the fourth step in the process of gaining access, where I had to demonstrate the University's Ethics Committee that my study design was ethically sound, and my participants' integrity and dignity were safeguarded the best I could. Against my expectation, the Ethics Committee of my university had initially withheld its approval for my study because they were sceptical about the type of research I was proposing. Their major concern was that I was doing research in a program I was facilitating and that the power differentials between facilitator and participants would not allow to conduct the study in an ethical way. It was only via a letter with thorough argumentation that I gained ethical clearance (see appendix 1). In this letter, I demonstrated that insider research had become a well-recognised approach in many areas including management and education and showed that I was aware of the ethical challenges and that I had built safeguards in the design to protect my study participants, which were also approved by the management of the MFI. These included:

- To avoid pressure or negative consequences for participants in the organisation, I would not disclose who would or would not participate in the

study to any member of the organisation, including the management team. Similarly, I would not use their real names but anonymise them. For example, given that only three women participated in the program, I would use only male pronouns to avoid that they could be identified. Furthermore, for head office managers, I would not use concrete job titles, but describe the broad area and location of their work.

- We agreed that I would not share what was discussed in the learning sets with the management team. Feedback would be limited to comments about general participation, but not reveal any specifics on the content of our discussions or issues raised by the participants unless they themselves would ask me to. We took this decision not only to comply with ethical standards, but also to prepare conditions for fruitful set discussions in the action learning program, which can only be achieved on the basis of trustful relationships.
- I chose strategies of inquiry that would intrude in the learning process as little as possible (MacLean and Poole, 2010), such as observation and informal conversations (see below).

The last step to gain access for my study was the negotiation with the actual research participants, that is with the middle managers in the Tanzanian MFI, who would participate in the LDP. The research ethics procedures at Lancaster University stipulate that participants need to give their "fully informed consent" for the participation in a study. This aspiration poses a challenge for ethnographically informed studies and requires some thought about how to deal with it in practice. First, a fully informed consent requires full information about the study. This is difficult since ethnographic studies are often explorative in nature and direction can change during the research process and, therefore, fully informed consent is neither possible nor desirable (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

To enable a consent that was as fully informed as possible, I introduced participants to the research, so they would understand the cornerstones of my study. We organised a half-day introduction event to the leadership development program, where I also explained the study and provided an information sheet (see appendix 2). In the introductory event, I highlighted the safeguards we included in the study design to

protect their integrity and anonymity. I tried to be as transparent as possible and explain my study in simple terms that would make sense to the participants. At the end, I handed out a written summary of the study, followed by a short Q & A session. In this concluding session, participants' major concerns centred around practical questions regarding the leadership development program rather than the study, for example: how often do we meet? Will we get a certificate of participation? What are the major topics we will discuss?

Prior to starting the first sessions in the action learning sets, I explained again the study and introduced the consent form. I was careful to refrain from persuading and avoided using my position, highlighting that this was an entirely private invitation that had nothing to do with my work or their participation in the program, and that no one will know who participates in the study, emphasizing again the safeguards in place. Furthermore, in the consent form (see appendix 3), I offered choices about different levels of participation, so participants could choose the level of disclosure they felt comfortable with and the option to fully refuse participation. While there were more questions around the study than in the introductory event, program participants did not seem particularly interested or worried about it. Their questions were mainly about the reason why I was conducting this research, and why I was conducting it in this MFI. The short extract from the conversation in one of the action learning sets after my presentation in the first session illustrates some of these:

Manager 1: So it's not because we are bad students?

(The group is laughing).

Manager 2: No, it's because we are the guinea pigs in the network.

(The group is laughing).

Me: I'd rather say 'pioneers'.

[The group is laughing louder]

Manager 1: "That's ok, it's good to try out new things and if it helps you, it's fine."

[…]

Manager 3: "Why do you do a PhD? Are you planning to leave us and work at the university?"

(Fieldnotes, July 2, 2014)

Ultimately, from 17 program participants 15 had agreed to participate in the study using different options of participation. 13 agreed to fully participate. Two refused to be interviewed or give access to their reflective diaries but were fine with me using the data from the discussions in the sets. Two participants declined their consent for their data being used. This was problematic, since the participants were divided into three sets, and this meant that I could not use any interactions in which these two were involved for my study. To minimise the impact of their refusal to participate, we took this into account when finalising the learning sets, and paid attention to assigning them to the same set, to maintain two sets that would serve as source for data collection for my study. In the third set, I only used extracts and situations that did not include the 2 who refused participation in the study. Furthermore, to ensure the participants' ongoing consent, I asked for permission to tape the session every time we met.

3.2.2 Building and managing field relationships

Access to a field is precondition for conducting ethnographic research. However, Burgess (1984) highlights that an initial consent does not guarantee an ongoing and full cooperation of the research participants to get the information needed to conduct the study. On the contrary, Burgess argues, access is an ongoing negotiation and cultivating trustful relationships is a critical requirement for any study. This applies even more to those studies that are based on participant observation, where the access to data lies in the quality of the researchers' face-to-face relationships. This was particularly true in my study given the cultural context, in which it took place. From my past professional experiences, I had learned that in Tanzania personal relationships were highly valued and taking time to build trust was key to any successful cooperation. Furthermore, given the historical relations involved, field relationships were not only a means to collect material, but the development of more equal and cooperative relationships was an end in itself to avoid objectifying the participants and conduct the study in an ethical way (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2015).

A first step to build trustful relationships involves recognising who one is in relation to the research participants (Merriam *et al.*, 2010). Mercer (2007), for example, suggests that practitioner researchers are never complete insiders or outsiders, but the positioning within the research is complex, fluid and multi-dimensional. In this study, I occupied what Mercer (2007) called multiple status sets: I was moving fluidly from different degrees of insider to different degrees of outsider based on the similarities I shared with the participants and the differences that distinguished us. On one hand, we were working for the same network of MFIs and shared an interest in their achievements. While I was not a full insider in the MFI, I was an organisational insider from the same network. As designer and facilitator of the leadership development program, I was clearly an insider in the program, albeit I was not a full member of the participant group. As white non-Tanzanian I was a cultural and racial outsider, who hardly spoke any Swahili. At the same time, my being European positioned me close to the centre of power embodied by the head office and the local expatriate managers.

Furthermore, while I had already established rapport with many of the research participants and developed some trustful relationships in past assignments, these were shaped by my expert role as HR consultant and management developer and characterised by an unequal distribution of knowledge (e.g., in terms of HR and management theories and tools) and closeness to the centre of power (working at the German head office vs working in a local institution). In this role, I had been the one providing expert knowledge. As researcher, however, my role was different and instead of providing knowledge and advice, I was interested in eliciting the participants' knowledge and learning about their practices rather than the other way around. While my personal biography and positioning were probably helpful in sustaining my role as expert, the question I had to pose to myself was how I could create more equal relationships. I had to find a way to cross these barriers and re-position myself in my quest to try and establish equal and mutual relationships.

To do so I used different strategies, utilising both our similarities and differences. For example, I tried to create similarities and showed respect to the participants' culture by adapting to local customs. I learned some basic Swahili to show my appreciation for them and their language and my willingness to learn from them. Although I could

hardly make conversation, some participants visibly enjoyed teaching me the most difficult tongue twisters and cracked up laughing, when my pronunciation was incorrect. Nevertheless, they smiled brightly, when I entered the room greeting them in Swahili and, as culturally appropriate, inquiring into their and their families' well-being. Furthermore, I dressed according to local conventions, paying attention that my skirts were not too short, my shoulders were covered, and my shoes were always clean despite the muddy weather outside during raining season – even if this meant to get up earlier to step by at the shoe cleaner at my street corner before work**.** I ate local food and shared my meals with them discussing football, family and cultural differences. As a non-religious person, I appreciated and thanked them for their prayers.

I also used our differences as opportunity to connect with the participants by using it as opportunity to inquire into the participants' cultural traditions and customs. This was not just a strategy to gather data but was born out of my genuine interest in the participants as people. This did not go unnoticed, and Moses was one of those who expressed his appreciation:

> "You know, no one has ever asked us these things. You are the first, who is really interested in understanding how life works outside of business." (Research diary)

Participants often reciprocated my questions with questions of their own about my cultural and personal background, with which I happily obliged. Sometimes these mutual exchanges were serene banter resulting in jokes and much laughter, at other times, it took a more serious note and resulted in deep discussions about worldviews that led to a genuine appreciation of 'the Other' and their perspectives.

Generally, reciprocity played an important role in my approach to field relations in the study. I offered an open ear and professional advice, when the participants approached me with professional questions, and would go to great lengths to prepare additional material they asked for. This reciprocity was not limited to the professional realm. For example, one of the participants who had been in Germany before, asked me to bring a specific kind of candy he could not find here, so I brought some for the entire set and shared my childhood memories that were linked to it. When talking

about writing a reflective journal, I shared extracts of my own reflective diary for this study to share my own vulnerability with them.

Mercer (2007) suggests that field relationships are fluid and evolve over time, and this certainly resonates with my experience in this study. When initially our relationships were limited to the professional realm, increasingly relationships became closer and more trustful. There was a moment, where I felt accepted not in my role as consultant, facilitator, or researcher, but as person. This was when some of the participants invited me after work to a local place where they served the traditional dish we had previously been talking about. The comment of one of the expatriate managers made me appreciate the significance of their gesture, when he said:

> "You know that this is quite a distinction? It is not common for any of them to invite an expat to a private dinner that is not related to work." (Research diary)

I did however also feel the need to draw boundaries. For example, when one of the participants invited me to his new-born son's baptism, I was honoured but also glad that my weekend plans provided me with a face-saving excuse to decline the invitation. While as researcher this would have granted me unique insights in the participants' larger cultural context, I felt that this was inappropriate in my professional role as consultant and facilitator, since it could provoke the impression that I had favourites and would treat participants differently. It was a fine line to walk between building trust and becoming too closely involved on a personal note.

In general, I believe that my field relationships were largely positive, but there were clearly differences. While with those I shared history, our discussions came naturally and their openness to share provided me with invaluable insights. With those I hardly knew from before, it took longer to build up trust and it was not until halfway through the program that some were willing to engage in more meaningful conversations. With two participants, I did not manage to establish the kind of relationship I would have liked, and I decided to respect their decisions to maintain their distance.

3.2.3 Collecting the ethnographic material

In ethnography, the researcher is the instrument and the primary source of data using multiple methods to build a bricolage of data from whatever information and resources are available in the field (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973; Burgess, 1982; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008). Whilst much ethnographic fieldwork is based upon extensive observation and participation, it may also include ethnographic interviews and informal conversations, as well as the analysis of written documents (Burgess, 1982; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Wolcott (1999) highlights that the use of diverse methods enables the researcher to integrate different ways of knowing: participation enables experiencing, interviewing enables enquiring and archival research enables examining. Each strategy illuminates social reality from a different perspective and sheds light on a different dimension of the situation (Burgess, 1984). However, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) emphasise that the use of "methodological polytheism" should fit the problem at hand and must constantly be reflected upon.

In chapter 2, I elaborated my theoretical strategy to explore the cultural politics in the LDP which aimed at identifying the logic of managing and learning that underpinned the LDP design, the participants' tendencies to act in the LDP and their incorporated logic of managing and learning. To illuminate these three concepts and make the study interfere as little as possible with the learning process of the participants and their managerial work, I used different forms of participant observation and ethnographic interviews to collect the material. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the data sources and strategies to access the data organised according to categories.

Table 3.1: Overview of data constructed, sources and strategies of inquiry

Concept	Data sources	Strategies to access data
Logic of manging and learning underpinning the LDP	Discussion in design process Documents related to LDP	• Field notes during collaborative design process
Participants' tendency to act in the LDP	Practices in LDP	• Participant observation in action learning sets

Participants' incorporated logic of managing and learning	Participants' past and current practices and accounts of managing and learning	• Participant observation in action learning sets • Ethnographic interviews • Participant observations in MFI • Field notes during collaborative design process

In total, the fieldwork for this study accumulated to over 20 days onsite in Tanzania, which were distributed over five visits with phases of onsite participation over 5 days approximately every two months during a period of 16 months.

In the following sections, I describe how I used these strategies and the dynamics that have evolved.

3.2.3.1 Participant observation

Participant observation allows gathering data by participating in the daily life of the group being studied. The researcher watches the people he is studying to observe how they behave in ordinary situations, and enters into conversation with them to explore their interpretations of the events he has observed (Burgess, 1984). Bourdieu (1992) suggests that participant observation has the advantage to observe action and try to bring what is said in relation to what is done, which is important as the participants' actions always encompass more meaning than they know or wish. Collecting data through participant observation in 'natural' settings gives a distinctive character to ethnographic work, which involves finding a role within the field being studied (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). The challenge of ethnography lies in the researcher's dual purpose that requires a balance between participating in social practices on one hand and acting as detached observer on the other hand. To do so, the ethnographer needs to be able to step in and out of the setting he is studying "alternating between the insider and outsider experience, and having both simultaneously" (Spradley, 1980: 57).

Gold (1958) identifies four roles in fieldwork, which are placed on a continuum of involvement and detachment. On one side of the continuum is the 'complete participant', where researchers become a full member of the group they are studying,

acting as researcher only after stepping out from the setting. On the other side of the continuum is the 'complete observer', who restrains from sustained interaction with the informants, and acts as fly-at-the-wall observing the social situation without any personal involvement. In-between these two extremes, Gold distinguishes two roles: the 'participant-as-observer' and the 'observer-as-participant'. The former conducts his research openly and develops working relationships with his informants while maintaining a certain distance to the group. In contrast, the 'observer-as-participant' enters only into brief and formal contact with informants and does so for the mere purpose of observation. Burgess (1982) emphasises that these descriptions are ideal types and that different roles may be used throughout the research.

In this study, I have conducted participant observations in different settings and situations, namely in the LDP program, some business meetings in the MFI, and in the design process. Depending on the setting and my role in it, I used different approaches to participant observation. The backbone of the study was the participant observation in the LDP program, which led to approximately 90 hours of tape and 80 pages of handwritten field notes. In the action learning sets, my role can be described as 'participant-as-observer' (Gold, 1958). In these groups, I was not only an observer, but in my capacity as facilitator I actively participated in the learning groups. However, I was not a member of the participant group and as such, I maintained a certain distance.

In this role, the boundaries between my role as facilitator and researcher became increasingly blurred. The roles overlapped and complemented each other, but at times also usurped each other. It was almost like a dance, continuously switching from one role to the other, and sometimes occupying them at the same time. This provided opportunities and insights, but also created confusion and anxiety. My position as facilitator enabled me to direct the conversations and actively pursue interesting lines of inquiry with the set, using my observations in the sets and trying to make sense of them together with the participants in the very moment they occurred. This was an integral part of the CAL design, and to a certain extent my interests as CAL facilitator greatly overlapped with my interests as researcher. This was a great opportunity to facilitate the production of research material, but it was also a fine line to walk

between pursuing my research interests without letting it shape the program in a direction that did not bring value to the participants.

This tension became particularly problematic in situations where participants were not willing to engage in discussions on group dynamics in the here-and-now. In such situations, I often felt unsure about what to do, being acutely aware of my dual role. The following extract from my reflective diary illustrates this:

> "What should I do? Should I insist and push more to get the data I am interested in, or should I yield to the group's desire to avoid this discussion? Do I ask this question in my role as facilitator or as researcher? Is there a difference? Would I also struggle with this question, if I only facilitated? Where does one begin and the other end?" (Research diary)

Additionally, in my role as researcher, I became also increasingly aware of the impact of my own facilitation practice in the action learning sets, and the field notes about the practices in the LDP increasingly merged with my research diary.

On other occasions, I was so invested in my role as facilitator, that sometimes I got lost in the here-and-now, forgetting about my role as researcher. Later I would realise that I had forgotten to take notes, caught up in the discussions. This created anxiety particularly at the beginning of the process and I was afraid that I would lose control over the research process:

> "I am not sure if this is the right way to go. Not sure I can handle this. How can I focus on both facilitating and taking notes. How much data will get lost? What will I miss?" (Research diary).

Doing participant observation while facilitating the event was very tiring and whilst I tried to review my notes in the evenings, at times I did not manage this as I needed to take a break ahead of the next day. I started to try and plan the sessions in a way that would allow me some breathing space in between the sessions, so that I could do some observations of business meetings or any other issues/tasks I had to do with the MFI. However, due to practical constraints this was often not possible.

I also conducted participant observation in business meetings. The idea was to observe the managers in their natural habitat to gain a deeper understanding of their organisational context and their positioning within it. The observation of these

meetings gave me the possibility to observe how the participants interacted with each other to gain a better understanding of informal power relations, which would help to inform the construction of their habitus. Additionally, it helped to gain a deeper understanding of the context in which participants and their problems were embedded. These observations have produced approximately 50 pages of hand-written field notes, which on several occasions I used to share my observations with the participants in the action learning sets to dig deeper in the situations and understand what they meant to them.

In contrast to the observations in the LDP, in the meetings I acted mainly as 'complete observer' (Gold, 1958) sitting outside the group and just taking notes. On some occasions my role switched and I became an 'observer-as-participant' (Gold, 1958) when I was addressed directly or asked for feedback. In these meetings I was able to take more comprehensive field notes about what was going on, which was important since I was not allowed to tape the meetings. I could also directly include some initial thoughts, questions and connections to the participants' practices in the action learning sets that came to my mind. This was an entirely different experience, emotionally as well as practically. Whilst in my role as participant observer, I was fully engaged in our practice, here I was not. This allowed me to be more relaxed, focusing on my role as researcher. However, this does not mean that it did not generate anxiety. I was not part of this group and had no other business than my research. In a way, I did feel I was intruding as these notes of my research diary show:

> I felt uncomfortable. I don't belong there. What do they really think I am doing? (Research diary)

I tried to sit in a corner but was invited by some of the participants to sit with them at their table. While this made me feel emotionally more "part" of the group and more accepted, it felt less comfortable to keep notes. To avoid anyone reading my notes, I switched to taking notes in German rather than English.

In the design process, I was a 'complete participant' (Gold, 1958), since I was the main responsible for the design. My initial intention was to collect material for the analysis of the LDP design. This was rather straightforward, since I was the one elaborating it, and initially this just involved describing the design in more depth than I otherwise

would have done as mere practitioner. However, I soon realised that the discussions about the design with my local counterparts (both the CEO and local HR staff), contributed to and gave additional insights in the organisational dynamics and unearthed some of the assumptions about learning that were prevalent in the MFI.

3.2.3.2 Ethnographic interviewing

The second strategy I used to produce material was conducting ethnographic interviews to collect data in a more focused way by digging deeper into certain questions, pursuing lines of inquiry that I had identified through initial observation, asking for clarifications, and testing my interpretations. Additionally, these conversations were important to collect the participants' stories about their learning experiences.

Spradley (1980, p. 123) describes ethnographic interviews as a special kind of interview that "employs questions to discover the cultural meanings people have learned". Such interviews can range from spontaneous, informal conversations to formally arranged meetings in bounded settings (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998). However, even when these interviews take place as informal conversations, they are never just conversations, because the ethnographer has a research agenda and must retain some control over the conversation (Burgess, 1984).

At the beginning, my intention was to use both formal interviews to inquire into participants' past experiences of learning, and informal conversations. However, this plan did not work as intended, and I had to adjust my strategy. I had negotiated with the management that I could interview the participants during worktime, provided the interviews did not last longer than 45 minutes. I had reserved one day for interviews and sent out a list in a Google document via email to those who had agreed to be interviewed in the consent form, so that they could choose a timeslot that would suit them best. However, nothing came back. Two days prior to my travel, I send out a reminder and received replies from five participants that unfortunately, they could not make it during my stay, since they would already be absent from work for one day to participate in the LDP. When I arrived in Tanzania, not a single person had signed up. I

found myself caught in a dilemma, which again, was linked to my multiple roles, as my internal dialogue from my reflective diary illustrates:

> That did not work out. Perhaps I was too optimistic. Doing these interviews makes sense from a research perspective, but I actually should have known that they have other priorities - this does not come as a surprise really. But what now? Should I insist and raise it in the learning groups? That would be an option. But would this not create a conflict with my role as facilitator and consultant? Would this not mean using my authority as program leader to make them participate in the study? Do I care about this? - I really want to get the data. But then again, it feels wrong to push them to something they obviously are not interested in – and I do know how busy they are. Are there other options to access this data? Perhaps using breaks and lunches to elicit their stories? Perhaps I could talk to [one of the participants] and ask for a local opinion. (Research diary).

When I commented on this to a participant I had known for a while, he said:

> "Yeah, everyone is really busy. For my part it's really difficult to find time for this. You know the business situation. But I am happy to help. Perhaps you can ask me now."
>
> After our conversation, he added: "Perhaps people are more open to share when you ask them like you now asked me. You know people in Tanzania. We prefer to speak privately, not so formal." (Research diary)

After this conversation, I reconsidered my approach and decided to discard the idea of formal interviews and instead use any opportunity that presented itself to inquire into their learning experience, particularly during breaks and lunches. These conversations were not planned but occurred naturally and were therefore entirely unscripted and unstructured. However, in my head I had a mental list of questions, observations and interpretations I wanted to dig deeper into. The questions I asked had a clear intent in that they aimed to collect specific material that helped to illuminate practices in the set or pointedly explore their understanding of learning and managing. Sometimes I asked participants overtly and told them what I needed for my study, sometimes I just asked without mentioning the study. Sometimes participants would ask directly whether I

would use this now in my study, and sometimes they seemed surprised that what they had said was interesting for academic research.

Usually, these conversations were real exchanges rather than only me asking questions. Many participants had the same interest in understanding "European" culture as I had in understanding theirs, given that they were working closely with foreigners. When I asked them to help me understand certain situations, often I was asked to explain how "you guys" would see this. In this sense, these conversations were invaluable in comparing ideas and experiences and exploring cultural similarities and differences. This resonates with Oakley (1981, para. 41), who suggests that "the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her own personal identity in the relationship".

However, given their random and informal nature, these conversations were sometimes derailed by other topics coming up. For example, participants sometimes used those moments to get professional advice or complain about some occurrences. My attempts to pursue a line of questioning were often hijacked by their questions, concerns and interests and I did not always get the information I was looking for. Sometimes this required several attempts, and sometimes it did not lead to anything, or I had to try with someone else. This form of interviewing was a learning process, and I became socialised in the culturally acceptable ways of when, how and what to ask. For example, I learned that depending on the topic, it often worked better when I talked to people individually. These conversations proved to be a very successful strategy and often provoked new lines of inquiry, especially to make sense of some contradictions between what participants said and the ways they acted.

I also used this approach in my dealings with the foreign managers. This provided insights in cultural differences between the local and foreign managers and highlighted inconsistencies between what people said in the set and did in practice at the workplace. These exchanges were interesting in seeing parallels between the managers' behaviour outside the set and highlighted some new perspectives, which potentially would challenge my own sense-making. However, I was careful not to take their interpretations at face value, but rather as food for thought and to test my own

interpretations. While at the beginning of the study, their interpretations often matched mine, the more I advanced my analysis, I realised that my own perspective and understanding was shifting.

3.3 Analysing the material and crafting the story

In this section I describe my approach to working with the data to construct the concepts elaborated in the chapter 2. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 347) describe data analysis as constructing knowledge through "the search for patterns in data and for ideas that help explain why those patterns are there in the first place". Thereby, as discussed above, the analysis and the crafting of the ethnographic text is neither objective nor neutral and involves ongoing decision-making about which themes and patterns to pull out of the vast amount of data, and which story to tell (Miles and Huberman, 1994). To analyse the ethnographic material produced for this study, I used a thematic approach, where I draw heavily on the work of Braun and Clark (2006, 2021). I chose thematic analysis due its theoretical flexibility, since as a method rather than a methodology, thematic analysis can be applied across a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

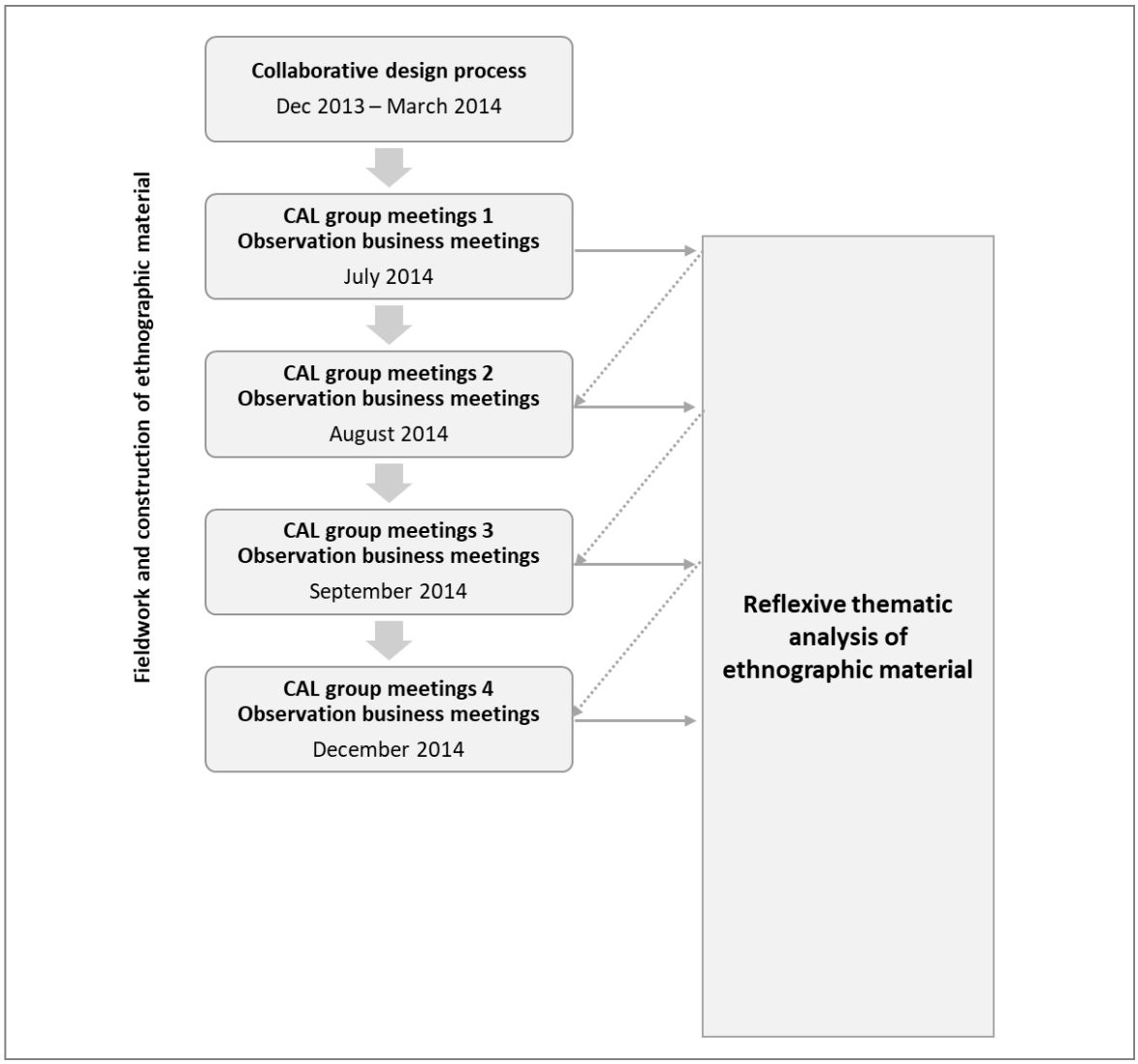
Approaches to thematic analysis can range from approaches that work with prior defined codebooks and are concerned with coding reliability, to reflexive approaches, which aim to capture both explicit as well as latent meanings and emphasise the inescapable subjectivity of data interpretation (Braun and Clarke, 2021). In this study, I take analysis as a situated, interpretive and reflexive process, where coding is open and organic, without the use of a prior defined codebook, and where I construct the themes from codes that have been generated.

Reflexive thematic analysis can be both inductive and deductive (Braun and Clarke, 2006). My approach was generally inductive, since I created themes that were grounded in the material. However, it was not entirely so, as I went into the field with a clear Bourdieusian lens, and a keen interest in a set of concepts. My approach resonates with Braun and Clarke's (2006) notion of theoretical thematic analysis,

which is driven by my theoretical and analytical interests, but within this framework I maintained the possibility for data-driven themes to emerge.

Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the data analysis process.

Figure 3.1: Overview of research process



3.3.1 Familiarisation and coding

The fieldwork resulted in vast volumes of material and multiple, large data sets in the form of audio tapes, field notes, and corporate documents. Reflexive thematic analysis requires a deep immersion in the material to look behind the data for features that contribute to developing explanations and meanings. To do so, Braun and Clark (2006) highlight the importance of familiarising oneself with the material through repeated

reading to generate ideas before detailed analysis. This process of familiarisation took place at several stages.

At the end of each day in the field, I revisited my field notes and reflected on what had happened or what I had learned that day that seemed important in relation to my conceptual framework and my research questions. In doing so, I took notes to further complement my field notes, wrote them up in a more complete manner and jotted down preliminary ideas about important themes, interpretations, and questions (Saldana, Miles and Huberman, 2014). This was helpful to identify issues I wanted to explore further in the next field work episode. To not get too attached to these initial hunches, I developed the practice to frame them as questions to remind myself that these were hunches or impressions rather than the result of a robust analysis.

A second round of familiarisation took place in the process of transcribing. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 88) highlight that the process of transcription is more than the mere "act of putting spoken words to paper", but that it is already an act of meaning making. Listening to and transcribing the tapes offers the possibility to get immersed in the data, to relive the situations again, and familiarise oneself with the material in more depth. While I started transcribing early in the process, I soon realised that this process was more complex and time demanding as I had foreseen, due to the multiple persons setting, the background noise in the audio recordings and the participants' diverse accents. After some time, I decided to outsource parts of the transcriptions. However, the transcribers struggled with the same challenges and as a result, transcriptions were full of blanks and statements that made no sense, and it took me a lot of time to fix them.

The third round of familiarisation happened when I engaged in the systematic process of analysis and the conceptualisation of the material. In the first reading of the material, I read the entire transcript to remind me of the situation and contextualise the data set. In a second reading, I started the process of systematically organising and categorising the material by underlining key words and assigning short initial codes to the texts that captured the essence of this part of the material (Saldana, Miles and Huberman, 2014). These initial codes served to condense the material and set the stage for deeper level analysis. They consisted usually of short phrases that described

the content of statements or categorised actions and practices, and an initial to indicate which concept they illuminated. This was important since I pursued three analytical strings at once. Frequently, I used Nvivo codes (e.g. "teacher has power to punish", "keep quiet, study and learn", "managers - we are best" "People follow, because you know") to ground the analysis in the data (Saldana, Miles and Huberman, 2014). Table 3.2 provides an example of my coding practice.

Table 3.2: Example of coding practice

Extract	Codes	Notes and questions
"*I had a very simple problem, I hope I will get some clarification, some solutions from here. I have experienced branch manager here. So, I think it is very easy for them.*	**ALS – Expecting solutions (from experienced set members)**	Expects solutions from experienced colleagues and proactively asks for it – potential link to centralised problem solving in MFI? Learning experience?
In the branch where I was working, I had… I mean the problem was the transparency between senior loan officers and the branch manager.	**ALS - Depersonalising problem**	Does not own the problem - avoids use of "I", e.g. corrects "I had" to "the problem was"; frames the problem impersonally as "between loan officers and branch manager" – but he was the branch manager.
Like I had one of my seniors who was not transparent to me, especially in telling me exactly what was going on with the staff. I was not informed these issues.	**HABITUS – Manager expects transparency**	Has expectation on senior to provide information, lack of transparency as incompliance? Managerial role/positioning?
	HABITUS – Importance of team as source of info	His team seems to play an important role as source of information – this has also emerged in other accounts. Link to arbitrary communication in MFI?
She used to keep things to herself. And despite all the feedbacks that I would do with her, it still was not easy for her to tell me the real situation."	**ALS – Blaming others for problem**	Highlights his efforts to address the issue and blames SLO for not being able to change. Victimising - does not recognise his role in the problem?
	HABITUS - Feedback as solution for incompliance	Feedback seems a solution for everything in the MFI – has featured prominently – also promoted by the management. What is the meaning of "giving feedback"?

To work with the texts, I experimented with two approaches. First, I tried out manual colour coding, where I marked the corresponding text parts in the different colours and then copied and pasted the relevant text parts as example for a code. This worked very well for the coding process, but after some time I felt that given the volume of the material, administering the codes was going to be a challenge, and I looked for an alternative approach with a software for qualitative analysis. This seemed an appealing alternative to keep track of and organise the data. I chose Nvivo, which given its visual similarity to MS Word felt more familiar and seemed easier to learn than others. Since I worked off-campus I did not have much chance to participate in a training course and had to train myself. After a while I realised that using the software was a double-edged sword. On one hand, it did really facilitate administering the codes and playing around, creating different possibilities. On the other hand, the process of coding felt more distanced from the material. I felt I was losing sight of the complexity and wholeness of the situation and missed literally "being in touch" with the material, using visual means to draw connections and writing down comments in specific places of the document where they belonged. I decided to go back to manual coding and switched to OneNote to gather all the codes and the respective text parts, since this allowed a better visualisation of the data structure and facilitated the physical production of lists of codes.

Braun and Clark (2020) ascertain that in reflexive thematic analysis, the coding process is unstructured and organic, with the potential for codes to evolve to capture the researcher's deepening understanding. This resonates with my own experience, where the codes, particularly those produced at the beginning of the process, were like living organisms that constantly evolved. After every round of coding, or when I had produced a significant number of new codes, I went a step back to clean up and work with my codes by re-naming codes and merging some codes together. For example, I grouped codes that described the same aspect or practice but had different names under a unified heading. This was an important step, given that I had used many Nvivo codes at the beginning. Throughout the process I took notes on emerging questions, hunches, connections, similarities and contradictions that would inform the

development of themes. While at the beginning coding was very open and flexible, with the analysis advancing it became more focused.

3.3.2 Generating themes

With an increasing corpus of codes, I started developing initial themes by conceptualising the codes into themes that represented a patterned response or meaning and captured an important aspect of the material in relation to the concepts I was working with. With the structural concepts always in mind, I looked for threads, similarities and points of connections that would tie the codes together and grouped them in a theme (Miles and Huberman, 1994). To facilitate this process, I printed the list of codes and cut them up to be able to physically move the codes around and play with different ideas and possibilities of categorisation. Frequently, codes would fit to illuminate more than one theme. Through this process, some codes became emergent themes, others were collapsed into them. I wrote short summaries and descriptions of the themes and noted down questions that I wanted to explore further and contradictions in relation to other themes or in relation to my past experiences with the participants.

During the early stages of the analysis, the themes were more descriptive in nature, paraphrasing and summarising features in the material. With the research progressing, I increasingly conceptualised the themes. To do so, I related the themes that I constructed in the analysis of the codes to other themes. New codes I created through ongoing fieldwork sometimes illuminated a theme, and sometimes led to revise or refine a theme by creating sub-themes. For example, I divided the theme “importance of knowledge” into “knowledge as cultural capital” and “knowledge as symbolic capital”. Similarly, I broke down the theme “Silence as strategy” into three different sub-themes: “Silence to maintain harmony”, “Silence to avoid mistakes”, “Silence as consent”.

A fruitful way to develop the themes further was the analysis of tensions and inconsistencies that had emerged in themes as well as between themes. As Braun and Clark (2021) highlight, themes might draw together data that on the surface appear rather disparate but unite in implicit or latent meaning. When at first, I found it stressful when new material did not “fit” the story I had been creating, I soon realised

the potential of contradicting observations to develop the themes and story further. It was those tensions which not only helped to explore alternative explanations, but which were key in refining the themes and differentiating them more clearly from each other. To make sense of these contradictions, I went back to the data extracts to look closer at the specific situation: Who said or did this and who did not? In which situation? What is different between these situations? For example, there were tensions between the importance managers attached to being in control and assuming responsibility, which directly contradicted material which illustrated a passive tendency to cede control. In exploring the specific situations more in depth, I could construct both patterns as strategies to maintain harmony in their organisational relationships, depending on their positioning in relation to the person they were dealing with.

During the analysis process, I took great care in addressing my previous assumptions and ensuring that I did not impose them on the material without analytically confirming them. To keep an open mind, I reflected on the impressions and assumptions I had built up during my previous experience in this organisation and asked myself how I arrived at these conclusions looking for evidence in my memory. These reflections served as a constant sensitiser as I revisited them when analysing the codes and constructing themes, regularly asking myself the question whether I had sufficient material that allowed for these initial interpretations or whether they supported different conclusions. This was extremely fruitful and resulted in a few surprises, particularly as the analysis advanced.

Additionally, I tried to put my observations and initial interpretations to the participants' scrutiny. At this point, my role as researcher merged with my role as facilitator and I used the LDP sessions to explore open contradictions and test interpretations. For example, at times, I raised my observations as ad-hoc interventions in the sets 'as they happened' or in the formal process reviews in a session. At other times, I used informal conversations with participants.

The analysis of the three analytical strings fertilised each other and I could increasingly see parallels between the participants' habitus and their practices in the LDP, thus

creating a plausible and coherent story. In the appendices 4, 5 and 6, I provide an overview of the data structure for each concept.

3.4 Plausibility and reliability

This chapter would not be complete without a conclusive discussion about the knowledge claims I am making in this study and exploring questions of subjectivity and objectivity (the extent to which the results are free from bias), internal validity (the degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred) and reliability (the extent to which results can be replicated by other researchers).

As foregrounded earlier in this chapter, I fully recognise the subjectivity of the research process given the origins of this study, my approach to ethnography and my positioning in the broader research context. This thesis is consciously and rigorously grounded in subjectivity, and I recognise that as an ethnographic researcher I have shaped the results and the story I tell. I argue, however, that in this piece of research, familiarity and subjectivity were an asset rather than an impediment to critical analysis. For example, my previous familiarity with the participants and other stakeholders, which were rooted in my membership in the broader organisational network, was helpful in gaining access for this study and establishing research relationships that promoted participants' openness to share their experiences and interpretations. In a similar manner, my double role as researcher and facilitator in the participant observations in the LDP program, where I researched practices of which I was part of, greatly facilitated the collection of material and the deeper exploration of the participants' sense-making.

At the same time, as a European and outsider of the MFI, I was culturally and organisationally distant enough to avoid organisational blindness and remain sensitive to the "extraordinary-in-the-ordinary" (Ybema *et al.*, 2009). On the contrary, since I was familiar with several other MFIs in the network, I was able to detect both similarities across the network as well as idiosyncrasies in each MFI, and as such was able to produce insights for the organisation that go beyond the results of this study.

In this sense, my subjectivity facilitated the access to information and material that I might not have had otherwise, and the merits of familiarity can be viewed as valuable resource in the production of this study.

Hence, when I write about the political dynamics in the LDP, I cannot claim that I am providing an objective account of what happened. However, the knowledge I have produced in this study is not just merely subjective, and I do attempt a degree of objectivity. Throughout the study, I have taken great care to address the potential bias that stems from my positioning and familiarity. For example, my rigorous use of Bourdieu's conceptual framework has enhanced both the reliability and internal validity of the knowledge created. While generally the reproduction of the results is to a certain extent limited by my particular positioning in the research process, the rigorous use of Bourdieu's analytical concepts provides a certain level of reliability, since the use of this framework can be replicated. Furthermore, in constructing the themes, I have strived to connect those themes that have emerged through my interaction in the field directly and explicitly with Bourdieu's concepts to enhance the internal validity of the results. In naming the themes, I have tried to integrate the participants' own words in the title to make this connection explicit. This was not only an important strategy to demonstrate the internal validity of my constructions, but also a strategy to emphasize the participants' own voice and language, and highlight that the results of this study are, to a certain extent, a joint account.

As outlined above, the quality parameter for ethnographic research, when conducted from an interpretive paradigm, is not whether the results are 'accurate' or 'true', or whether alternative explanations can or cannot account for the same material. Rather, the question is whether the theoretical explanations are plausible and authentic. Throughout this thesis, I have strived to illustrate the plausibility and authenticity of the research results. For example, I have made explicit how I worked with the material to arrive at the interpretations and concepts I present and provide an extended overview of the final data structure for each string of analysis in the appendix. Furthermore, in presenting the accounts, I have been careful to substantiate my interpretations with illustrations of the field to give readers the possibility to judge for themselves, whether they deem my interpretation plausible.

Reflexivity played an important role in my research practice, and the rigorous use of a research diary was an integral part of the process. As described above, reflexivity was key in my research not only to make explicit how my biography and positioning shaped the results of my study, but also to conduct this study in an ethical way given the context of the study. Scrutinising my own practice as both researcher and facilitator has, at times, been an unsettling experience. This experience resonates with Van Maanen (1988), who argues that to be critically reflexive, fieldwork must be ready for embarrassment, confusion, affection and deceit.

In this thesis, I make no attempt to hide, but instead I have strived to write myself in throughout the study. For example, I have openly discussed my diverse roles and interests and made explicit the process through which I have constructed my ethnography, explicating how these have shaped my strategies to gain access, build relationships, and conduct participant observation. I have dedicated ample space to this, which has led to a longer methodology chapter than perhaps usual to allow the reader to judge for themselves something of the way I influenced these events and accounts I am writing about. Given my complex positioning in this study, I deemed this an important step. Furthermore, in my style of writing, I have situated myself, the "I", throughout the study, to take ownership of both the research process and the analysis results, making clear that the results constructed are my reading of material.

3.5 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to show how I approached the research empirically to the cultural dynamics that were mobilised in the LDP by filling the conceptual framework developed in chapter 2 with life. In doing so, I have highlighted three key features of my empirical approach: First, my research was underpinned by an ethnographic approach, which has made the research process an iterative process, where the different stages of data collection, analysis and theory development interacted and mutually informed each other. Second, my approach to ethnography was based on a variety of forms of participant observation and ethnographic interviewing, which were based on genuine interaction and collaboration with the research participants. Third, critical reflexivity played an important role to benefit from

the methodological opportunities and address the methodological challenges, which were rooted in my triple role as researcher, consultant, and CAL facilitator and my broader positioning as European doing research in a postcolonial setting. I have provided ample insight into my research practice to show that my subjectivity in the research process was an asset to critical analysis rather than an impediment. Through the research process, I have endeavoured to create plausible and authentic knowledge in an ethical way.

In the next three chapters, I present the results of the analysis that I have constructed through this research process. In chapter 4, I present the analysis of the behavioural requirements of the LDP and the logic that underpins it. In chapter 5, I provide insight into how the participants enacted this logic by exploring their tendencies to act in the action learning sets. In chapter 6, I present the participants' dispositions to act and the mechanisms of distinction that have structured them. In chapter 7, I bring all the analysis strings together to explore the cultural politics that have emerged in the LDP by providing my interpretation of the participants' practical logic.

4 Behavioural requirements in the LDP

To explore the cultural politics that are mobilised in the LDP, one string of the analysis was to explore the logic of managing and learning that underpins the design to identify the behavioural requirements of the LDP (field). In chapter 2, I have operationalised this logic as the cultural resources that are valuable to effectively participate in the LDP, which are structured by the configuration of relations in the set the design seeks to promote. The aim of this chapter is to present the results of this analysis. The data structure of the emerging themes can be found in appendix 4.

Access to the information that illuminates this logic was greatly facilitated by my role as principal program designer. The material stems predominantly from my field notes during the collaborative design process, formal documents I provided to the MFI (e.g. the proposal for the program and the presentation of the program to participants) as well as inner conversations, which allowed me to reflect about and access my own assumptions that have informed the design of the LDP, even when they were not made explicit in the design process.

I have chosen to present the analysis in terms of the behavioural requirements posed by the LDP, since this provides a backdrop for the analysis of participants' tendencies to act in relation to these requirements. I have identified four behavioural requirements that were important to achieve the objective of the LDP: investing time and effort in learning through inquiry; (collaboratively) self-organising learning; engaging with not knowing, uncertainty and emotions; and surfacing assumptions, contradictions and conflicts. I present each behavioural requirement by illuminating the assumptions about learning that have informed the design and the cultural resources that are valuable. Additionally, I provide further insight into how the LDP aimed to support participants in building up this cultural capital.

4.1 Investing time and effort in learning through inquiry

First, the LDP required participants to invest time and effort in learning through inquiry. The LDP was underpinned by the idea of learning as inquiry. The objective of the program was to foster managerial problem-solving capacity by developing the

managers' individual and collective competence for critical reflection, which was hoped to contribute to the transformation of current managerial and organisational practice in the long-term by making managers more independent in their thinking and actions. This objective was key in the decision to use an action learning approach, which conceptualises learning as process of iterative cycles of action and reflection, and as such connects learning with real life managerial practice to create knowledge that is contextual and actionable and, therefore, relevant to the participants. The assumption was that this approach would allow participants to explore and experiment with different ideas to gradually create practical solutions that were relevant for the specific context in which the problems exist. Learning was thus seen as reflective real-life experimentation, where managerial problems could be reframed to produce alternative solutions, which would then be evaluated and adjusted, if needed. Such a view implied that participants would take a more active role in the construction of knowledge, which required high degrees of personal involvement and participants' keen commitment to investing time into reflection and problem framing, actively experimenting with novel ideas and evaluating the outcome of their actions, if necessary, through several cycles. This commitment was particularly important, since as a declared development program, the LDP was designed with a clear and explicit focus on learning, where learning a new, inquiry-based approach to problem-solving and developing individual and collective competence for critical reflection had primacy over the solution of problems. Therefore, practicing these skills was critical to the success of the program, and this was clearly communicated to the participants in the introduction event.

The design was aimed to facilitate this commitment to learning through inquiry. For example, we integrated several elements that aimed to support participants' capacity to follow through with the cyclical process of problem-solving. Given that for all participants this program was their first formal contact with action learning, we strived to familiarise them with the fundamentals of the approach by providing an extensive information letter about the program and its pedagogical approach, and organised a half-day introductory event, where we presented the program, its basic features, and underlying assumptions. During this event we explained action learning through a

presentation and also included a short experiential session to make the principles of action learning touchable with a subsequent Q&A session.

Furthermore, we aimed to support the process by formalising the cyclical steps in the design. To stimulate continuity in the process in the action learning sets, but also in the periods between the set meetings, the design included the use of reflective diaries, where participants were asked to keep record of the actions taken, the perceived consequences as well as reflections on and evaluation of these actions, which were planned to serve as basis for inquiry in the next set meeting. To facilitate action, the development of an action plan was formalised. Furthermore, to support the development of a process perspective, we provided space in form of periodic process reviews at the end of each session, during which the set would reflect on their experiences and the dynamics of the day. In addition, it was established that an important function of my role as program facilitator was to ensure that the cyclical process was enacted as well as to turn participants' attention to the process, when I perceived that the dynamics would provide a good learning opportunity.

To facilitate the managers' capacity to commit to learning, we aimed to provide conditions that would allow the participants to come with a quiet mind. This meant to create conditions that would limit the LDP's impact on managers' performance and mitigate the performance pressures the managers were exposed to. This was important since the MFI was operating under some difficult conditions and past experiences from other learning events had shown that managers tended to skip participation in corporate training, particularly towards the end of the month. In this context, participation was made mandatory for all middle managers. To ease the pressure, middle managers were officially exempt from work obligations on the days of the set sessions, and their substitution was centrally organised through a system of rotation and delegation. Branch managers, who were most heavily involved in daily operations, were assigned to different learning sets to avoid that all branch managers were away at the same time and to ensure that they could cover for each other in essential tasks. Furthermore, we paid careful attention to the temporal arrangement of the set meetings, which we scheduled at the beginning of the month to avoid interference with the busy monthly closing.

To encourage participation, we included a certificate of participation upon completion of the program, since in the past, participants had shown a keen interest in such formal recognition. Additionally, we aimed to give the program more weight, and the LDP was promoted as leadership development, as opposed to the management development program some of them had participated in before. We made significant investments in the introductory event, during which several top managers were present to underline the importance of the program. These top managers were also involved at different stages of the program. For example, the CEO was involved in the introductory event to highlight his support for the program and emphasise its strategic importance. Furthermore, for the second phase of the program, where the middle managers were working collectively on systemic challenges, each project was sponsored by one member of the management team to which the respective project group would report.

4.2 (Collaboratively) self-organising learning

Second, the LDP required participants to take responsibility for their learning by taking own and collective decisions to organise learning. The design was underpinned by a view of learning as self-directed process. The inquiry process that underpinned the LDP was envisaged as being controlled by participants rather than the set facilitator. For one thing, this was considered important to ensure that the participants' learning was relevant for them. Additionally, this was an important part of the design to foster congruity between the rationale and the learning process. As elaborated in the introduction, the rationale of the LDP was to foster the initiative and independency of the participating middle managers, which was rooted in the current way of decision-making in the MFI, where problem-solving was centralised and usually promoted by top management. This rationale was another reason to adopt an action learning approach, which is underpinned by a view of managers as proactive decision-makers and problem solvers, who have the capacity to take responsibility and ownership for both their own learning and their managerial actions. This idea, I believed, had to be reflected in the design by providing opportunities for the managers to practice self-directed action.

Hence, participants were encouraged to take ownership of and co-shape the process by making informed choices. For example, rather than having an agenda imposed upon them by the management or the facilitator, participants were invited to work on the challenges that were most relevant and important to them. They were encouraged to define their own goals and needs of support according to what they felt was most helpful. Furthermore, they were granted the power to make their own decisions as to the way in which they engaged with the challenges, questions, and observations of others, as well as the direction they wanted to take. They were also in control of choosing the concrete actions they would implement in the attempt to address their problems. Additionally, participants were given the possibility to organise and structure their meetings according to their needs. This included, for example, the authority over the agenda in terms of the order of individual airtimes, but also requests for ad-hoc input sessions when they felt a need for this.

4.3 Engaging with not knowing, uncertainty and emotions

Third, the LDP required participants to engage with not knowing, uncertainty and emotions. The LDP was underpinned by an idea of learning as critical reflection, which aimed to explore the taken-for-granted beliefs and power relations that shaped participants' practices. Such an approach to knowledge construction through critical inquiry was expected to produce new knowledge rather than 'more of the same' which would make a real difference in their managerial practice and had the potential to transform it in the long-term. Additionally, engaging with critical reflection in the LDP program would allow participants to practice and develop their reflective competence, which was the main objective of the program. In practical terms, such a commitment to critical reflection required that participants would engage with uncertainty and not knowing. This included recognising one's own ignorance, being open to examine situations from different perspectives and to question the assumptions that underpin one's own and others' interpretations and practices.

Furthermore, the LDP was underpinned by an idea of learning as emotional and political process, where the attempt of learning may mobilise dynamics that constrain

learning from critical reflection. Such feelings were expected to be mobilised by the questioning of deeply held assumptions, as well as the social nature of the LDP, where learning was seen as a collaborative and collective process. Hence, reflection in the LDP was, therefore, also conceptualised as organising reflection, where the political and emotional dynamics that shaped both participants' practice in the MFI as well as the action learning sets would be addressed. Such an approach to learning required a commitment on the part of the participants to actively engage with conflicts, diverging interests and emotions by recognising and surfacing contradictions and tensions, as well as admitting to and surfacing own emotional and political behaviour.

The design aimed to support a commitment to critical inquiry with several strategies. For example, to foster managers' understanding of the process and the potential value of inquiry, the program was preceded by a coaching workshop, where participants could experience and practice the art of questioning. While this was not officially connected to the program, it was part of the strategy to expose potential participants to approaches that use inquiry rather than advocacy. Furthermore, to foster the participants' openness to engage with not knowing and uncertainty, we considered it important that participants had a high-stake interest in the problems they brought to the learning sets. Therefore, participants were encouraged to bring those problems to the set, in which they had a considerable interest, and which did not have a straightforward technical solution.

Additionally, the program was designed in a way that would support the participants' development of skills for critical reflection through ongoing support and possibilities of practice. For example, the program was not entirely theory free, but included some theoretical input and practical tools. In addition, to facilitate critical reflection, the design aimed to include alternative theories and frameworks for sense-making as food for thought, particularly in relation to group dynamics, which would be introduced according to need and situation. Similarly, we established that an important part of my role as facilitator would be to promote ad-hoc opportunities for critical reflection by surfacing assumptions or bringing political and emotional dynamics to the participants' attention. Particularly at the beginning, I would participate in the process as critical friend to model critical reflection, if I felt it necessary.

4.4 Surfacing assumptions, contradictions, and conflicts

Finally, the LDP required participants to support critical reflection by surfacing assumptions and contradictions in others' accounts and emerging conflicts in the sets. The LDP was underpinned by a view of learning as social process. Learning was aimed to be achieved through a cyclical process of critical reflection and action. This process was conceptualised as being supported by both the facilitator as well as the action learning set. However, as elaborated above, to foster the independence of the participating managers, the LDP aimed to promote a more active role of participants in the learning process. My role as facilitator was conceptualised as process consultant, where I would support the managers throughout the process, by making proposals, surfacing learning opportunities and providing food for thought. However, the responsibility for the process was intended to be firmly in the hands of the participants.

As such, the learning set was envisaged as the main source of learning. The members of the learning sets were expected to mutually support each other's learning through collaborative inquiry by acting as critical friends and sounding board to each other in the process of solving the problem. Additionally, learning in the LDP was a collective process, where participants would jointly reflect on their practices in the action learning sets to gain deeper insight into the emotional and political dynamics of collaborative problem-solving. Hence, to learn in such a collaborative and collective way, it was important that participants were committed to actively support learning through critical reflection. This was significant with regards to the outcomes achieved in terms of problem solving, as well as providing the opportunity to practice collective critical reflection in a safe space to develop their reflective competence, which was the objective of the LDP.

In practical terms this commitment meant that participants would actively provide support in their role as critical friends by providing constructive feedback and asking critical questions to surface assumptions and offer alternative perspectives on a problem. Additionally, such an approach required high levels of trust and reciprocity,

which we assumed would be supported by the participants' commitment to share their vulnerability by, for example, sharing challenges and problems, but also emotions and feelings that were mobilised by their attempt to learn, as well as receiving criticism and observations with a positive attitude.

The design aimed to facilitate such a commitment to support learning through critical reflection by facilitating conditions that were conducive to making people feel comfortable and develop trust with the facilitator and their peers in the learning sets. For example, we thought hard about set compositions and ensured that none of the members in a set was in a direct reporting line to another set member. We also tried the best we could, to avoid direct functional lines. To provide space to build up relationships, we decided to organise set meetings over an entire day, kept the sets small and aimed to maintain them in their initial composition for the course of the program. To facilitate initial bonding in a pressure-free and safe space, we organised a kick-off barbecue at the beach with all participating middle managers and members of the management team.

To foster open and mutual relationships among participants, we promoted the establishment of rules that would guide the interactions between set members. For example, from the outset, we established that all participants had the same rights and responsibilities, and that all would assume both the role as problem-holder and as critical friend. Thereby, we emphasised that the role as critical friend was not seen as an expert role, but that critical friends acted equally from a standpoint of inquiry and not knowing, as did the problem-holder. Additionally, we emphasised confidentiality as an important principle in the LDP. Nothing that would be discussed in the set was allowed to go out the room. This rule extended to me as facilitator, and with the CEO we had agreed that I would not disclose any of the issues discussed in the set without the participants' consent. This also meant that my feedback to the CEO would be in general terms and not disclose anything in terms of specific participants or topics. Furthermore, a significant amount of time of the first session was dedicated to discussing mutual expectations from and among participants, but also from me as program facilitator, which resulted in a set of ground rules that would guide interactions in the sets and facilitate engagement with the process. To promote

relationship building in the set, we aimed to provide space and time for dialogue. Throughout the program, time was dedicated to address disagreements and conflicts, which was facilitated by the focus of the program to make the group process a subject of reflection. It was an important part of my role as facilitator to surface group dynamics and foster critical reflection.

4.5 Conclusion

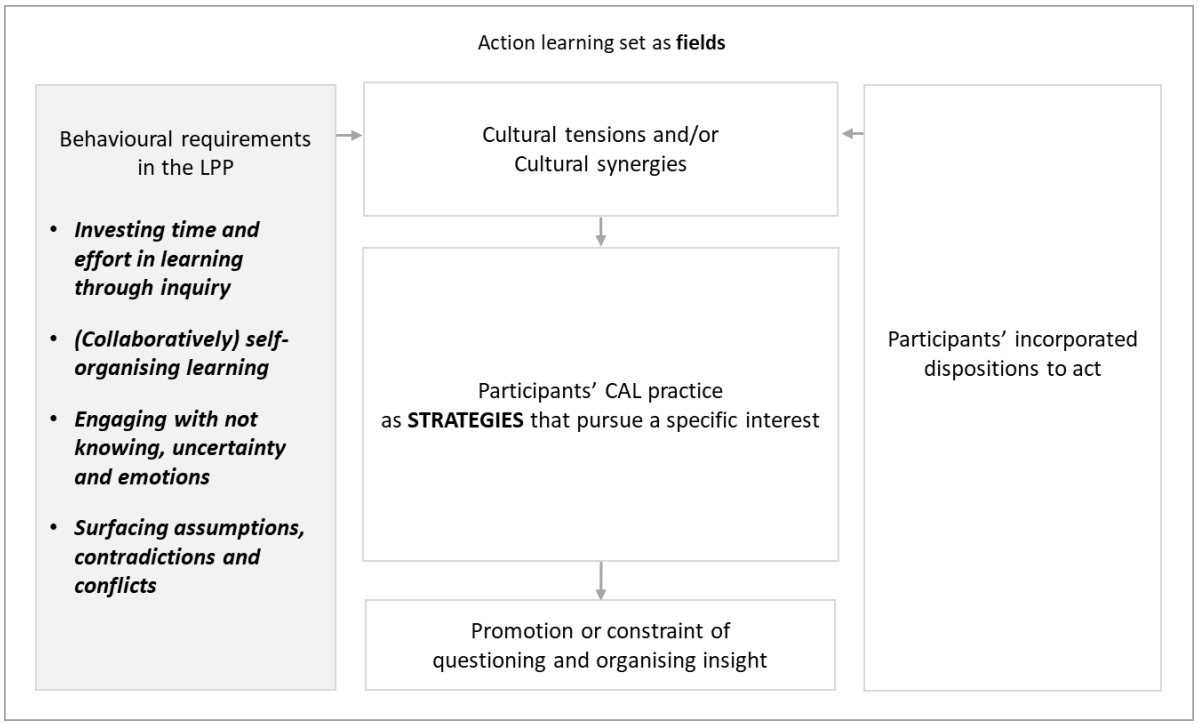
The aim of this chapter was to provide the reader with insights into behavioural requirements of the LDP and the logic that underpins them. I have presented four requirements I constructed from the analysis: investing time and effort in learning through inquiry, (collaboratively) self-organising learning, engaging with not knowing, uncertainty and emotions, and actively surfacing assumptions, contradictions and conflicts.

I have surfaced the assumptions about learning that underpin these requirements in terms of the cultural resources that are valuable (a commitment to learning, a commitment to self-direction, and a commitment to critical reflection) and the configuration of social relations, which were characterised by a view of participants as active decision-makers and the facilitator as process consultant rather than knowledge expert. I have also provided insight in the ways in which the design has aimed to foster the participants' acquisition of these cultural resources.

The analysis of the behavioural requirements in the LDP and their underpinning logic contributes to the research questions by illuminating the structure of the field. Together with the results of the habitus analysis, they contribute to exploring the tensions and/or synergies that emerge in the LDP, which I have conceptualised as habitus-field conflicts.

Figure 4.1 embeds these results in my overall conceptual framework.

Figure 4.1: Behavioural requirement of the LDP in the conceptual framework



In the next chapter, I provide insight into how participants' have enacted this logic in their practices in the LDP by exploring their tendencies to act in the action learning sets.

5 Participants' tendencies to act in the LDP

The second string of the analysis was to explore the participants' tendencies to act which are the outcome of their practical sense-making of the LDP design and as such represent an important foundation to make sense of the cultural dynamics that were at play. In this chapter, I present the results of my analysis. The data structure of the emerging themes can be found in appendix 5.

The material that forms the basis for this analysis stems from both the transcribed audio recordings as well as my fieldnotes. To identify these tendencies, I have analysed participants' practices through the lens of the four behavioural requirements presented in the previous chapter. From this analysis, I have constructed four tendencies to act: the tendency to resist investing time in learning through inquiry; the tendency to avoid engaging with not knowing, emotions and novel perspectives; the tendency to collude in the avoidance of critical reflection; and the tendency to cede collective responsibilities to experienced experts. In the following sections, I present these tendencies to act one by one. In doing so, I remain on a rather descriptive level to lay the foundation for analytically engaging with them in chapter 7 by exploring the practical logic that underpins these tendencies to act.

To enhance the credibility of the study, I substantiate the analysis with illustrations and examples from the ethnographic material. It is worth iterating that, as mentioned in chapter 3, there were two participants who did not consent to participating in the study. While they were comfortable to use the dynamics in the set as material for the analysis, they did not want their statements or practices be used as illustrations. I have, therefore, decided to limit illustrations from this set and only include those situations where these two managers were not involved. Hence, while the result of the analysis is the result of a cross-group analysis, the illustrations and examples are mostly drawn from set 1 and 2.

5.1 Tendency to limit investing time in learning through inquiry

The first tendency to act I have constructed from the material is the participants' tendency to resist investing time in learning through inquiry. One key requirement of

the LDP was the participants' commitment to regularly participate in the LDP and engage with both action and reflection. However, the material indicates that participants tended to limit both.

Generally, participants adopted a flexible approach to participation. Some managers were occasionally absent either for the entire day or for some hours, others spontaneously attended the meeting of other sets, when the day of their own set meeting would not suit them. Throughout the program, there were only few meetings where a set was complete in its original composition. Many participants tended to show up late, and although punctuality improved over the life span of the program, a 15 min-waiting-time became built-in into our practice. Managers justified their absences with important operational issues, citing, for example, the urgent need to deal with a complicated client (Fieldnotes, September 23, 2014), to hold a meeting with an important external supplier (Fieldnotes, July 7, 2014) or to finish some urgent business (Fieldnotes, August 4, 2014; August 7, 2014). This was a clear disregard of previously established rules, since from the outset we emphasised the importance of both full attendance and maintaining the same composition over the lifetime of the sets to facilitate continuation in the learning process.

Similarly, the process was often interrupted by participants to attend to business issues. For example, participants frequently used the time in the sets to respond to urgent operational needs, when head office staff knocked on the door and asked participants to step out the room to discuss an urgent issue or sign documents, or when staff from the branches called their managers to solve urgent problems. This was commonly accepted as necessary and not challenged by anyone in the set. Furthermore, set meetings were highjacked as participants tried to use the time available to discuss changes and updates in policies and procedures that were largely unrelated to the issues that were brought to the set. They updated each other, explained technical details, and discussed their understanding. Participants described this as important benefit for them, since for them it was a rare occasion where they met in a room away from business pressures. Frequently, they were not happy when I intervened to bring them back to what we were here for, as the following extract from my fieldnotes show:

The discussion has been going on for a few minutes. A new credit policy has been implemented with some considerable changes in procedures. Ismael, who was significantly involved in the development of this new policy explains some details. The entire group listens carefully. Some of those who are directly affected ask questions and raise their concerns. Ismael explains why some of these changes were included. I let the discussion run for a while, and then decide to intervene.

Me: Sorry, can I interrupt for a second? It seems there is a need for discussion on these new procedures.

Godfrey: Yeah, it's big changes.

Me: I understand this. But I would like to close this discussion for the moment being and get started with the session. It's already late and we have many things to do today. Is it ok for you to continue the discussion in the next break?

Faraji: You know, it's really important for us. We need to understand this clearly. And now we have Ismael here, who can explain us these changes exactly.

Me: Perhaps the branch manager meeting could be a good place to continue this discussion?

Godfrey: In these meetings we don't have much time. You have been there. The agenda is full. It's difficult to find time to discuss. Here we are fewer people and it's easier.

Faraji: Yeah, here it's easier. Just 5 minutes more.

Me: Is that ok for the group?

Several: Yeah. Yes. That's ok. It's important.

After five minutes I intervene again to close the discussion and start the session. Faraji and Godfrey do not look happy.

(Fieldnotes, August 7, 2014)

These tendencies to act mobilised many interventions on my part. However, many of them fell by the wayside and were shot down. For example, when I raised the issues of punctuality and interruptions, participants acknowledged my observations, but nevertheless insisted that this was "almost inevitable" and that "the show must go on" (Fieldnotes, August 4, 2014). One participant explained:

> "It's important to finish certain things before we come here. We're out the entire day, we need to let things prepared so our staff can continue without us." (Fieldnote, August 4, 2014).

Two sets decided to formally legitimise these practices and suggested that everyone should try and keep disruptions "to a minimum" by instructing their staff to come in without knocking or by leaving the room quietly when there was a need to attend to urgent issues (Fieldnotes August 4, 2014).

Despite these pressures, all participants attended at least 75% of the program. However, while participants invested a considerable amount of time to be present in the sets, many dismissed participating in learning activities that required commitment beyond their set meetings and came to the meetings unprepared. For example, additional reading materials I provided often remained unread. On most occasions, it was only a few who had read them, frequently shortly before the session began (Fieldnotes and transcript, August 4, 2014; August 3, 2014, September 22, 2014). The usual justification for their lack of engagement with the activities was a lack of time or "forgetting" due to the pressures of daily operations. Most impactful was perhaps participants' tendency to refrain from taking action to solve their problems at work. While participants would decide on a course of action, very frequently they would not implement those actions. Consequentially, they did not use the reflective diary either. Those who did usually adopted a "getting things done" approach rather than meaningfully engaging with reflection. Frequently, I saw managers scribbling some notes in their reflective diary shortly before the meetings began. Participants usually argued that they had a busy month and did not have time "to use" the reflective journal. When I put this practice on the table, in all three sets managers voted to discontinue the reflective journal with the justification that "it takes too much time" and did not have much value for them.

In the sets, participants tended to focus on solutions, regularly attempting to circumvent engaging in the cyclical process of reflection and action. For example, participants across the board prioritised the elaboration of potential actions at the expense of problem exploration. Generally, they showed a high-level of proactivity when it came to addressing their managerial challenges. After some warm-up time,

many participants took the initiative and volunteered to present their issues. This was surprising, since based on previous experiences, I had expected more hesitancy and restraint, particularly at the beginning. Similarly, many (albeit not all) participants got actively involved in the discussion of their peers' challenges. This willingness to contribute facilitated vivid exchanges and was appreciated by most participants. However, while they were keen to get going, participants were mainly interested in obtaining (and providing) ready-made solutions for their problems, rather than in gaining a deeper reflective understanding of them. This interest became particularly evident when participants formulated their needs and the nature of the support they were seeking from the group. Most participants were very explicit about their wish and expectation to receive others' input, even when they were aware that this was not intended by the design. The following statements illustrate this:

> "I have a very simple problem, I hope I will get some clarification, some solutions from here. I have experienced branch manager here. So, I think it is very easy for them so I will get a lot of inputs from them." (Transcript, July 3, 2014).

> "I know you are not supposed to ask for advice, but they can give their own opinion on how they have faced it in their department […] maybe they can contribute the way I do this." (Transcript, August 4, 2014).

> "What is most helpful to me is knowing what has to be done to close it. I want to know what the right solution is." (Transcript, September 22, 2014).

Participants also evaluated the usefulness of their peers' contributions in relation to the solutions they provided, rather than their potential as food for thought. For example, Moses, when he was asked to provide feedback on the helpfulness of the group's support, said:

> "It's ok, but I need more ideas, more questions." (Transcript, July 2014).

The participants' interest in pursuing outcomes rather than new understandings was not only observable in their engagement with their problems, but also in the way in which they engaged with a bird's eye view on the process. Participants showed a keen interest in process efficiency and proactively made suggestions to make the process more efficient to "make the best use of our time" (Transcript, G2 S2, August 4, 2014). However, the participants' interest in process efficiency went hand in hand with a

tendency to circumvent an exploration of the dynamics in the learning sets, for example by jumping to practical solutions for challenges in the process. The following excerpt provides an example:

> It is the first session I had opened the floor for participants to present their problems. However, silence greets me, and no one is willing to make the first step.
>
> Me: Ok, can I sweep in for a second? If I had a hat, I would put one on now. Let's imagine that I have a hat on to indicate that we switch from the problem discussion to the process discussion. Let me ask a question: what is going on right now in the group? What's happening?
>
> Wilson: In the group? For what I see people are like having more than one problem, so they are trying to sort out which one comes first.
>
> Me: Ok. This we can address. If someone cannot decide between two issues perhaps the group might be able to help in that decision. Is that all? What else does this silence say?
>
> [Silence]
>
> Wilson: Ok, I will start (giggling)
>
> Me: No no no. I'd rather stick a bit with looking at what is happening.
>
> [Group laughing]
>
> (Transcript, July 3, 2014).

In response to my intervention, Wilson first provides a general explanation for the silence in the set. However, given that at least half of the set had sent a brief about the issue they wanted to discuss, this explanation seemed somewhat baseless. When I brush this problem aside to continue probing in the dynamics, Wilson volunteers to present his issue to get the process going and thus circumventing further exploration. The laughter that explodes when I insist on exploring the problem can be seen as indicating that participants 'felt caught' in their attempt to circumvent this discussion.

Similarly, participants circumvented deeper reflective exploration through attempts to quickly move on to new challenges. Several participants declared their problems as solved or other issues as more pressing after merely one session. For many participants, such an outcome-oriented approach was the best use of their limited time in the LDP, which they perceived as a great opportunity to exchange experiences

and accumulate expert knowledge. Juma's explanation is representative of this view:

Facilitator:	Who wants to go next?
Juma:	I go. My problem is: how can I bring improvement to service communication. It is important in the sense of customer care and professionalism. And this communication problem brings a lot of customer complaints. […]
Facilitator:	So, this is a different challenge. Not the same as we discussed last time.
Juma:	We have many challenges.
Facilitator:	Okay good. But is there anything else you would like to discuss related to the previous issue?
Juma:	No.
Facilitator:	Nothing?
Juma:	You know, I have many things to discuss. It's better to use the opportunity here to discuss several issues and get ideas about what to do. Then I can see later what I do with it.
Facilitator:	Perhaps you could nevertheless give us an update on what you have been doing and how this has worked out for you?

(Transcript, August 6, 2014).

This extract shows that rather than in exploring his issue in more depth, Juma was interested in accumulating experiences and knowledge from others, which could potentially be helpful to address his challenges. Accumulating this knowledge would allow him the flexibility to use this knowledge when time permits. In doing so, he interrupts the cyclical process of action and reflection and avoids the practical experimentation with new ideas.

In summary, the examples in this section illustrate that participants in the LDP tended to resist investing time in learning through inquiry by prioritising their managerial work over their participation in the LDP and by prioritising the accumulation of possible solutions for their problems over their reflective and active exploration. These practices stood in sharp contrast to those the LDP design aimed to promote and considerably limited the participants' opportunities to learn through inquiry and further develop their reflective competence.

5.2 Tendency to avoid engaging with not knowing, emotions and novel perspectives

The second tendency to act I constructed from the material was participants' tendency to avoid engaging with not knowing, emotions and novel perspectives, which featured prominently in the material. The design of the LDP was based on a view of learning as critical reflection. This required participants' willingness to recognise, accept and engage with their not knowing, which was seen as the starting point for learning. This openness to not knowing was seen as important in both the participants' role as problem-holder, as well as their role as critical friend. Furthermore, critical reflection implied that participants were willing to engage with novel perspectives and the uncertainty that comes with it. However, participants showed a tendency to avoid both.

Throughout the program, participants engaged in practices that would promote their expert status. This became visible in that, for most, the notion of bringing a problem and openly admitting to not having a solution in front of the group seemed to be problematic, and they used strategies to conceal and legitimise their lack of knowledge. For example, two participants showed great reluctance to presenting a problem. While one participant declared that currently "all goes well", and he had "nothing to discuss" (Transcript, August 6, 2014), the other declined his turn, arguing that "others have perhaps more pressing problems" (Transcript, August 4, 2014). Both explanations seem highly unlikely for middle managers, who were operating with limited resources in uncertain conditions. However, in declining to present a problem, both managers could conceal their lack of knowledge which is implicit when presenting a problem to the group for which one has no solution.

Those participants who presented their problems used different strategies to demonstrate that despite the problem they were in control or that their lack of knowledge was legitimate given the nature of the problem or the circumstances of the situation. For example, Ismael chose to bring a problem that was not directly related to his expertise, as the following summary from the transcript illustrates:

> Ismael is a highly experienced credit head office manager who has been with the MFI since its beginnings. While he has no functional authority over any of the other participants, he is heading a key business area. Currently, his area is facing serious difficulties. However, the question Ismael wants to address in the first session is about how he can identify and deal with secret relationships in branches. When probed about the importance and the occurrence of the problem, Ismael admits that he currently knows only about three cases, but insists that it is a problem, because it can affect performance and "there could be a lot more cases out there" (Transcript, August 7, 2014).

Given Ismael's position in the MFI, the topic he chose to bring was surprising for two reasons. First, in his position, Ismael provides important support to the branches in the credit area, a business area which faces several substantial challenges. In the light of this difficult situation, secret relationships in the branches, which seemed neither widespread nor having a serious impact, seems rather insignificant. Second, while he is involved in policymaking and the development of procedures in terms of one business area, the operational responsibility to deal with secret staff relationships lies with HR and branch managers, a fact Ismael himself acknowledged. However, by choosing an issue that is not directly related to his field of expertise, Ismael legitimises his lack of knowledge, since no one expects him to be an expert in HR issues. In doing so, he avoids presenting a problem that is related to his area of expertise and would, implicitly, make evident a more relevant lack of knowledge.

Other participants used the way in which they framed their problems to legitimise them. Legitimisation was, for example, achieved by blaming others or external circumstances for the existence of the problem (e.g. "the market", "the client", "the management") or by highlighting circumstances that justified a lack of knowledge for a solution (e.g. "it's not only me" "It's generally a big problem for all", "for us a branch managers"). The following extract from Godfrey's problem presentation is illustrative for several of these strategies. Godfrey is by far the youngest and most junior in the set. When it is his turn to present his challenge, he presents the problem in the following way:

> "You know, I am a trainee branch manager, so I hope I will find a solution. […] I had a very simple problem, so I hope I will get some clarification, some solutions from here. I have experienced branch managers here. So, I think it is very easy for them. […] In the branch where I was working, I had the problem of transparency between senior and branch manager. I had one of my seniors who was not transparent to me. She did not tell me exactly what is going with the staff. She used to keep things to herself. And despite of all the feedbacks that I would do with her it was not easy for her to tell me the real situation". (Transcript, July 3, 2014).

This short extract illustrates a set of different legitimisation strategies. First, while Godfrey is explicit about his need for help, he highlights from the outset that he is trainee branch manager, thus capitalising on his lack of experience and relatively low expert status as justification for his lack of knowledge. Second, he describes the problem as "simple" and "easy" to solve, which reduces the importance and gravity of the problem, thus limiting the seriousness of not knowing. Third, when describing the issue, Godfrey lies blame on the senior loan officer, whose actions are responsible for the problem, despite his attempts to mitigate it. This legitimises the problem showing that the existence of the problem was not his fault and that he made anything possible to fix it.

Likewise, several participants used the problem presentation to showcase their expertise by highlighting a plan of action, which they laid out in detail, ornamented with extensive technical explanations. The following extract illustrates Joshua's attempt:

> Facilitator: So, you want to address the issue of how can you increase your team's performance?
>
> Joshua: Yes, so first of all, I'm planning to provide feedback to those who performed badly, and we will have the agreement on the feedback form. We agreed that in this month we have to verify the issue of the price range and to separate their targets and in terms of numbers and the amount. And they said in last month there was a couple of cases which hindered them to concentrate on disbursement and making follow-up to the client. […] From the beginning of this month they probably started to make follow-up to those default clients and most of them are coming to the

branch to make an agreement and pay. Some of them are paying in instalments. So, it's a progress issue.

Facilitator: You seem to have a plan. So, what is it you need from the group then?

Joshua: I just want to see whether they have other ideas.

(Transcript, July 7, 2014).

In presenting the problem already with a solution and detailed explanations, Joshua uses the presentation as an opportunity to demonstrate his technical expertise in the matter and shows that he is in control. He makes clear that he is not really in need of help, but just wants to see whether other useful ideas are around. In doing so, he limits the risks that he is perceived as lacking the necessary knowledge to solve this situation.

The participants' tendency to act as experts was not limited to their role as problem-holder, but also transpired the practices as critical friends of those who were experienced managers. The role of critical friends was to support the exploration of the problem by helping to surface assumptions and find new perspectives that would bring about a new understanding of the problem. In doing so, critical friends were encouraged to adopt an inquiry attitude, and to explore the problem together from a standpoint of ignorance, rather than from an expert perspective, which assumes that they know the problem and have a solution they can provide. However, experienced managers tended to engage as experts for solutions rather than facilitators of inquiry, which limited the critical reflection that took place in the learning sets.

When I intervened to re-focus their efforts on the exploration of the problem and to foster an inquiry attitude, participants technically engaged with my interventions and turned their observations into questions. Most of the time, however, these questions seemed not to be posed with an inquiry mindset, but rather functioning as hidden advice or opinions. As a result, the collaborative inquiry, which was meant to be supportive, had frequently resemblance to a cross-examination, where questions were thrown at the problem-holder to push him in a specific direction rather than opening up new perspectives. The following extract from the transcripts is exemplary:

Godfrey, a trainee branch manager and the most junior in the group, struggles with the experience he made with one of his seniors. The experienced managers immediately start 'grilling' him:

Godfrey: So, it was the case whereby I found out that there are things that my senior never told me before and I was not aware of that […] I left and then I started thinking like this was not okay […] So my concern is that in the new branch now I don't want to repeat the same thing. So, how can I prevent this and make the thing going in the right direction?

Wilson: Do you hold meetings with your seniors?

Godfrey: Yes.

Wilson: How frequent?

Faraji: And what do you say in these meetings?

Wilson: How frequently did you hold meetings with your seniors?

Godfrey: Frequently at least not less than once per week and if there is anything else it might be more than that depending on the situation of where we are…

[…]

Faraji: In the former branches were you discussing performance or also other issues?

Godfrey: Plus the other issues.

(Transcript, July 4, 2014).

Frequently, in their role as problem-holders, participants often reacted defensively, trying to protect their recognition as capable managers by justifying their actions and, at the same time, devaluating the knowledge of others by highlighting why this piece of advice was not appropriate to their situation. Salim's reaction, a branch manager, to a suggestion from Idriis, a head office manager, illustrates this strategy:

> "You don't understand. You're from head office. You sit in your office, and you don't move. But *we* deal with clients, real people who come to our offices and complain." (Transcript, August 4, 2014).

By highlighting the different location and nature of their jobs, Salim invalidates Idriis' opinion and discourages further questions or feedback, while at the same time promoting his own expertise for the problem. The relatively blunt rebuff was rather

uncharacteristic for any of the managers, who frequently took great pain to sugar-coat their messages in a direct exchange.

Furthermore, throughout the program, participants showed a tendency to resist critical analysis. An important condition for critical inquiry as envisaged by the design was the participants' openness to accept and engage with uncertainty, leaving the comfort zone of taken-for-granted beliefs and convictions by engaging with new perspectives and experimenting with new strategies. However, the analysis of participants' practices has revealed a clear tendency to 'play it safe'.

This became visible early on in the program, when during the discussion of one group's ground rules, two managers fought hard to establish formal boundaries to limit critical inquiry:

> Imani, a branch manager, proposes to establish clear boundaries to exclude some topics from discussion. Imani is supported by Godfrey, a young and inexperienced branch manager who also begins to actively lobby the establishment of boundaries. Eric, a head office executive working closely with the CEO, disagrees with this idea.
>
> Imani: Yes, I think we should define some boundaries, like personal matters, things from private life.
>
> Eric: If we reach that point… we cannot define everything. We have too many rules.
>
> [Others in the group laughing]
>
> Imani: You never know, come on guys.
>
> Godfrey: We have all different problems, you know…
>
> Imani: That's why we are sitting here now…
>
> [Others in the group laughing, some murmur in Swahili. The conversations drifts towards something else.]
>
> Me: Let's come back to the boundary topic. We have not yet come to a conclusion about the boundaries yet. What does everyone think about including boundaries in the ground rules?
>
> Wilson: Maybe like what Imani suggested. We should go deeper and include untouchable topics about personal life maybe. When we are afraid of that.
>
> (Transcript, July 3, 2014).

Throughout the process, participants tended to dismiss alternative perspectives or challenges, regardless of whether they were provided by peers or me, as facilitator. Most of them stuck to their initial interpretations or, if they acknowledged an alternative view, refused to act upon it. The reluctance to engage with alternative perspectives was particularly notable in situations where their underlying assumptions were surfaced and questioned and were thus threatening to the security and certainty of their comfort zone. The following example illustrates this:

Facilitator: What is the implicit assumption of what you say?

Manager: What do you mean?

Facilitator: What does it imply when you say staff needs to be controlled? What idea of your staff is implied?

[Silence]

Facilitator: Let me explain what I mean. You said that your staff needs to be controlled because otherwise they would not do their job. This is a rather negative idea of your staff. For me it sounds like you say that your staff needs to be controlled and punished, because otherwise they would avoid doing their job. They are inherently demotivated and not interested in fulfilling their task.

Manager: No, I don't think that. There are people who are motivated. But for the most part, people are only interested in their own personal gain.

(Transcript, G2 S1, July 2014).

Resistance to engage with novel perspectives was particularly observable when attention was drawn to the power relations that underpinned a problem, which was an important part of the design. Several participants had brought problems to the sets, which they had framed as problems of efficiency by highlighting, for example, how the budgeting process (Transcript, July 3, 2014), the way in which decisions were taken in disciplinary committees (Transcript, July 3, 2014), the arbitrary approach to communication (Transcript, July 3, 2014) or the purchase process (Transcript, July 3, 2014) affected their performance. Managers insisted on pursuing technical solutions, despite my interventions and alternative interpretations through the lens of power and politics. Thereby, it was not necessarily a question of not agreeing with this

interpretation, but of a reluctance to act upon it. One case that is illustrative of this pattern is Faraji's, who is an experienced branch manager struggling with the way communication is organised in the MFI.

> "There is no clear path [of communication]. Anybody wakes up in the morning and communicates. This person from the head office makes communication through the subordinates, regardless whether this person is the right person or not […] They don't see the importance to communicate to the branch manager. […] But his affects us, people don't respect us like this. […] They can squeeze the management, because we [the branch managers] have lost power. They started slowly, very slowly, very slowly. Then they gained power, they gained power to transfer, transfer, transfer. Then they come…now they are hitting you, you see? [Suddenly stops, looks at the group and smiles] But this remains confidential eh… because they can transfer me." (Transcript, July 3, 2014).

After Faraji's description of the issue, the group was asked to summarise their understanding of the key issue. All group members, including Faraji, concentrated on the issue of communication. When I made an observation about the power relations and politics involved, which Faraji himself had highlighted, Faraji back-pedals:

> "I don't think… for me I don't think it's about power…what we need here…if just you can inform, and it will be understood. You tell somebody 'You know we have this person. We think he fits somewhere else because of this and this'. And then I think if the branch manager has an argument he can say 'Yeah, yes it's no problem, because they are bringing the other guy. It's no problem. It's ok'."(Transcript, July 3, 2014).

Faraji's account was an unusually explicit account of power issues, which illuminates his awareness of the power dynamics in the MFI. The way he speaks indicates his frustration with the authority that enables head office managers to take decisions over his head, which he perceives as abuse of power. The fact that he tries to build in some safeguards by reminding the group of the rule of confidentiality illustrates that he is aware of the political consequences of what he is saying. However, Faraji chooses to frame the issue around notions of efficiency. When I offer a different reading of the situation by highlighting Faraji's own words and language of power, he actively dismisses going in this direction and insists on treating the issue as a problem of efficiency and politeness. In the next session, Faraji declares the problem as solved, arguing that since last time we spoke, this miscommunication has not happened

again. In doing so, Faraji avoids further inquiry into the issue and can remain in his comfort zone.

Similarly, participants attempted to circumvent the critical analysis of conflicts and emotions in the learning sets by pretending that they do not exist or by openly resisting their exploration. The following extract provides an example of this:

> One manager is struggling with low performance in his branch. He attributes this, partially, to a new procedure that has been implemented by a credit area in the head office. Another participant, a head office manager from another credit area in the head office, has defended the procedure. The branch manager is furious and claims that this procedure was only implemented to make life easier for "you guys in the head office". The discussion gets unusually heated. At some point, I intervene.
>
> Me: I feel there is some tension right now. Perhaps we should take some time to address this?
>
> [Silence]
>
> Me: I felt that the emotions started boiling a bit. How do you feel about that?
>
> Branch manager: No, it's ok. It's not a problem.
>
> Head office manager: It's fine.
>
> (Transcript, August 7, 2014).

This situation was a rare display of emotions on part of the participants, who usually acted in a very self-contained way. However, when I probe into the emotions that were at display, both the branch manager and head office manager avoid explicitly addressing them and pretend that "it's not a problem".

Participants also showed a tendency to avoid uncertainty, when it came to deciding on managerial action to solve the problem. Usually, participants settled for solutions they felt were safe, which usually meant actions that had proven to work in the past or, even if not, at least were legitimised by the organisational discourse. Thereby, their decisions remained firm, even when I challenged them on the value of their choices. Godfrey's example illustrates this:

Godfrey: What I'm planning is giving more feedback to the seniors, especially giving them the room to explain me more about the branch situation. But you know transparency is within someone. What I worry is how can I make him or them be transparent on me? See? Because even what I faced is not like I have not been discussing with them. We were discussing, but someone can decide not telling you things maybe. I don't know.

Facilitator: But you said you were giving feedback to the senior before and it did not work out. So perhaps, it might be interesting to look at something different. What could be other alternatives to build up trust in your relations with your seniors?

Godfrey: I think feedback is a good way of doing it. Just talking and telling them my expectations.

Facilitator: What do the other think?

Faraji: It's also good to have more meetings with the seniors so there is better communication.

(Transcript, July 3, 2014).

Feedback talks, which were frequently used to clarify the supervisor's expectations, were a widely used tool in the MFI and encouraged by top management. Despite my observation that so far feedback had not worked for him, Godfrey insisted that this is the best way forward for him. In doing so, Godfrey remains in his comfort zone and avoids the risk and potential failure of trying out something new. Faraji's suggestions of having more meetings was also in line with the organisational discourse and more of the same, avoiding the risk of uncertainty. Other safe solutions included, for example, providing training, or "talking to people" and "explaining things".

Frequently, when participants had committed to novel solutions, they tended to refrain from implementing them in practice. The following summary of an episode illustrates this:

Imani, a branch manager, struggles with the loan repayment rate in his branch. In the discussion it becomes clear that the issue has become pressing in several of the branches.

Facilitator: Do you somehow explore these things together? Among branch managers? With other departments? […] I mean apart from the branch manager meetings, are there forums to cooperate and discuss this issue and find a collective solution?

Imani: Maybe we discuss it in the branch managers meeting, but as you know we don't have much time to discuss this issue. We just have some issues where we have some strategies… few. But in detail…branch managers have not been working that way.

Faciltiator: Would this be an option? To organise branch managers so you can tackle shared problems, including arrears, together?

Imani: Yeah, I think this would be good. There are many things we can discuss together. [He has a big smile on his face]

Imani seems intrigued by the idea to create a platform for exchange among branch managers. He tries to involve Faraji, another branch manager. However, Faraji is sceptical. He does not believe that it would work and suggests that it would be better if such an initiative was organised by HR or the credit department in the head office. In the next session, I ask whether they have made any progress on the issue. They did not, but ensured that they would – at least passing the idea on to HR. However, this never happened.

(Transcripts, July 3, 2014).

In summary, the examples in this section have illustrated that participants in the LDP tended to avoid critical reflection by resisting recognising their helplessness as well as their own biases, assumptions, and emotions and by avoiding the uncertainty associated with novel perspectives and actions. These practices stood in sharp contrast to those the LDP design aimed to promote and considerably limited learning through critical reflection in the LDP.

5.3 Tendency to collude in the avoidance of critical reflection

The third tendency to act I have constructed from the material is the participants' tendency to collude in the avoidance of critical reflection. An important part of the design was the role of the set in supporting critical reflection by surfacing contradictions in their peers' accounts and the negative dynamics that constrained critical reflection in the group. However, the material indicates that participants tended to do the opposite by supporting the concealment of contradictions and conflicts.

Throughout the program, participants refrained from surfacing contradictions by the way in which they engaged with their role as critical friends. Thereby, participants used diverging strategies. For example, several participants stood out in the set for their attempts to remain silent in their role as critical friend. This was particularly observable in situations where the person who was acting as critical friend, was considerably more junior or less experienced than the person who presented a problem. In contrast, those who were more experienced and senior tended to engage proactively in their role as critical friend. However, as shown above, they did so by giving advice and guidance instead of engaging in critical inquiry. Both strategies contributed to limiting the possibility of critically analysing their peers' assumptions and contradictions.

Similarly, participants colluded in the avoidance of critical analysis in relation to the conflicts and dynamics that were mobilised in the sets. For example, participants tended to quickly avert situations of disagreement, which had the potential for resulting in conflict between members in the group. This became particularly observable in the participants' tendency to support their peers, when they were put on the spot by my interventions, by helping to justify their behaviour and offering direct exit strategies.

The following example is illustrative for this tendency, where two managers jump in to help their peer to legitimise his silence as critical friend, after I had surfaced his behaviour:

> It is Erik's airtime. Erik is an experienced head office business manager. One of the managers, a rather inexperienced head office manager, had been very silent during the discussion of Erik's problem. I intervene to explore his behaviour.
>
> Facilitator: Sorry, if I interrupt for a second. I would like to make an observation. I have noticed that you have been very silent in this discussion. What is holding you back?
>
> [Silence]
>
> Facilitator: What makes it difficult for you to participate?
>
> Manager 1: It's not difficult, I just have nothing to add.
>
> Facilitator: How do the others in the group feel about this?

Manager 2: It's ok. You know, I have the same sometimes, when it's a problem I don't know. He is from a different area, so he does not know the problem.

Manager 3: But maybe he can find a question next time.

Manager 1: Yes, I will find one next time.

(Transcript, September 22, 2014)

This extract illustrates the participants' collusion by exemplifying several strategies to support the avoidance of critical engagement with the dynamics in the set. When I highlight the silence of the inexperienced support function manager, he simply denies any difficulty. One of his peers jumps in to legitimise this behaviour by indicating that he "has the same" sometimes. In doing so, he provides an acceptable explanation, which discourages further exploration of the issue. Another peer also comes to his rescue and suggests that, maybe, the manager will act differently next time. By proposing a practical solution to the problem, he supports the support function manager in opening the door to circumvent further critical scrutiny, who quickly promises to be more involved next time. In doing so, the two managers help avoiding a critical analysis of the dynamic.

The following extract is the continuation of the situation, where two managers who were fighting over the credit procedures, and provides another example of this:

Me: No one wants to comment?

[Silence]

Participant: What I see is that we are tired. Perhaps we can take a break.

[Approval in the group: "Yes, a break" – "Good idea"]

Me: But this would be a good opportunity to explore what makes management so difficult. What triggers these emotions. In the end, this is part of our daily work.

[Silence]

Me: Well, ok - let's take a break.

(Transcript, August 7, 2014).

This extract highlights again how the participants mutually supported each other in the attempt to avoid critical reflection. When I do not let the managers of the hook, their peer jumps in to stop the discussion. By proposing that all are tired, the participant offers an explanation that legitimises the conflict and supports the managers' cover up by proposing a practical solution, which diverts attention from the conflict. The group supports this by approving the suggestion to take a break.

Furthermore, this extract also shows how, in my role as facilitator, I colluded with the participants in the avoidance of critical reflection letting them off the hook easily. This was increasingly the case since their collective resistance created anxiety in myself and mobilised my own political strategies, which limited my readiness to promote the exploration of set dynamics and challenge the participants' strategies. For example, while at the beginning, I had taken on a intervened more with the aim to instigate critical reflection, in the attempt to further participants' engagement with the CAL design, with the program advancing I increasingly limited my process interventions to promote critical reflection and rather adopted a role that was similar to a set member, where I would get involved in the problem discussions, where I tried to support participants with my knowledge, to provide them with a benefit they deemed valuable for their practice and which, at the same time, would provide real benefit to the MFI. While I tried to bring in critical perspectives to instigate questioning insight/bring them to new knowledge and new strategies, I did so in a way that was less inquiry and rather advocacy. In doing so, I joined the participants' collusion and actively participated in sustain their practices to resist critical reflection.

In summary, the examples in this section have illustrated that participants in the LDP tended to collude in the avoidance of critical reflection by refraining from surfacing assumptions and contradictions in their peers' accounts and supporting the concealment of the conflicts that emerged in the sets. These practices stood in sharp contrast to those the LDP design aimed to promote by the collaborative process it was based on, and considerably limited both the critical reflection on participants' problems and the critical analysis of the dynamics in the sets.

5.4 Tendency to transfer shared responsibilities to experienced experts in the set

The fourth and last tendency I constructed from the material is the participants' tendency to cede collective responsibility to experienced experts in the set. An important part of the design was to encourage self-directed action by offering choices and putting control over process and organisation into the participants' hands, rather than the facilitator's. This principle required participants to assume responsibility for the learning process to address their own problems as well as to collectively organise the set's structure and activities. The analysis of participants' practices has foregrounded contradicting dynamics of assuming and ceding responsibility in the learning process. However, the diverse strategies united in limiting the organisation of the process in a way that would promote learning.

On one hand, participants showed a tendency to assume responsibility of the learning process. For example, in the discussion of the problems the managers brought to the set, those participants who were experienced and had a long seniority in the organisation took a leading role by providing advice and ideas on how the challenges could be addressed. Similarly, most participants made ample use of their opportunities to take their own decisions in their role as problem-holders by avoiding investing time in their participation in the LDP, resisting alternative perspectives and refraining from implementing action. They did so to the extent that they, covertly or openly, resisted my interventions as set facilitator. As shown above, in my role as facilitator, I frequently intervened in an attempt to encourage participants to pass through the different stages of the learning cycle or to surface the dynamics that limited critical reflection. This often resulted in me taking on a more prominent role than I had foreseen, getting heavily involved in the process by making observations and asking questions to promote re-framing of the problem and model a critical inquiry approach. However, participants tended to resist these interventions. Increasingly, I colluded in their strategies and thus contributed to limit learning through critical reflection.

At the same time, participants showed a tendency to cede control to me as set advisor, or to other more experienced set members. For example, as shown above, in the discussion of the problems, participants expected their peers, particularly those who

had accumulated more managerial experience as themselves, to provide solutions for the challenges, instead of contributing to the creation of new knowledge themselves. Similarly, participants turned to me for explanation and guidance on the process, take decisions on the way forward for the group and to organise the learning sets, particularly at the beginning of the process. Increasingly, I tried to withdraw from this guiding role, leaving a vacuum that required participants to find their own way forward. In such situations, where the sets were confronted with the need to assume responsibility as a group and collaborate to organise the activities of the set, the participants showed a tendency to transfer responsibility to those who were most experienced and had the longest seniority in the MFI. The following extract illustrates both dynamics in a situation where participants were confronted with the uncertainty about the process:

> It is the first session. After an extensive introduction to the process and some housekeeping, we start a round where everyone provides a short overview of the issue he wants to discuss based on the brief they have sent prior to the set meeting. I open the floor for the participants – but there is a long silence. When I inquire into this silence, there is still more silence, until Moses, a long-time head office manager, breaks it. Akida, the oldest manager, joins in:
>
> Moses: I just want to say. It's the first time, so everyone is waiting for somebody to start to see how it goes or get a direction. We have not done it yet.
>
> Akida: It was not clear whether first we discuss what we sent or we can choose something else. So, it was not clear.
>
> […]
>
> Moses: Ya. we were just waiting for somebody to start.
>
> Akida: First of all, nobody is sure if this presentation should go according to the structure of the brief. Or you need to explain the incidence, then the group will help to put what falls where.
>
> (Transcript, July 3, 2014).

All participants seem overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity of the process and were at a loss of what to do. In a first instance, participants waited in silence to see whether I would take over control and provide additional explanations or whether someone else would make the first step. When I inquire in this silence, those who were less experienced continue in silence, and it is Moses and Akida, two of the most

experienced managers in the group, who take it on to explain the situation. This dynamic was visible throughout the program, where it was usually the experienced managers who asked for input and guidance.

The dynamic of ceding control to experienced experts in the set became even more explicit in situations, where the groups were confronted with the challenge of taking a decision on who should assume responsibility for a specific task. The following vignette is one of many examples that illustrates the pattern:

> The group wants to propose a project to the management team. When they ask me whether I could "pass the idea on" to the management team, I refuse and highlight that the organisation of such issues is their own responsibility. The group discusses who should take on the task:
>
> Wilson: I think Ismael should do it.
>
> Faraji: Yeah, Ismael.
>
> [Approval from the group – Ismael smiles, somewhat forced].
>
> Faraji: Come on Ismael, you sit on the same floor.
>
> Ismael: Ok, no problem.
>
> [Silence]
>
> Facilitator: Ok, so that's the group's decision?
>
> The group: Yeah, Ismael will do it.
>
> Facilitator: Ismael, is that ok for you?
>
> Ismael: Sure, no problem.
>
> This is not the first time that the group has voted for Ismael to assume responsibilities for the group, and I bring this observation to the table:
>
> Me: Interesting. Ismael seems to be your favourite candidate to take over such tasks.
>
> [The group laughs]
>
> Me: What makes Ismael the best candidate for this?
>
> Faraji: He is close to them. The management, I mean.
>
> Me: What do you think would happen if someone else would do it?

Faraji: We can do it, but it's easier if he does it.

Me: So, Ismael is the best candidate because he has better access? But could it not be an opportunity for you to interact with the management team?

Godfrey: It's better when he does it. They listen to him more. Perhaps he can convince them.

Me: What would make them listen more to Ismael than to one of you?

Godfrey: He is close to them. He can talk to them easier.

Ismael: It's ok, I do it. (Transcript, September 2014).

This vignette illustrates how participants attempted to transfer responsibilities first to me as facilitator and ultimately pass it on to Ismael, the most experienced manager in the set who closely collaborates with the management team. As such, he is perceived as being in a better position to convince top management of the importance of the project. The others in the group are explicit about how his position is related to his social network and closeness to the management team and this power differential is recognised by all. Ismael accepts the tasks without delay – although he does not seem very eager to do so. This pattern has featured prominently in the sets throughout the program and contributed to reproduce the organisational relations, where those who were seen as being more powerful tended to assume the role as experts thus replacing the missing figure of a trainer for those who were more inexperienced and junior.

In summary, the examples in this section have illustrated that the participants were keen on acting in a self-directed fashion regarding the extent to which they invested time in learning and engaged in critical reflection about their problems. However, the analysis has also shown that they did so in ways that constrained rather than promoted meaningful learning. In contrast, when it came to collective responsibilities, participants tended to transfer control to those they considered experienced experts, for example to me as set facilitator or to those members in the set they considered the most adequate given their experience or position in the MFI. These practices stood in sharp contrast to those the LDP design aimed to promote through the principle of self-direction and considerably limited both the opportunities to gain questioning insight

and further develop their individual and collective reflective competence by gaining organising insight.

5.5 Conclusion

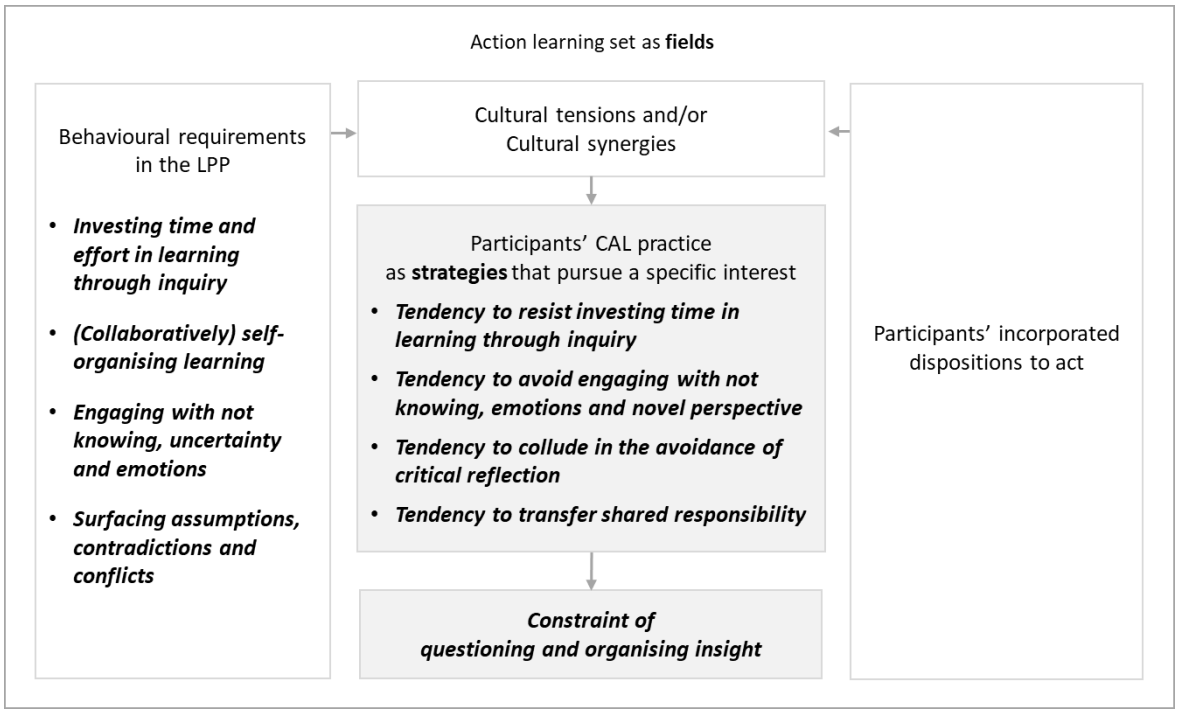
The aim of this chapter was to provide insight in the participants' tendencies to act that were the result of their practical sense-making of the LDP design. I have presented four tendencies to act: the tendency to resist investing time in learning; the tendency to avoid engaging with not knowing, emotions and novel perspectives; the tendency to collude in the avoidance of critical reflection; and the tendency to cede collective responsibilities to experienced experts.

The analysis has further shown that these tendencies to act conflicted with those practices the design aimed to promote through its focus on learning through the process of collaborative critical inquiry, which I have elaborated in chapter 4. As such, the practices of the participants have limited critical reflection on both their problems and the dynamics in the set and constrained the learning that was made possible in the LDP.

The analysis of the participants' tendencies to act contributes to the research questions by illuminating the practical enactment of the design as outcome of the participants' practical sense, which is an important basis for exploring this sense-making in chapter 7.

Figure 5.1 embeds these results in my overall conceptual framework.

Figure 5.1: Participants' tendencies to act in the conceptual framework



In the following chapter 6, I provide insights in the participants' incorporated disposition to act and the mechanisms of distinction that underpin them, before drawing the different analysis strings together in chapter 7 to explore the cultural politics that were mobilised in the LDP and generated the participants' tendencies to act presented in this chapter.

6 Participants' habitus: dispositions to act

In the third sting of the analysis, I have constructed the participants' habitus. In chapter 2, I have conceptualised the participants' habitus as their incorporated logic of managing and learning, expressed in their dispositions to act. In this chapter, I present the results of the analysis.

As elaborated in chapter 3, the material that was the basis for the construction of participants' habitus dispositions stems from both different forms of participant observation, as well as informal ethnographic interviewing, which aimed to elicit participants' experiences, practices and assumptions of managing and learning. The data structure of the emerging themes and an illustration of the relations among the middle managers can be found in appendix 6 and 7.

It is worth mentioning that the material that has informed the analysis of the managerial habitus has been significantly denser than the material that provided insight in the participants' learning experiences. The reasons for this are of practical and conceptual nature. In the first instance, it lies in the ease of access. The problems that managers brought to the set provided a deep insight in their managerial practices and the social conditions of their practice. Similarly, the opportunity to observe the participants in their 'natural habitat', by observing several business meetings contributed to a rich production of material. Furthermore, the analysis of their managerial logic also provides insights in the broader context of the MFI. The internal relations of the field of managing were not only the past conditions that created the participants' habitus, but also represent the current broader context of the LDP program. I therefore considered it vital to gain a deeper insight in this. In contrast, the construction of their logic of learning relies mainly on the participants' stories about their past experiences, which I elicited in ethnographic interviews and casual conversations, or which had emerged naturally during the LDP program.

In the following sections, I first present the participants' incorporated disposition to act. Since both practices, managing and learning, seemed to follow a similar logic, I present the findings together as participants' general dispositions to act. In section 6.1. I explore the participants' disposition to invest time and effort in learning, in section

6.2 describe their disposition to maintain harmony in their relationships, in section 6.3, I analyse their disposition to promote their image as managers-in-control and in section 6.4 I explore their disposition to prioritise short-term performance above anything else, including learning. In exploring these dispositions, I also illuminate the guiding principles that underpin these dispositions which are rooted in the participants' understanding of knowledge, personal relationships, managerial authority, and financial income as important forms of capital and mechanisms of distinction in different learning contexts, the MFI and their broader communities.

6.1 Disposition to invest time and effort in relevant learning: the role of knowledge as cultural and symbolic capital

The first disposition I have constructed from the material is the participants' disposition to learn, which has developed from their understanding of knowledge as cultural and symbolic capital.

This disposition became visible in the participants' general interest in their own development and their willingness to invest time and effort to accumulate knowledge they considered relevant. For example, and several times during my visits, I learned that some of the managers had applied for a spot in a highly rated training offered by the Central Bank. One manager even left the LDP and the organisation to pursue a masters' degree. Similarly, when the managers participated in learning events, they felt relevant for their daily work, they were willing to work hard to acquire the knowledge imparted. The following fieldnote provides an example of the determination of one of the managers in a corporate training at the beginning of his career in the MFI:

> Manager: I remember at the beginning. You had to work hard in the training. It was always very dense: calculating interests, doing client evaluations, how to interview, case study after case study. But I came from a totally different area. It was difficult at the beginning to keep up.
>
> Me: And how did you manage to keep up?

Manager: I remember that in the first weeks, I had to study at home. I had to review what we had done. But the more cases I saw, the easier it became.

(Fieldnotes, September 2014).

Thereby learning required investing considerable amounts of time to practice the application of knowledge to make it an automatic routine, as another manager highlighted:

Me: What do people need to do to be successful in these trainings?

Manager: You need to work hard and practise, so you can do this without thinking. It has to become automatic.

Participants were also keen to learn from those they considered more expert or experienced. For example, for younger managers it was a popular strategy to ask more experienced colleagues for advice, as the following fieldnote illustrates:

Me: So, what do you do when you wrestle with a problem?

Manager: Sometimes I ask Ismael for advice. He is a first-generation manager. He knows how things work here and can give good guidance.

(Fieldnotes, July 9, 2014)

The analysis further suggests that the participants' disposition to learn was underpinned by their understanding of knowledge as cultural and symbolic capital. On one hand, participants believed that knowledge was a critical resource to achieve their performance results. Banking was seen as knowledge-intensive work, and the success of the organisation was intractably linked with their knowledge as middle managers. The following statements illustrate this belief:

"We *have* to learn, so we can become better managers. We need to improve our performance. We need to motivate our staff better and make them more productive." (Fieldnotes, March 11, 2014)

"It's important to learn. Everyday. To perform in your position, you need to adapt and develop strategies to be efficient. The more you know, the better can you do your job. It's actually a competitive advantage." (Fieldnotes, July 4, 2014).

More specifically, their knowledge was important to enable their staff to achieve their targets:

> "As manager you must know. You must know each and everything. […] You must explain your staff what to do. A manager who doesn't know is no good" (Transcript, July 03, 2014).

> "I think our role is to solve problems. Our staff relies on us to help them achieve their targets and sometimes they face obstacles, and we must help them to overcome them." (Fieldnotes, August 4, 2014).

The material further suggests that the importance of knowledge to promote performance was underpinned by their awareness of their own lack of relevant knowledge. In the previous year, the MFI's product portfolio had considerably developed, which made the participants' managerial work more complex and required a broader and technically more specific knowledge base:

> "All these new products, they are good. But we have to familiarise us with them. We need to have a clear understanding of how they work to be able to explain it to our staff." (Fieldnotes, September 24, 2014).

At the same time, many of the middle managers felt that they lacked preparation for their role. The majority of middle managers were aged between 23 – 35 years and had no previous professional experiences from other financial institutions. This was largely a result of a set of internal HR policies and practices in the MFI, which aimed to recruit young people, who would then be developed internally. Additionally, while the MFI was famous in the market for its thorough technical training in its credit core business, there was little training in other technical areas or leadership. Many of the middle managers felt that they got 'thrown into the cold water':

> "Even me, I did not attend any training on how to deal with these corporate clients, like corporate sales training. Not at all. Here you just learn by doing. You just find that you are there, and you need to do it."(Transcript, G2 S3, September 23, 2014, p. 57).

> Yeah, maybe knowledge is what is also lacking. In the sense that there hasn't been a kind of a systematic training when one is promoted to the next level. So, the presumption has been like 'You have been promoted, so you will act accordingly. But this has not been so for everyone. So, this is also an issue. (Transcript, G3 S3, September 24, 2014, p. 37-38)

Hence, while being an important cultural capital to promote their and their staff's performance, knowledge was rare for many middle managers, particularly those who were young and/or had less seniority in their positions.

On the other hand, the analysis suggests that participants' disposition to invest time and effort into relevant learning was also underpinned by the symbolic value of knowledge in both managing and learning. The managers shared the conviction that their appointment as managers was made upon considerations of knowledge, and that it was the superior knowledge they possessed that distinguished them from non-managers. Godfrey made this belief very clear:

> Facilitator: Why do you think you guys have been selected for the managerial role? Why did you become a manager, and not somebody else?
>
> Godfrey: Because we are the best.
>
> (Transcript, July 3, 2014)

Hence, knowledge served as justification for their managerial role and the formal appointment to a managerial position was seen as a symbolic act that institutionalises and formalises these differences in knowledge by conveying the formal authority to take decisions and give orders. In this sense, knowledge functioned as an important entry qualification into the managerial group. Thereby, it was not only considered as means of distinction for the individual manager, but for the entire managerial group, and a lack of knowledge could have an impact on the reputation of the managerial group in general, as illustrated in this extract:

> Faraji is agitated and raises his voice when he speaks. One of the senior loan officers in his branch has applied for an open branch manager position but was not considered. Instead, a relatively young senior loan officer from a different branch was selected. Faraji is furious: "It was not his turn. He has been with the bank for less than two years. [The senior loan officer in my branch] works here much longer." Imani agrees: "What experience does he have? He was loan officer for just 12 months. Senior for not even a year. And now he is branch manager?" Wilson tries to intervene: "They say he has a very good performance." Faraji clicks his tongue and insists: "This does not

> make him a good manager. You must know how things work. How can he know?"
>
> (Field notes, G1 S3, September 22, 2014).

This extract shows how Faraji and others see knowledge as one of the most important managerial assets, and therefore should be the most important criteria in the selection process. In Faraji's view, the selected candidate is not worthy to enter their managerial circle due to his young age and short time in the MFI, and thus his lack of knowledge. His fierce rebuttal of the candidate shows how important this issue is for him and suggests that his concern is not about the individual performance of the candidate, but more likely about the impact his lack of knowledge might have on the middle managerial caste in general by threating the very justification of their role.

Hence, for the managers knowledge served as an important means of distinction, and this not only in relation to non-managers, but also among themselves in the middle manager group, where those who were considered as more knowledgeable were attributed more authority. This was generally reserved for those who had been working with the organisation for a long time and were respectfully referred to as "first- and second-generation managers". Knowledge was also attributed to older managers, based on the assumption that age was an indicator for knowledge. The following extract from my fieldnotes illustrates this:

> We take a break and chat about the upcoming wedding of a colleague. Moses asks me whether I am married and whether I plan to have kids anytime soon. When I negate this, he asks me how old I am. I laugh and answer that in Germany, you would not ask a woman about her age. Moses laughs and asks: "Why not? It's not a bad thing. Age is good. Age means you have experience. Look at Akida here. He is our old-timer. And he is respected, everyone knows that he has experience and people ask him for advice." Akida smiles at the compliment but says nothing. He does not have to - his age speaks for itself." (Fieldnotes, G1 S2, August 4, 2014).

The material also suggests a symbolic value of knowledge in the context of learning. In their accounts, participants constructed the learner as deficient and shared a belief that training was a means to fix past mistakes and eradicate inadequate behaviour. The need for learning was seen as born out of failure and mistakes, which were

attributed to a lack of knowledge and skills. In the introductory event to the LDP, participants have described that they expected to "improve", "rectify behaviour", "prevent mistakes" and "improve performance" (Fieldnotes, March 3, 2014).

Given this prevailing construction of the learner as deficient, for the managers the acquisition of knowledge was the most important part of learners' job description. Thereby, they had learned that in the role as students it was advantageous to demonstrate their newly acquired knowledge during the learning event, since this served as proof of their capability and their potential to learn. The experience of one of the managers in a technical corporate training program illustrates this belief:

> "Those who came from a financial background had advantages. For me, I come from a communications background. I had to learn all the financial jargon and how to calculate interest and those things. Basically, I had to learn from scratch. So, at the beginning I was far behind many others, and the trainer became very impatient. He probably thought I was stupid. I failed the first exam, and I am pretty sure he thought that I couldn't do it. But I worked hard and eventually I caught up. And look, now here I am." (Fieldnotes, December 2014).

Furthermore, the participants felt that the demonstration of their newly acquired knowledge awarded them the label of being a "good" student, who dutifully fulfilled their role as a learner, which was frequently rewarded with preferential treatment. In contrast, they had experienced that not knowing had negative consequences leading to reprimands and public humiliation. The following statement illustrates this logic:

> "You know, I was not a very good student. Theory is not my thing. I like getting my hands dirty. I always felt that those who were good with the theoretical stuff got a bonus. … When *I* did not do my homework, it was a big deal. When one of the "good students" (he draws quotation marks in the air) did not do their homework, they got away with it." (Fieldnotes, August 4, 2014)

Hence, knowledge was seen as an important mechanism of distinction, dividing the student group in good and bad, capable and incapable students, who were treated differently.

In summary, the analysis suggests that the participants' general disposition to learn was structured by their belief in the role of knowledge as cultural and symbolic capital

which, directly and indirectly, contributed to enhance the achievement of their performance results. Furthermore, the analysis has shown that participants were socialised in an approach to learning and problem-solving through knowledge accumulation, where knowledge was transferred from an experienced expert (teacher, trainer or experienced colleague) to a less experienced person.

6.2 Disposition to maintain harmony: the role of personal relationships as social capital

The second disposition I constructed from the analysis is the participants' disposition to maintain harmony in their relationships, which I suggest has developed based on their understanding of personal relations as social capital.

The disposition to promote harmony was mainly illustrated by the participants' tendency to prevent direct confrontation. For example, middle managers showed a propensity to avoid making unpopular decisions. This tendency was particularly shown by younger and inexperienced managers, as the following example illustrates, where Boniface, a regional manager, criticises the lack of decision-making on the part of the newly appointed branch managers:

> Boniface: What else is that they should be able to take actions when there's mutual procedure because the procedure itself gives them power but they don't quite often exercise this power.
>
> Facilitator: Why do you think that is?
>
> Male Speaker: Because they are afraid of the consequences. They are afraid that this creates conflict, and this affects them.
>
> (Transcript, G3 S2, August 2014).

Similarly, when middle managers did implement unpopular decisions, they tended to put blame on either rules and regulations or top management. "It was a management decision" or "that's what the procedure/memo says" were expressions I heard many times in the learning sets. Although these practices conflicted with their disposition to

promote their image as managers-in-control, which I discuss in more depth in section 1.3, these strategies were widespread, particularly among inexperienced middle managers. This indicates that in certain situations, the managers felt it was more expedient to maintain harmony in their relationships than promoting their managerial authority.

In a similar manner, the participants showed a tendency to prevent confrontation by remaining silent, particularly in their relationships with their superiors. As middle managers, they were at times invited to comment on decisions from top management. In such situations, middle managers tended to remain silent – a strategy I had observed on several occasions in the branch manager meetings. When I shared this observation in a conversation with one of the expatriate managers, who had only been working in the MFI for a few months, he acknowledged his frustration:

> "They just look at you. It drives me crazy. I want them to tell me what they think, I give them the opportunity to get involved and they just don't say a damn thing." (Fieldnotes, September 21, 2014).

When I shared my observation from the meetings with one of participants during a break in a set meeting, Eric commented:

> Eric: You know, sometimes we don't agree with the decisions taken by the management. But we just have to accept them, even if they make our life harder.
>
> Me: But why not just give it try?
>
> Eric: They ask for our opinion, but later they do what they want. So why should we say something they probably won't like?
>
> Me: What do you think would happen if they don't like it?
>
> Eric: I don't know. Besides, it's their responsibility to make this kind of decisions.
>
> (Fieldnotes, September 22, 2014).

While for the expatriate manager silence meant nothing, for Eric silence was a way of avoiding saying something negative that may generate conflict or dislike – especially since he saw decision-making as the responsibility of the top management. The conversation continued and we drew parallels to other

instances of silence, for example, when being late or not being able to meet a deadline. Moses, who was used to act as my cultural interpreter, shed some light on this prevalent way of communicating:

> Me: But if you know you can't make it, but you don't say it - isn't this ineffective? You cannot coordinate, and it affects everyone else.
>
> Moses: Yes, sometimes it's true. But they don't want to create conflicts.
>
> Me: But doesn't this just postpone the conflict? For example, with those who depend on you and cannot proceed with the process… I think personally it would annoy me, if I only learned at such short notice that you can't deliver, although you insisted that you would.
>
> Moses: I suppose. But in *that* moment, you avoid discussion. Later you figure it out. Perhaps you can manage.
>
> (Fieldnotes, September 22, 2014).

The conversation with Moses elucidates that postponing a negative message was seen as strategy to avoid confrontation in a specific moment, and that harmony in the here-and-now, especially when the encounter is direct and face-to-face, can be more important than the task. Hence, for managers it was not only a question of what was done, but it was of utmost importance *how* it was done. In this sense, the managers' disposition to maintain harmony conflicted with their disposition to prioritise short-term performance, which I discuss in more depth in section 1.4, which indicates that at times, they considered maintaining harmony in their relations as more expedient.

Likewise, participants' learning experiences revealed that silence was also an important strategy to maintain harmony in the context of learning. The managers had learned to recognise the teacher or trainer as a source of legitimate knowledge, and it was them who decided which pieces of knowledge were relevant and legitimate, and which were not. As such, teachers were not to be questioned. The following extract illustrates this strategy:

> "You know, we are not used to challenge experts publicly. At school or university, you would not question the teacher. Even if you think he's wrong. You just go with it and give the answer he wants to hear. They didn't like when you discussed. Just keep quiet, listen and learn." (Fieldnotes, September 2014)

The participants' disposition to maintain harmony became also visible in their many attempts to avoid the noise stemming from dissatisfaction. To do so, managers tended, for example, to cater to staff interests. Dennis' story exemplifies this desire, which is linked to the concern that dissatisfaction would lead to noise and demotivation:

> In the learning set, Dennis, a branch manager, is concerned about the dissatisfaction of his staff with a decision from top management to move a very large client deposit from his branch to another as collateral for a loan the client has taken out in a different branch. Dennis' branch is not allowed to disburse such large amounts; therefore, management has decided to transfer the client and his savings account to provide a one-stop service.
>
> According to Dennis, his staff, "starting from the senior", "have taken it badly". People in the branch have "only negative thoughts", are "very frustrated", "mad" and "completely demotivated". Dennis is very worried about the impact of his staff's dissatisfaction on branch performance. To raise the moral of his staff, he is determined to bring back the deposit. "That is what I want, to avoid that the situation gets worse."
>
> (Transcript, G2 S1, July 4, 2014).

This episode illustrates Dennis' fear of losing control over the situation, if he does not manage to calm the noise by satisfying his team's interests. He is afraid that his staff could stop working altogether, which would constitute a big problem for him in terms of performance. In his view, the dilemma can only be solved by him bringing the clients' money back in his branch, since this is what staff want. To do this, he is ready to accept both the administrative burden and the MFI's potential image loss in the client's eyes. In other words, Dennis prioritises the harmony in his team over organisational business considerations.

In a similar tenet, in their relationships with their classmates "being nice" was an important strategy to maintain harmony.

> "There was this one student in my class who was really good. He was some kind of a nerd. He was the one you would ask for help, because he knew everything. He was not really a "cool kid" (draws quotation marks in the

> air), but everyone was really nice to him, because they needed his help." (Fieldnotes, December 2014).

The analysis suggests that the participants' tendency to maintain harmony was connected to the role of harmony in creating good personal relationships. In their accounts, the managers have linked the quality of their personal relationships directly to the issue of harmony. The following statement exemplifies this belief:

> "Because if you are nice then the person says 'okay why should I not open up?' because you create the environment which the person feel free to speak out if I have a lot of problems. If the relationship is not good even if I have a lot of problems, I won't open up, I won't speak out." (Transcript, July 3, 2014).

Conversely, conflicts were believed to affect personal relationships negatively and promote behaviour that could have undesired consequences. Young middle managers were particularly concerned about the potential impact of a lack of harmony and bad relationships. They found themselves caught in the dilemma of pushing and controlling and the fear of repercussions from these strategies. This fear was notably pronounced by younger and less experienced middle managers, as is exemplified by Musa's experience:

> Musa was recently appointed as branch manager. For a few months now, he has been working in a new branch. He describes that "it's hard sometimes" because he has "to manage [his] friends" now. He says that although he has been transferred to a new branch, he knows all other branch staff there personally, because "we all know each other in the branches". He describes how he finds it difficult to follow up on some of his staff and have feedback talks when they do not achieve their targets, because "they ask: 'why are you like that now? We are friends. Why do you treat me like that?'". He is desperate to maintain a good relationship with them, because "if they turn on me, I have a problem." (Fieldnotes, Musa, September 24, 2014).

This short extract illuminates the importance harmony plays in Musa's personal relationships with his staff. On one hand, he feels being in control and pushing his staff is part of his managerial duty. On the other hand, he is worried that pressuring them creates conflicts.

The participants' accounts have provided insights that illuminate the importance of good personal relations, which is rooted in the participants' understanding of personal relationships as important social capital in both their role as managers as well as learners. On one hand, the material suggests that participants had a deeply engrained belief in the value of personal relationships as source of performance. The participants expressed a clear understanding that they were embedded in a network of interdependencies and required the goodwill and cooperation of others to fulfil their own responsibilities.

One manager emphasises the importance of his team in the development of his area by contributing new ideas:

> "In order to develop I cannot only depend on my own ideas. I need some ideas from the rest of the team. And I know that they have so many ideas which can be very, very useful to me. But I don't get new ideas from them… So that also has an impact on my performance level." (Transcript, July 4, 2014).

Another manager highlights how he was dependent on the cooperation of other departments to achieve his targets and deliver high quality work:

> "If they don't perform, I don't perform; we are working together. So, if they do not produce reports on time, then it's a big issue for me. I need to wait for the reports and so on." (Transcript, July 4, 2014)

On the other hand, the material suggests that the managers' disposition to maintain harmony was furthered by their understanding of personal relationships as a source of information. A vast personal network was believed to be paramount to be kept in the communication loop:

> "I think one of the most important assets I have as a manager are my personal relationships. If you are on good terms with people, they tell you things. Things that help you understand what's going on." (Fieldnotes, September 2014).

This was considered particularly relevant since decisions were made centrally by the top management and communicated top down, often excluding middle managers from the communication flow. This made middle managers dependent on the information shared in their personal networks. Good relationships were especially

important for those who worked in the branches, and as such had limited access to the decision-makers in the head office. The following statement underlines this:

> "For us as branch managers it's difficult. I cannot just knock the door like people in the head office. I have to call, and often people don't answer. Then I have to call again. I try to meet people, when I am here [in the head office] for the branch manager meeting, but I have not time to talk to all people I would like because I have to go back to my branch." (Fieldnotes, August, 2014).

In contrast, the close cooperation of middle managers in the head office with the senior management is seen as opportunity to build up and use the social networks available to get information and shape decisions. The following comment from a branch manager illustrates this belief:

> "These people here [in the head office], they have a chance to talk to the management. They can go and talk anything. They say, we saw this guy is not fitting [in this branch]. So, the management says: 'Talk to this guy' and then they send this guy away. […] They can squeeze the management here, because we [the branch managers] have lost power here. Because they started slowly, very slowly, very slowly. Then they gain power, they gain power here to transfer, transfer, transfer. Then they come…now they are hitting you here, you see?"
>
> (Transcript, July 4, 2014).

The analysis has also revealed differences in access to managerial networks among head office managers, where managers in the credit area seem to have easier access to the top management than non-credit managers. This became visible in the fact that on several occasions, non-credit managers had their meetings with top management cancelled or postponed, in favour of credit managers, whose concern and requests were prioritised. One of the managers links this prioritisation of credit managers to the origins of the MFI, which historically focused on the provision of loans as single product.

> "You know, [the credit managers] still think that they are the most important ones because we started as an MFI with only loans. But now we have also other banking services, and especially deposits are now really important to secure our liquidity." (Fieldnotes, September 2014).

The importance of personal relationships as a source of knowledge also played an important role in the participants' experiences of learning with both teachers and trainers, as well as peers. With regards to their relationship to teachers and trainers, the participants' were acutely aware of the asymmetrical relations of learning, where the teacher/trainer had the "power to punish" and inflict serious consequences on learners. This power stemmed from the teachers/trainers right to evaluate the learners' performance. The following comment from my fieldnotes illustrates this relation and highlights the participants' strategy to protect from this threat by maintaining harmony:

> "You know, he's the one who grades you. You just do what he says, even if he's not right. You write it in the exam and then you forget about it." (Fieldnotes, September 2014).

Along similar lines, Juma comments on the power of evaluation of trainers in corporate programs and the serious impact this can have on their career:

> "They need good feedback from their induction training. This is like a first filter and a first impression. In a sense they depend on his goodwill." (Fieldnotes, August 7, 2014).

The managers have learned that in the context of learning, conflicts in relationships carry the risk for negative consequences, such as public embarrassment. The memory of one of the managers illustrates this:

> "I remember a classmate. The poor guy was the target of this one teacher. He got constantly humiliated in front of the class. He got always asked these difficult questions and he never knew the answer. […] I don't know why he picked him. It must have been a personal thing." (Fieldnotes, September 26, 2014)

In a similar manner, the managers had learned that it was expedient to maintain harmony in their peer relationships, which were seen as a source of knowledge. Kelvin's memory of the cooperation with his classmates provides an example:

> "With my friends we would exchange homework. Sometimes one would do them and we others would copy. Next time it was someone else's turn." (Fieldnotes, December 2014).

This resonates with Juma's experience in corporate trainings, where he perceived his peers as source of knowledge, and where teamwork was helpful to do the task and learn from it:

> Juma: In the training, we had to do group work to work on a case. This was helpful, so we could help each other and learn from each other. Sometimes you had understood something others didn't understand, and you would explain them.
>
> David: Yes, but this was also unfair, because I had to do much more work than you.
>
> Both laugh.
>
> (Fieldnotes, December 2014).

In summary, the analysis has foregrounded the managers' disposition to maintain harmony in personal relationships, which stems from the value they attach to personal relationships as social capital, which has the potential to convert into cultural capital (knowledge) and enhance the achievement of their performance results. The analysis has also highlighted that, at times, this dispositions conflicts with their disposition to promote the image as managers-in-control as well as their disposition to prioritise short-term performance.

6.3 Disposition to promote the image as managers-in-control: the role of managerial authority as symbolic capital

The third disposition I have constructed from the material is the managers' disposition to promote their image as managers-in-control, which has developed from the participants' understanding of their managerial authority as symbolic capital in the MFI.

Participants used diverse strategies to foster this image. For example, in meetings middle managers tended to showcase their results and highlight their technical expertise. At the same time, they paid careful attention to cover up a lack of knowledge or information, when they felt it opportune to do so. Faraji illuminates this strategy in a set meeting:

Faraji explains that staff gets frequently transferred to other branches without prior notice to the branch manager.

Faraji: So the branch manager doesn't know anything, the decision is made by the management. Then the staff comes: 'Branch manager, do you know?' I say, 'What's going on?' 'I'm being transferred. You don't know?' Sometimes I say 'I know, I know' although I don't know.

Me: So, you are pretending that you know?

Faraji: Yeah. So, this guy continues trusting me. When I admit that I don't know, they'll stop and start mocking you. That's a problem. Pretending makes the respect continue.

(Fieldnotes, July 4, 2014)

Similarly, the analysis has foregrounded the participants' tendency to avoid situations of uncertainty, which carried the risk of a loss of control. For example, middle managers had a strong desire to formalise processes. On several occasions in the branch manager meetings, the managers asked to receive written instructions. In their daily operations, they frequently insisted on receiving emails instead of being called on the phone. The following conversation illuminates this practice and highlights the importance of written evidence to justify their actions:

In the break, two participants discuss in Swahili with raised tempers. This is an unusual display of emotion, and I ask Wilson what is happening. He explains that one of the managers complained that he had not yet received an answer to a request he had made via email, and that he was angry because it had cost him valuable time. I had observed situations like this several times and have been asked myself to send emails instead of calling. This troubled me and I asked Wilson to help me understand.

Me: But if time is limited, would it not have been easier to just make a phone call to coordinate? Then you get the answer right away and can discuss things.

Wilson: It would. But people like to have a backup. If things turn out wrong, they can claim that this was the instruction. So, it's not their fault.

(Fieldnotes, August 7, 2014)

Additionally, branch managers often asked head office staff or top management for clear instructions to handle difficult situations in relation to both business and staff

management. This seemed to be common practice among middle managers and Jason, an expatriate manager, deplored the lack of middle managers' willingness to assume risk:

> "[The middle managers] like to stay in their comfort zone, and they have strategies to do that. On the department or branch level there is no innovation to drive the business, because they are not willing to take responsibility for something that has no management approval. Things could go wrong you know – and then who is to blame?" (Fieldnotes, January 14, 2014).

Strategies to foster their image as managers-in-control became also evident in their tendency to make their managerial position visible for others, for example by emphasising their privileges through small gestures and comments or openly displaying physical status symbols. A conversation with Sven, a European expatriate in the MFI, provides an example of how managers saw the size and quality of cars as demonstration of success and control:

> Sven pulls out of the parking lot and waves to some staff who are also leaving the building. It has been raining for several days and the streets are muddy. Dirty water splashes and drains from the car. Sven laughs and jokes that tomorrow his staff will ground him because his car is dirty. I look at him quizzically and he explains that managers in the bank had approached him on several occasions asking why his car is dirty. Some even suggested that he should rather buy a new and better car since this was important for representation.
>
> (Field notes, July 7, 2014)

The fact that Sven has been approached on several occasions by different people, in a culture where high level managers are not readily criticised, highlights the importance status symbols and representation have for local managers. Particularly in high profile positions such as Sven's, the size and quality of their cars matter in underlining their position internally, as well as externally, by sending a message about their own and the MFI's financial success.

In relation to their staff, the managers tended to highlight their position and authority by being clear and explicit about the consequences they can inflict upon staff or

sometimes outright threatening them. Musa, a branch manager, highlights the importance of demonstrating control in their role as managers:

> "It's important to show that you have an eye on them and you have means to deal with them. Once your staff are told and have understood that you look at these things, you'll see some changes. […] And if not, you have other options. […] Maybe you tell them that you issue a lot of warning letters, maybe during the process the other underperformers will be terminated. It's about taking difficult decisions on those who are continuously underperforming, so others can see that we have not enough time to forgive you."
>
> (Transcript, July 4, 2014)

The analysis suggests that the participants' tendency to foster their image as managers-in-control was connected to the way in which they constructed their managerial role, and the value their authority played as driver of business results.

The participants' accounts portrayed an understanding of work as hierarchically structured, where power lied in the hand of those who occupied managerial positions. As elaborated above, in the managers' understanding, this distribution of power was rooted in their superior knowledge. In this sense, hierarchy was justified and, as the following explanation illustrates, necessary to establish order:

> "You know, hierarchy is important, so everyone knows what is expected from him. The job description tells you what your tasks are and to whom you report. This must be clear. Otherwise, everyone can do what they want." (Fieldnotes, August 7, 2014)

From the managers' perspective, their managerial task in this hierarchy was to direct staff and ensure that business results were achieved. The following extracts are exemplary for their role understanding:

> "As managers, we must be in control of everything and tell staff what to do. We give them direction, so they are able to achieve their targets." (Fieldnotes, G2 S1, July 2014)

This view of management as control was underpinned by a deeply engrained belief that staff is generally self-interested and uses any opportunity to achieve their own agenda. Without control and supervision, staff was expected to deliberately make

mistakes, take short-cuts or circumvent procedures, as the following extracts from the transcript exemplify:

> "The issue remains there that the attitude issue also is a problem. […] People, they don't take themselves as part of the institution. They think only of what they can gain themselves." (Transcript, G2 S1, July 2014).

Additionally, the managers' accounts highlighted the belief that staff are intrinsically lazy and motivated by external stimuli rather than intrinsic drive. To address their staff's unwillingness to work, participants considered it vital to control and push their staff to perform:

> "The problem was that they were too relaxed. […] It was like 'You were here, and you didn't take actions'. […] […] Now I'm saying that I have to surprise them that they don't relax to the extent that later they are in problems that create trouble even to myself" (Transcript, G3 S3, September 2014, p. 28).

In a similar way, Kelvin's explanation shows how he has accepted and interiorised this logic:

> "I can say there is another big problem. I am a subordinate also to my superiors. If Boniface is my superior and he is making a close follow up with me, I will make his work right away. […] But if Musa is my superior and he's telling me that 'please do this', but he is not making a close follow up, then I can leave it, if I don't get the time to do it. So, if somebody is making a close follow up on you, you actually get the time, whatever it takes you to do it."
>
> (Transcript, September 2014, p. 30).

In this context, demonstrating that they were in control of situations was an important strategy for managers to enhance the recognition of their managerial authority and thus ensure their staff's compliance:

> "You need to show that *you* are in control and that they can't just walk all over you. If you're too nice they think they can do what they want." (Fieldnotes, July 2014).

A lack of recognition of their managerial authority was believed to lead staff and peers to withhold cooperation, as Marvin's comments highlights:

> "I need some inputs [for this report], but you really, really have to push people in order to give you the input. […] You need to follow up, sometimes even physically, after seeing no response. So, I copy the MT" – Others nod at his comment and admit that they frequently use the same strategy. (G3, S2, Sept 2014).

This extract shows that Marvin lacks the authority to enforce the cooperation from others. To get things done, he chooses to borrow the authority of top managers by copying them in the email. The others' approving comments to his explanation illustrates that this strategy seems to be both legitimate and popular in situations where managers lack authority.

The analysis suggests that the participants' interest in promoting their image as managers-in-control was further promoted by the fact that in the MFI, their positional authority was visibly limited since they were excluded from decision-making and communication. In the managers' accounts, top management was frequently described as "command centre" (Fieldnotes, August 7, 2014), where all power was centralised. Decisions were made by the top management and a few senior head office managers and communicated in a top-down approach. Middle managers were presented with a fait accompli and tasked with operational implementation.

Thereby, the management team was seen not only in charge of strategic decisions but was heavily involved in operational problem-solving. Middle managers had very limited control over their budgets and were dependent on management decisions, as the following extract exemplifies:

> Moses: The problem we have now is that we don't have even a single car for recovery issues. Every branch is having one car that is mainly used by seniors for monitoring. So, for recovery transport is an issue.
>
> Me: But wouldn't this be solved by buying a car?
>
> Eric: Yes.
>
> Me: So, where is the problem with that? I mean this is a quite straight forward action - unless there is some issue with it.
>
> Eric: Still there are some difficulties until the management approves it. They asked us to see the prices for cars, and what type of car we need. We made a proposal, but the management is still thinking. But we need it urgently.

(Transcript, July 3, 2014)

In addition, communication in the MFI was characterised by a high degree of arbitrariness on the part of top management and leading head office managers, and often excluded other middle managers from the information flow, particularly those who were inexperienced and/or working in the branches. This was problematic for many middle managers since, as elaborated in section 6.1, knowledge and information were considered important building blocks of their managerial authority, and as such, if publicly visible, their exclusion of the information flow could have high political cost. Faraji's experience exemplifies this concern:

> Faraji: Sometimes these people who were transferred… if they have something, they go directly to the head office managers, they don't come anymore. [...] They say 'I have spoken to dash, dash, dash. Yeah. I have spoken to dash, dash, so I'm going to take my leave', 'You are going to take your leave? How?' 'We spoke with XYZ, we arranged, and they agreed.' 'But you didn't tell me?' 'He will tell you.' […]
>
> Facilitator: So you feel you are losing authority?
>
> Faraji: Yeah! [with urgency] Sometimes you lose authority. Staff is not trusting the branch manager anymore. […] That's the thing.
>
> (Transcript, July 3, 2014).

Faraji tells the story in a very emotional manner. He uses direct conversations to exemplify his experiences, raises his voice and illustrates his points onomatopoetically ("dash, dash, dash"), speaks in long monologues and later bluntly admits his frustration. This way of speaking was rather unusual for any of the middle managers, who usually displayed a controlled manner of speaking. The emotionality with which Faraji describes his experience underlines his frustration and the importance this issue has for him.

In summary, the analysis has foregrounded the participants' general disposition to promote their image as managers-in-control, which was structured by the ways in which they constructed managerial authority and the role the recognition of their

authority played as symbolic capital in the MFI, which is a prerequisite to ensure staff compliance to achieve performance results.

6.4 Disposition to prioritise short-term performance: the role of financial income as economic, symbolic, and social capital in the community

The fourth and last disposition I have constructed from the material is the managers' disposition to prioritise short-term performance results over anything else, including learning. This disposition has featured prominently in their account and, I suggest, has developed based on their understanding of their financial income as economic, symbolic, and social capital in their communities.

Strategies to prioritise short-term performance results included, for example, not attending meetings or withholding cooperation with others when they felt this would not contribute to enhancing their own performance, disregarding or bending the rules and procedures to maximise end-of-the month results, as well as pushing the boundaries of the very raison d'être of the MFI. Kelvin's case illustrates this last strategy:

> Kelvin, a head office business manager, is struggling with the results of his department. To increase his financial performance, he strives to add products that serve "large corporate clients", because it is those who "bring the money". He explains that the competition is far ahead. However, so far management has blocked his attempts in that direction.
>
> Idriis: Do you have an idea which services you would like to introduce?
>
> Kelvin: Yes, for example we tried to look on the market what other banks are doing in corporate. […] So, like consumer loans, bank overdraft, letter of credit. So, there are other products which are very, very useful to them and which we are not offering at the moment.
>
> Idriis: Do you think these products fit to our [business model]?
>
> In the same conversation, another set member, Marvin, reminds that the supervisory board previously has already rejected similar requests:

> "But [Kelvin], regarding the new products you want to introduce to management, remember that we had that five-years management plan, where we proposed some of the products that must be introduced to our bank and things will be a bit easier. And more of those things we wanted to introduce here about bank overdraft, consumer loans and letter of credit… but none of them were approved by the board of directors, because it goes against the mission of (the MFI). Then do you think it is possible for management to approve while the Board of Directors didn't approve?"
>
> (Transcript, July 7, 2014).

This vignette illuminates the strong performance orientation prevalent among the middle managers. Kelvin wants to introduce new products that attract "large corporate clients" who "bring the money". However, products and target groups in the MFI had been defined based on social considerations, not (only) economic ones, and large corporate clients were intentionally excluded. While profitability was an important issue in the social-for-profit approach to enable investments in terms of outreach, ideologically it played a secondary role and was rather seen as means to fulfil the social purpose. In his position as Head Office Business Manager, Kelvin can be assumed to be aware of the social motivations of their work. Nevertheless, his desire to provide new catalysts for his area's performance is so strong that he is ready to trade the very essence of their business for a productivity increase.

Furthermore, the managers' accounts and stories also illustrated their tendency to prioritise performance at the expense of learning. For example, despite their interest in further education elaborated above, the managers (and their staff) did not act upon these wishes due to their workload:

> "Sometimes you might find that your staff are not motivated because maybe they want to study. But they don't get a chance because of the tough work they're doing. I understand this, I also thought about doing a diploma in [my area], but I have just no time for this." (Transcript, July 4, 2014.

Similarly, managers tended to skip corporate trainings with the explanation that they had urgent issues to attend, particularly, when they did not expect an added value from the event. This tendency to prioritise performance prevailed, even if managers

had identified a clear need for learning in themselves or their staff. Idriis' example is one of many where managers chose to refrain from creating learning opportunities due to concerns over short-term performance:

> Idriis is struggling with the demotivation of his staff. He describes how people are stuck in the "same position, same repetitive work" every day, which makes them feel "bored" and "stuck". He is convinced that introducing a rotation system would be a good solution since it would make people's work less monotonous and provide them with the opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge and prepare them for further career steps. However, he feels that implementing such a system is difficult given the strong pressure they operate under:
>
> Idriis: "It is difficult for me to rotate, because I have a lot of deadlines and it's a very tight situation. […] So, I have to rationalize according to their experiences […] For the case of rotation, I think I'll put a cross because […] it's going to affect deadlines. […] Reporting periods are very frequent, and it will take staff some time to gain that potential to meet those deadlines."
>
> (Transcript, Idriis, July 4, 2014).

The managers' disposition to prioritise short-term performance over learning stands in tension to their disposition to invest time and effort in learning elaborated above. However, the participants' accounts and stories provide further insight by illuminating the important role of performance as driver of financial income. Thereby, the managers understood performance results as contributing to their financial income in two ways.

On one hand, the achievement of performance results had a indirect impact on the managers' financial income by considerably shaping how they were perceived by others and the extent to which their managerial authority and position was recognised. All middle managers, without exception, explicitly established their teams' performance as the very purpose of their managerial role:

> "As manager, it is my responsibility that my staff performs." (Transcript, August 6, 2014)
>
> "I think to have a proper performing department is one of the goals of every manager, and it's my responsibility to make them perform. (Transcript, G2 S1, July 7, 2014).

To be able to fulfil this responsibility, they considered the regular achievement of business results critical to make people recognise the legitimacy of their managerial position:

> If staff sees you are helping them to achieve their targets, this makes them see that you know. Your expertise… they believe that you're in the right place, that you are more knowledgeable than they are." (Transcript, August 6, 2014)

As I have explored in more depth in section 6.3, the managers attached great value to their managerial authority, which was an indispensable prerequisite for their staff to accept their decisions and follow their orders. Their staff's willingness to do so was, in turn, critical for the achievement of monthly performance results in the future.

On the other hand, the middle managers had learned to appreciate the achievement of performance results as direct driver of their monthly financial income. They were used to working in a system where remuneration was composed of both a fixed salary as well as a flexible bonus paid upon attainment of individual and group performance goals. This applied particularly to managers and staff in the branches, but also, to a certain extent, to those in the head office. What counted were the quantifiable results at the end of the month: specific numbers in terms of disbursed loans or opened accounts, the punctual completion of projects and reports, or the attainment of other key performance indicators. One of the branch managers made this logic explicit, when in the action learning set, he presented the issue that his loan officers tended to disregard procedures to increase their monthly loan disbursements, which had increasingly brought problems with the compliance department:

> "It's all about the money. Performance means bonus. Bonus means more money at the end of the month. You know, people are counting on this money. Here in Tanzania, people spend money before they have it in their pockets. If the bonus is lower than expected, they have a problem." (Transcript, July 7, 2014).

The maximisation of the bonus was important for managers and staff alike since for many their financial income was their single most important reason to work. In a lunch time conversation, Joshua makes this very explicit:

Me: Why do you work at [the MFI]?
Joshua: What do you mean?
Me: What were the reasons you applied for a job here?
Joshua: To be honest, I have applied to several vacancies. But the financial sector normally pays well. Even if here the pay is lower than the average in the banking sector, it's still good money to have a decent life.

(Fieldnotes, July 4, 2014)

This keen interest in a stable financial income transpired the entire MFI, and often made people accept jobs they were not really interested in. As Idriis explained in relation to some of the cashiers:

> "[In some cases] you might find he or she is okay with the job description, although there are a lot of tasks, which are not related to [their professional profile]. Someone might accept that because they need the job. They just want to be employed and earn money." (Transcript, Idriis, July 4, 2014).

These financial considerations shape many decisions throughout the lives of both managers and staff. For example, Marvin revealed that his choice of studies was dependent on the money-making potential of the degree:

> "I would have liked to study something else, but sometimes it's not a personal choice. My family and I decided together that accounting was a good choice, because accountant jobs pay well." (Fieldnotes, August 7, 2014)

The importance of money was also illustrated by the expectations participants had on the institution to cover all costs, when they were "sent to trainings". The following extract from a discussion in one of the action learning sets illustrates this:

> Today, we must change location on short notice since our usual meeting room is needed for a Supervisory board meeting. When we arrive at the location, which is located in a more exclusive area, a fierce debate about the costs of lunch evolves:
>
> Manager 1: They have to consider us, because they bring us here, they have to consider the environment. How are we paying for the food? In this area the food is expensive.
>
> […]

Manager 2: I think the bank should at least cover half of it. […] Or, at least, they should organise to bring us food from somewhere else, where they see it's somehow cheap. […] You can see in other banks. The bank always covers to each and everyone. […] When we are doing training, it's not 100% benefit for us, it's also a benefit for the bank.

[…]

Manager 3: I know from state-owned banks. They provide at least an envelope.

Me: What do you mean?

Manager 3: It's an envelope with money, like a training bonus.

The participants decide to act and contact HR to ask for a compensation of the costs for lunch.

(Transcript, September 3, 2014)

This extract shows that money, even smaller amounts, was an important issue for managers. The fact that they decide to contact HR for a compensation highlights its importance, since usually, as shown above, they tended to accept decisions and remain silent.

Hence, taking into account the importance of money, I suggest that prioritising performance over anything else was a strategy for managers and staff alike to maximise their monthly financial income.

The analysis suggests that for managers, the importance of their financial income was rooted in its role as economic, symbolic and social capital in their communities. In 2014, when I conducted this study, Tanzania was categorised as a low-income country by the World Bank with large parts of the population living in poverty. While the managers in this study came mostly from a middle-class background with university degrees, they too had to navigate challenges to provide for their families, and several managers shared insights into the struggles many employees in the MFI shared given the economic situation. For example, during a lunch break, Eric made explicit what he believes are common aspirations:

"People need to make sure that their families have a good life, that they have what they need. They must pay for food, living, education. People

> want stability. What the government is doing is not helping us." (Fieldnotes, Eric, September 22, 2014)

In the managers' experience, economic uncertainty went alongside political instability. There was a palpable sense of discontent with the government. This was mainly due to high levels of corruption and bureaucracy, which have generated a lack of trust in the state, its institutions and policies as the following fieldnote illustrates:

> "It's not Germany", he says dryly. We are sitting around the huge oval table in the board room waiting for the other set members to arrive. Moses, Akida and I have been talking politics. Akida has shared his admiration for Angela Merkel, who he feels has integrity. Without any visible emotion, Moses explains: "In Tanzania, politicians put the money in their own pockets. We must take care of ourselves." (Fieldnotes, July 3, 2014).

As a result, people developed the tendency to trust in their close ones to organise their lives and go forward. The material suggests that the managers saw family and community as an informal safety net that balances the lack of a public system in dealing with the challenges of daily life. In the managers' experience, "*umoja*" (English: unity) is the fundamental principle that underpins the tight social fabric in their communities. Many Tanzanian proverbs embody the idea of *umoja*. One that I learned from Wilson during the LDP concentrates the essence in one sentence: *Umoja ni nguvu, utengano ni udhaifu* (Unity is strength, division is weakness). This closeness is also embodied in Marvin's comparison of family ties and highlights the financial responsibility of those who are the main breadwinner:

> "Our idea of family is different. For me, family is not just my kids, family are also the kids of my *dada* [Swahili for 'sister']. I am also responsible for them. Even my church community is somehow my family." (Fieldnotes, Marvin, August 4, 2014).

Family and community members take care of those who are less privileged, "who has, gives" (Fieldnotes, Wilson, August 7, 2014), particularly when the extended family is concerned. For example, in a conversation during lunch, it turned out that every single person at the table was financially supporting their extended family in one way or another. Especially in times of hardship, the community stepped in to provide support. For example, when close family members died or got hospitalised, friends and colleagues collected contributions to help the family cover the costs for medicines or

funeral services to stabilise the family's income after the loss of a bread winner (Fieldnotes, August 7, 2014).

As managers, the participants in the program were exposed to strong social expectations, since their position was associated with high expectations in terms of income, as Wilson commented to me in a private conversation in a break:

> "One reason why people are dissatisfied with their salaries is that they must fulfil their duties. I know we're not a normal commercial bank, but people outside don't know that. We are still managers in a bank, so there are certain expectations in terms of salary." (Fieldnotes, August 7, 2014).

In this context, managers perceived financial contributions to family and community as an important responsibility in their role as community members. The salary and bonus earned at work thus played an important role in the managers' life to provide for their family (economic capital), fulfil their social obligations in the community (symbolic capital) and thus contributed to the cohesion and well-being of the community (social capital).

In summary, the analysis has foregrounded the managers' disposition to prioritise short-term performance, which I suggest is underpinned by the role of their financial income as economic, symbolic, and social capital in their communities. This highlights the close, functional relationship between work and community life, as well as the dominance of their work over learning, which participants have incorporated in their habitus.

6.5 Conclusion

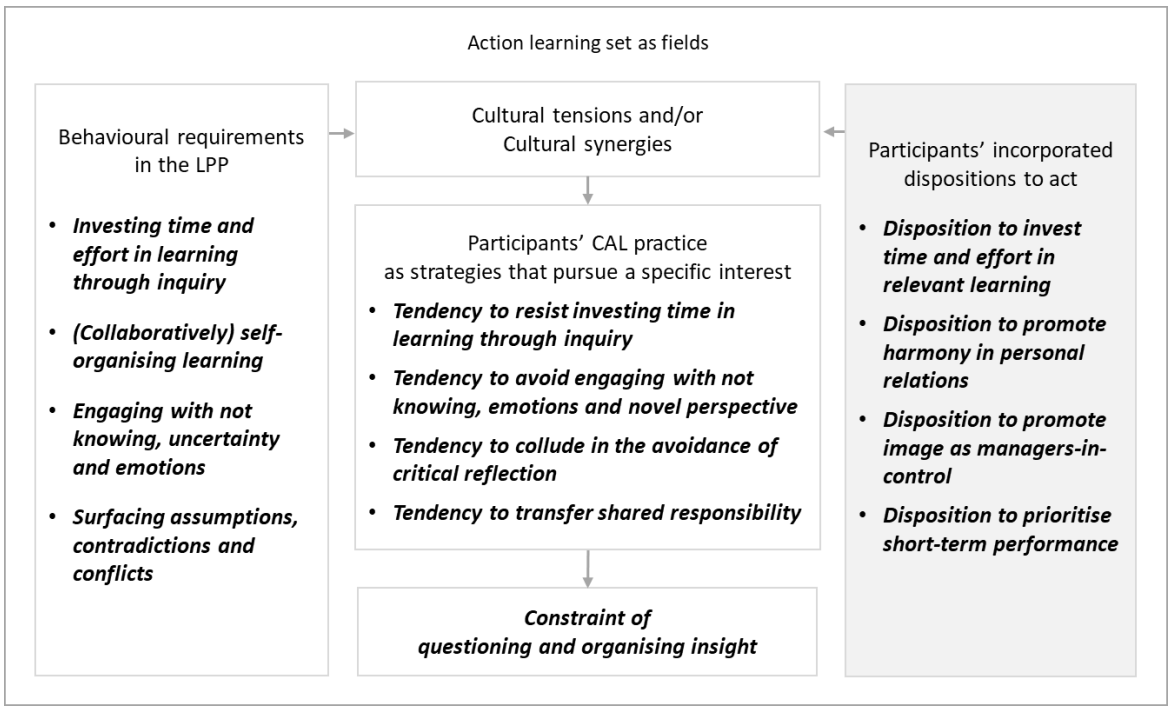
The aim of this chapter was to present the analysis of the participants' incorporated dispositions and the structuring principles that underpin them. I have presented four dispositions, namely, the disposition to invest time and effort in relevant learning; the disposition to maintain harmony in personal relationships; the disposition to promote the image as managers-in-control; and the disposition to prioritise short-term performance over anything else, including learning.

In doing so, I have shown that these dispositions have developed based on their understanding of knowledge, personal relationships, managerial authority, and financial income as important forms of capital and mechanisms of distinction in different context such as learning events, the MFI and their broader communities.

Furthermore, the analysis has highlighted some contradictions between the participants' dispositions to act, for example between participants' dispositions to invest time and effort in relevant learning and to prioritise short-term performance over learning as well as their dispositions to maintain harmony and to promote their image as managers-in-control. This underlines the importance of empirically analysing the participants' practical enactment of the LDP design, since practice cannot be predicted from mere theoretical analysis.

The analysis of the participants' dispositions to act contributes to the research questions by illuminating the logic of the local culture that was at play. Together with the results of logic underpinning the LDP, they contribute to exploring the tensions and/or synergies that emerge in the LDP, which I have conceptualised as habitus-field conflicts. Figure 6.1 embeds these results in my overall conceptual framework.

Figure 6.1: Participants' dispositions to act in the conceptual framework



In the next chapter, I draw the different analysis strings together to explore the cultural politics that were mobilised in the LDP.

7 Cultural politics in the LDP

The objective of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how the local cultural context shapes the political dynamics in an organisational CAL program in Tanzania to identify the challenges and/or synergies that may emerge when introducing CAL in such settings. Using a leadership development program in a Tanzanian MFI as vehicle for my study, I set out to explore the following research questions:

1. What tensions and/or synergies did participants experience between the cultural requirements of the CAL design and their local culture?
2. How did these tensions and/or synergies shape participants' practices in the LDP?
3. How did these practices promote or constrain learning through critical reflection in the LDP?

In the previous chapters, I have presented the results of the analysis of the behavioural requirements of the LDP design and the logic of learning and managing that underpins them (field); the participants' tendencies to act in the action learning sets (practice); as well as the participants' disposition to act and the mechanism of distinction that underpinned them (habitus). In this chapter, I tie the different strings of analysis together by using my conceptual framework elaborated in chapter 2. To recapitulate, I have conceptualised the tensions (synergies) between design and local culture as *crisis (doxa)*, where the external structures that are promoted by the design and the incorporated structures of the participants' habitus are incongruent (congruent). These tensions (synergies) ultimately generate the participants' strategies based on their practical sense-making of the design through the lens of their habitus.

Looking at the analysis results through this conceptual lens, I unpeel three layers of context, whose structures, which participants had incorporated, have mobilised cultural dynamics in the LDP, namely the CAL sets in the LDP, the MFI, and the managers' broader communities. In doing so, I identify three cultural dynamics.

The first two dynamics are mobilised by an incongruity between the structure of peer relations in the action learning set promoted by the design and the structure incorporated by the participants and represent a crisis for participants. This incongruity

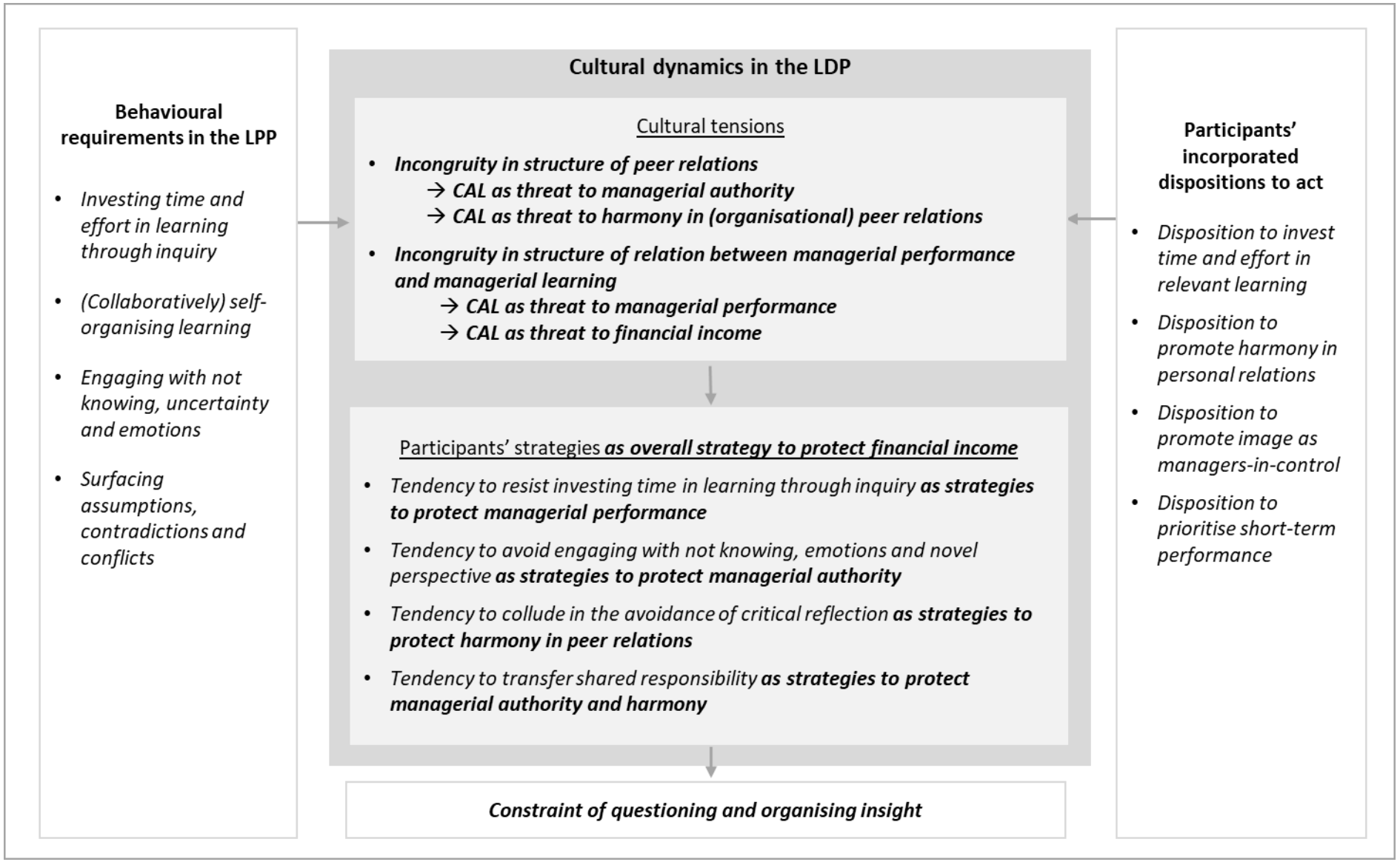
has mobilised participants' concerns about the impact of critical reflection and (shared) self-direction on their managerial authority and the harmony in their peer relationships, which has prompted them to use strategies to protect these resources, thus limiting critical reflection.

Central to the third dynamic is an incongruity between the structure of the relation between managing and learning promoted by the design and the structure incorporated in the participants' habitus, which also represents a crisis for participants. This habitus-field conflict has mobilised participants' concerns about the impact of CAL on their performance and, ultimately, their monthly financial income and has led them to generate strategies to protect this resource, thus limiting critical reflection.

As such, I argue that participants' strategies largely reproduce the structures of their habitus. To emphasise, I do not suggest that these strategies were conscious choices and that participants acted as *homines oeconomici*. Instead, I propose that these strategies were the result of their practical sense, which was based on their incorporated logics of managing and learning. Together, these three dynamics provide an in-depth understanding of how the participants' local cultural context has constrained learning through critical reflection and limited the participants' development of individual and collective competence for critical reflection by reproducing the participants' incorporated structures.

In the following sections, I present these cultural dynamics. To keep the integrity of the individual dynamics and surface how they have developed and manifested themselves, I present the cultural dynamics one by one, rather than following the overall structure of the research questions. First, I present the dynamic that has emerged from the participants' interpretation of the CAL design as threat to their managerial authority, then the dynamic that was mobilised by the notion of CAL as threat to the harmony in their peer relationships, before closing the chapter by presenting the dynamic mobilised by the interpretation of CAL as threat to participants' managerial performance. Figure 7.1 provides an overview of the findings embedded in my conceptual framework.

Figure 7.1: Overview of cultural dynamics in the LDP



7.1 CAL as threat to managerial authority: limitations to critical reflection and (shared) self-organisation

The first cultural dynamic I have identified is rooted in fundamentally different ideas about how relations were structured in the action learning set and the participants' concern about the recognition of their managerial authority, which limited their commitment to critical reflection and (shared) self-direction.

7.1.1 Limitations to critical reflection

A key requirement in the LDP was the participants' commitment to engage with not knowing, emotions and novel perspectives, which gained its value from the view of learning through critical inquiry that underpinned the program. This was important for two reasons: to create new insights into the problems the managers brought to the set and to practice their individual and collective competence of critical reflection. Such a commitment would require participants to engage with their own ignorance and the uncertainty that is mobilised by critical reflection to gain questioning insight. Additionally, to gain organising insight, this commitment would require participants to recognise and admit their own emotions and vulnerability and their role in creating dynamics that limited critical reflection as an integral part of their managerial practice. Such a view of learning would require participants to meet on relatively equal footing, and attention was paid to avoid formal hierarchies in the LDP. However, the analysis of the participants' practices in the LDP has shown that throughout the program, participants used strategies that were directed at avoiding the recognition of ignorance and uncertainty, as well as the explicit discussions of conflicts and emotions. Such strategies were used by all participants but were particularly observable in those who were experienced managers with a long seniority. Despite my attempts to promote critical reflection by modelling a critical approach to inquiry, providing additional tools and reading, and offering alternative frameworks of interpretation through interventions, these tendencies to act persisted and ultimately constrained both questioning and organising insight.

The habitus analysis in chapter 6 helps to illuminate these practices and provides insights that suggest that participants perceived critical inquiry as threat to their

(managerial) authority and, ultimately their positioning in both the action learning sets and the MFI. The analysis has revealed participants' incorporated disposition to promote their image as managers-in-control. Thereby, being in control of a situation was associated with notions of knowledge, expertise and rationality. To a large extent, participants' strategies were congruent to the ones they utilised in the MFI and other learning events, for example, showcasing expertise and hiding a lack of it or denying negative emotions and conflicts, which were seen as a sign of weakness and lack of control. The habitus analysis further revealed that the participants' disposition had developed based on their experience that being recognised as expert-in-control was an important symbolic resource in both learning and managing.

In the context of learning, participants had internalised the idea that demonstrating their expertise in the respective subject matter area furthered their recognition as "good" and "competent" learners, which frequently promoted preferential treatment. In the context of managing, participants had learned that being recognised as a manager-in-control would boost the recognition of their managerial authority. This, in turn, was seen as an important driver of performance since it promoted their staff's readiness to follow their direction. As such, for the participants, their managerial authority was an important symbolic capital in the MFI that supported the maximisation of their financial income at the end of the month, which was the reason they engaged in their managerial work in the first place.

Drawing on these analysis results, I argue that participants perceived an active engagement with critical reflection as a threat to their (managerial) authority. Participants felt that genuinely engaging in critical reflection would affect their recognition in the learning sets as good and competent learners. Additionally, and, I believe, more importantly, given that their peers in the learning sets were also their managerial peers in the MFI, the negative impact of acting in ways that could be perceived as loss of control could spill over to the MFI and potentially affect the recognition of their managerial authority in their daily work. From such a perspective, I argue that in avoiding the engagement with their lack of knowledge, emotions and novel perspectives, participants aimed to mitigate the risks to their positioning they perceived inherent in the commitment to critical reflection by protecting their

symbolic capital in both the action learning sets and the MFI. This interpretation also illuminates the fact that these strategies were particularly observable in those participants who possessed relatively long managerial experience and/or were with the MFI for a long time. Given their positioning in relation to their more inexperienced peers in the set, the political cost of a seeming loss of control was considerably higher for them, since in their superior position it was culturally unacceptable to lack knowledge or expertise.

7.1.2 Limitations to (shared) self-organisation

The participants' concerns about their managerial authority shed some light on the ways in which participants enacted the principle of self-direction, individually and as a group. As elaborated in chapter 4, self-direction was a key component of the LDP to promote learning that is relevant and provide participants with the opportunity to practice self-directed action, as individuals and middle manager group, in a safe space with the aim to promote independence from top management. A commitment to (shared) self-direction required participants to make their own choices in the solution of their problems and to collaborate in making decisions about how the group process is organised. The analysis of participants' practices in chapter 5 has shown that while participants were willing to assume responsibility in relation to their own problems, they did so in a way that has limited their engagement with critical reflection, which, as argued above, was underpinned by a concern about their managerial authority.

I argue that the fact that participants resisted my interventions to instigate critical reflection and willingly ignored opportunities to practice and develop their skills in this area illustrates how important the protection of their managerial authority was for them. The habitus analysis has shown that participants had incorporated a view of teachers and trainers as authority figures whose voice they, habitually, tended to unquestioningly accept due to their interest to maintain harmony and avoid the political cost of disrespecting authorities. In this sense, their covert and open resistance to my interventions represents a deviation of their habitual disposition and illustrates the importance they attached to protecting the recognition of their managerial authority.

One could speculate that this strategy was facilitated by the specific situation in the LDP, where participants perceived it as culturally appropriate to question me or openly resist my interventions, given my own biography and practices. As non-Tanzanian, the managers might not have felt bound to act according to the same logic, particularly because I had continuously insisted that they would challenge me and take their own decisions. Additionally, I did not work with the managers in the MFI, and as such the negative consequences of potentially culturally inappropriate behaviour would be confined to the learning set but was likely to have little impact on their managerial practice in the MFI. While this is speculation, it does not contradict the interpretation that at the heart of participants' strategies was a concern about the recognition of their managerial authority. Therefore, drawing on this analysis, I argue that when it came to the solution of their problems, participants perceived self-direction as an opportunity to protect their managerial authority, which legitimised their tendency to avoid critical reflection.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown that in the negotiation of shared responsibilities, participants tended to transfer control to experienced experts in the set. Drawing on the habitus analysis, I argue that participants interpreted the expectation to assume shared responsibility as threat to their managerial authority, since the uncertainty that was created by the lack of a trainer who organised the process involved the risk of making mistakes and "not doing things correctly". However, participants ceded their control only in situations where they considered it legitimate to do so, that is when there were others present who possessed more knowledge and expertise, and thus could be expected to take over control. The habitus analysis has surfaced that the participants had developed a strong sense of hierarchy, where tasks and responsibilities were clearly distributed in both managing and learning. In their managerial experience, problem-solving was centralised and it was top management or leading head office managers who made decisions and provided solutions. These incorporated relations illuminate the participants' tendency to cede control, for example, when participants, both experienced and unexperienced managers, turned to me as expert of the process. In these cases, participants considered ceding control to me as legitimate, since I was the one introducing the process and none of them

could be expected to be an expert in the process given the fact that it was novel to all participants. Similarly, in situations where participants shared responsibility among themselves, it was legitimate for inexperienced managers to cede control to more experienced managers since, given their greater ascribed expertise, they could be expected to assume responsibility. Similarly, the participants' sense of hierarchy illuminates the willing acceptance of shared responsibilities on the part of the more experienced managers. Given their relative superior experience in relation to their peers in the set, these managers felt that it was their responsibility to take control. Restraining from doing so carried the risk of being considered as lack of role fulfilment, and as such would negatively affect the recognition of their managerial authority by their peers in the group.

From this perspective, I argue that the contradicting practices of ceding and assuming control in the sets were both strategies directed to protecting the participants' managerial authority. Ceding control to more experienced experts in the set was a strategy to avoid the risks associated with making mistakes and failure, whilst at the same time minimising the political costs of not being in control. Conversely, taking control and initiative in the light of uncertainty was a strategy for experienced set members to protect their managerial authority by fulfilling the social expectations associated with their positioning.

In summary, the exploration of the participants' practices in the set through the lens of their habitus has shown how the participants' hidden interest in protecting their managerial authority has limited both their commitment to critical reflection, as well as their commitment to (shared) self-direction. While the strategies mobilised in the set reproduced the organisational relations among peers, their relation with me as facilitator was enacted in a way which did not correspond to their habitus, but which allowed them to avoid critical reflection in the attempt to protect their managerial authority and their positioning in the MFI. In this sense, the cultural dynamic which was mobilised by conflicting assumptions about how peer relations were structured and the way in which participants constructed their managerial authority, contributed significantly to constraining the learning achieved in the LDP.

7.2 CAL as threat to harmony: limitations to critical reflection and (shared) self-organisation

The second cultural dynamic I have identified is also rooted in fundamentally different ideas about how relations were structured in the action learning set and, in this case, the participants' concern about the harmony in their peer relationships, which equally limited the participants' commitment to critical reflection and shared self-direction.

7.2.1 Limitations to supporting critical reflection

The LDP was based on a view of critical reflection that was collaborative and collective. My role of set facilitator was envisaged as process consultant rather than expert, and the learning set was promoted as main source of learning. Consequently, the action learning set played an important role in supporting critical reflection. Peers were expected to function as a sounding board to support each other in the problem-solving process and collectively inquire into the political and emotional dynamics in the set. A commitment to supporting learning through critical reflection required participants to constructively challenge their peers and themselves by surfacing conflicts and contradictions in both their peers' account, as well as in the interactions in the set. However, the analysis of practices in the LDP in chapter 5 has revealed that participants colluded in the avoidance of critical reflection by employing strategies that contributed to concealing contradictions and conflicts rather than surfacing them. For example, those participants who were less experienced tended to use strategies of deference when dealing with those who were more experienced and/or had longer seniority by keeping silent in their role as critical friend and refraining from questioning their more experienced counterparts. In contrast, those managers who had accumulated managerial experience and seniority in the MFI were proactive in providing their support to the group by providing advice and criticism.

The habitus analysis in chapter 6 helps to shed light on these tendencies to act and provides insights into participants' sense-making of supporting critical inquiry as a threat to their social relationships in the action learning sets and in the MFI. As the analysis has shown, participants had incorporated the disposition to maintain harmony in their personal relationships in both learning and managing. This disposition had developed based on the participants' deeply engrained belief that good personal

relationships would serve as a source of information and performance. In regard to learning, the managers have come to learn that promoting good relationships with the teacher or trainer facilitates preferential treatment and prevents them from being punished or humiliated in front of their peers. Similarly, the participants had interiorised that good relationships with their classmates promoted their peers' willingness to share their knowledge and let others benefit from their skills. As managers, participants had come to learn that good personal relationships with their staff and colleagues fostered their willingness to cooperate and dutifully perform their tasks and, in addition, promoted their colleagues' openness to share critical information that was valuable to improve the achievement of their performance results. Whilst at first sight this resonates with the assumptions of the design, where the personal relationships in the learning set were seen as an important resource for learning, the habitus analysis has shown that participants had a different understanding about what "good" relationships mean and how these can be fostered. Whilst the design was based on the assumption that good relationships spring from supporting each other by surfacing assumptions, contradictions and conflicts, and thus promote meaningful learning, participants have come to learn that good relationships are those that are harmonious and free of conflict. Thereby, harmony was associated with acting according to cultural norms by fulfilling the social expectations that are imposed on the respective position. For those in powerful positions, this meant assuming responsibility by providing knowledge and solving problems. In contrast, for those in less powerful positions, this meant respecting those in more powerful positions by accepting their decisions and avoiding criticising or challenging them. Hence, there was an intrinsic friction between the assumptions about how to promote and leverage the benefit of personal relationships as social capital.

From such a perspective, I argue that participants perceived supporting learning through critical reflection as a threat to their social capital. Proactively supporting learning through critical reflection by surfacing conflicts and contradictions would affect the harmony of their personal relationships with their peers in the learning sets, and as such limit their peers' willingness to cooperate and support their problem solving by providing advice and sharing of experiences. Additionally, and perhaps more

importantly, given that their peers in the learning sets were also their managerial peers in the MFI, the negative impact of acting in ways that would affect the harmony in their peer relationships in the action learning set could spill over to the MFI. This could affect their social capital in the MFI, which stemmed in parts from their good personal relationships with their managerial peers. Consequently, in colluding in the avoidance of critical reflection, participants aimed to protect their social capital in both the learning sets and the MFI, which would be put at risk by supporting critical reflection.

7.2.2 Limitations to shared self-organisation

The participants' concerns about the harmony in their peer relationships also shed some light on the ways in which participants enacted the principle of shared self-direction. A commitment to shared self-direction was central to the LDP and required participants to collaborate in making decisions about how the group process is organised. As elaborated above, the analysis of participants' practices has shown that in the negotiation of shared responsibilities, participants tended to transfer control to experienced experts, but that they only did so in situations where they felt it was appropriate since others were present who possessed more knowledge and expertise and thus could be expected to take over control.

Drawing on the habitus analysis in the previous section, I argue that participants interpreted the expectation to assume shared responsibility not only as a threat to managerial authority, but also to the harmony in their peer relationships. As elaborated above, the participants had developed a strong sense of hierarchy, where tasks and responsibilities were clearly distributed, and fulfilling one's role was seen as central to maintaining the functioning of the social system. From such a perspective, I argue that participants perceived the negotiation of shared responsibilities on equal footing as a threat to their social capital. For less experienced managers, shared self-direction carried the risk to go beyond the boundaries of their position, which would imply a disrespect of the hidden hierarchy in the sets and, by extension, in the MFI. In this sense, ceding control was not only legitimate, but also culturally appropriate to fulfil one's role and respect the hidden hierarchies in the sets. Therefore, I argue that ceding control to more experienced managers (or me as set advisor) was not only a

strategy to protect managerial authority by avoiding mistakes and uncertainty, but also a strategy to protect the social relationships in the set and the MFI by avoiding potential conflicts that might be mobilised by crossing the boundaries of one's position.

Conversely, for more experienced managers, shared self-direction carried the risk of failing to fulfil the social expectations associated with their positioning. Given their ascribed positioning, they felt they were expected to assume the responsibilities for the group. Refraining from doing so would carry the risk to generate conflicts and thus disturb the fine balance of the social system in the set and, by extension, in the MFI. Consequently, in accepting shared responsibilities in the set, experienced participants aimed to protect their social capital in both the learning sets and the MFI, which would be put at risk by genuinely negotiating shared responsibilities. To protect the harmony in their peer relationships, the participants were willing to put at risk the harmony in relation to me, as set facilitator, by resisting my interventions with regard to those practices that would jeopardise their relationships with their peers.

In summary, the exploration of the participants' practices in the set through the lens of their habitus has shown how the participants' hidden interest in protecting the harmony in their peer relationships has limited both their commitment to support critical reflection, as well as their commitment to shared self-direction. Whilst the strategies mobilised in the set reproduced the organisational relationships among peers, their relationship with me as facilitator was enacted in a way which did not correspond to their habitus, but which allowed them to avoid critical reflection in the attempt to protect their peer relationships and ultimately their position in the MFI. In this sense, the cultural dynamic which was mobilised by conflicting assumptions about the structure of peer relations and the way in which participants constructed good relationships, contributed to constraining the learning achieved in the LDP.

7.3 CAL as threat to managerial performance and financial income: limitations to learning through critical inquiry

The third cultural dynamic I have identified is rooted in fundamentally different ideas about how the relation between managing and learning and the participants' concern about their financial income, which limited the participants' general commitment to learning through inquiry.

"It's all about the money." (Branch manager, Transcript, July 4, 2014).The quote stems from one of the participants in a discussion about his staff's tendency to bend the procedures in their role as loan officers. However, it also seems a good summary of what I argue is central to the managers' strategy to resist investing time in learning, and their overall strategy to prioritise the protection of their managerial authority and the harmony in their peer relationships over the possibility to create new knowledge through critical inquiry in the LDP.

7.3.1 Limitations to investing time in learning through inquiry

As elaborated in chapter 4, the LDP was underpinned by a view of learning through inquiry. Given the participants' lack of experience with such an approach to problem-solving, the LDP was designed as a learning program, where the focus was on the development of participants' individual and collective competence of critical reflection rather than the immediate solution of their problems. Such a commitment to learning required investing time in learning through inquiry by regularly participating in the set meetings and engaging with recurring cycles of action and reflection. However, the practice analysis in chapter 5 has shown that participants tended to use strategies that limited their time investments in learning. This tendency to act was expressed in the participants' flexible approach to participation, where they frequently used the time set aside for learning in the LDP to address urgent business issues, as well as their focus on outcomes and solutions, at the expense of engaging in both reflection and action in the inquiry process. In my role as facilitator, I tried to promote participants' engagement with the inquiry process by incorporating ad-hoc sessions on reflection, modelling an inquiry approach, and regularly bringing the process back to problem framing and reflection, when participants attempted to skip through it. However, participants' tendencies to act persisted, and some of my interventions and learning

offers were disregarded or even openly resisted to the extent that as groups, participants willingly and consciously legitimised their strategies. This resistance to my interventions, which was a contradiction to their general disposition to respect authority figures to maintain harmony, underlines the value they attributed to the time they had at disposal for performance and foregrounds that to limit the loss of performance time implicit in the participation in the LDP, they were willing to compromise the inquiry process which was at the heart of the LDP.

Drawing on the habitus analysis, I argue that for the participants a commitment to learning through inquiry was seen as a threat to their managerial performance. At first sight, a commitment to learning seems to resonate well with the participants' understanding of knowledge as managerial capital. The analysis has shown that the managers were generally interested in learning, since they had come to learn that knowledge served as cultural capital that greatly facilitated the achievement of performance goals through an increased ability to guide, motivate and develop staff, and solve problems that may stand in the way of their performance. Additionally, they had interiorised the symbolic value of knowledge as justification and legitimisation for their managerial role, as well as their recognition as a "good" and "competent" student in their role as learner.

However, the habitus analysis has also revealed that the need for a clear commitment to learning through inquiry stood in sharp contrast to the participants' disposition to prioritise short-term results over anything else, including learning, to maximise their performance results in limited timeframe they had available. The material suggests that this disposition was based on a deeply engrained understanding of short-term performance results as an important source of managerial authority by furthering the image as competent managers who were able to fulfil the purpose of their role, which was to ensure the maximisation of performance results. Furthermore, the habitus analysis has revealed that, given the bonus-based remuneration system the managers have been socialised in, short-term performance results were seen a source of financial bonus, and as such contributed directly to maximise their financial income at the end of the month. From such a perspective, I suggest that in resisting investing time in learning through inquiry, participants aimed to mitigate the threat to their

managerial authority and their financial income, which they perceived inherent in the time-intensive engagement with the learning process. As such, their strategies can be seen as an attempt to protect their symbolic capital in the MFI, as well as their managerial performance.

The habitus analysis also reveals another layer of symbolic meaning of their performance results that is helpful to shed light on this dynamic. Drawing on the habitus analysis, I argue that an important reason for the participants' strategy to prioritise managerial performance over managerial learning lies in the meaning that their monthly income had for participants in terms of their positioning and the well-being of others in their communities. The analysis in chapter 6 has shown that, given the challenging economic conditions and political instability in Tanzania, the compensation the managers received for their work was crucial for them to balance the negative effect of a dysfunctional state. Their salary and bonuses were the main source of financial income, from which life had to be financed. The managers were not only responsible for themselves and their core families, but, bound by the principle of *umoja,* they were socially expected to financially contribute to the well-being of their broader communities. As managers in a financial institution, the participants were faced with particularly high expectations for financial support. Hence, for the participants the value of their financial income as outcome of their work was rooted in its role as economic capital to provide for their families and satisfy ongoing, immediate needs such as getting food on the table and paying for rent, utilities or education. Additionally, this economic capital could convert into symbolic and social capital in the community by using it to fulfil the social expectation of providing for others and thus support the well-being of the community. In doing so, the managers could increase their recognition as 'good' community members and foster their relationships in the community as social capital, which served as a safety net in times of hardship. From this perspective, I argue that the participants' strategies to protect the time at their disposal for their business performance were ultimately strategies to protect their positioning in and the well-being of their communities.

7.3.2 Limitations to critical reflection and (shared) self-organisation

The meanings participants attached to their financial incomes also contribute to further illuminate the managers' strategies to prioritise the protection of their managerial authority and the harmony in their peer relationships over their engagement with critical reflection and (shared) self-direction, which I have explored in some depth in the first two sections. The habitus analysis in chapter 6 has shown that in the context of their managerial work, participants appreciated knowledge, managerial authority and harmony in their peer relationships as important forms of managerial capital to reap the benefits of their work in form of their financial income. In this sense, learning was an important strategy for the managers to improve their positioning through the accumulation of knowledge which would serve as cultural capital. It was precisely the assumption that the middle managers had an intrinsic interest in learning, which underpinned the LDP. This interest was expressed several times by the participants in the management development program that preceded the LDP. Learning to accumulate knowledge as cultural capital was, however, but one strategy to reap the benefits of work in the form of financial income, and the analysis results in chapter 5 show that the participants had chosen to prioritise the protection of their productive (time for performance), symbolic (managerial authority) and social (harmony in their peer relationships) capital over the accumulation of cultural capital through learning critical inquiry in the LDP.

Bourdieu (1992, 2015) argues that in situations of crises, where participants are confronted with new rules and logics of practice, some agents try to accumulate those forms of capital that are valued in the field, whilst others attempt to change the rules in ways that protect the value of those resources they possess. He further suggests that agents' choice of strategies is based on the convertibility of the different types of capital. Thereby, agents choose to accumulate those resources whose conversion is least costly in terms of conversion work and of the losses inherent in the conversion itself (Bourdieu, 1986a).

Hence, drawing on Bourdieu, I argue that the managers in the LDP have deemed the conversion cost of learning into performance results and, ultimately, financial income as higher than the cost of conversion of their productive, symbolic and social capital. I

argue that their strategies were based on the fact that the LDP was underpinned by a clear long-term perspective, where the benefits of learning were to be reaped over time, after engaging in a continuous process of action and reflection. The management team was ready to accept the opportunity costs of a short-term loss of financial results as investment to reap greater benefits in the future. The assumption that underpinned the LDP was that learning a new way of problem solving through critical inquiry had the potential to lead to a transformation of practice, which would allow to create new knowledge on an ongoing basis and as such would enhance performance in the long run.

However, the analysis of participants' practices in the action learning sets indicate that they were not ready to make the same concessions. Drawing on these results, I argue that an important reason for the participants' strategy to prioritise managerial performance over managerial learning lies in the meaning that their monthly income had for the participants in terms of their positioning and the well-being of others in their communities. The pressing needs and the significance of their monthly income has furthered a short-term orientation, which stood in sharp conflict to the long-term orientation of the LDP, and which has considerably increased the conversion costs participants associated with learning in the LDP. The fact that the issue of money appeared constantly in discussions in the LDP, but also in conversations in the MFI more broadly and at all levels, highlights the importance of financial income and supports this interpretation.

Furthermore, the analysis allows the interpretation that this logic might have been reinforced by the participants' unfamiliarity with critical inquiry. For all of them, it was the first experience with such a learning process, and it seems likely that they were uncertain about whether learning through critical inquiry might really enhance their performance in the long-term. Some participants were explicit in voicing their doubts about the value of critical reflection and openly declared that sharing experiences and giving direct advice was "more helpful", which supports this interpretation. Hence, it seems plausible to argue that both the demand for financial support the managers faced in their communities, as well as their uncertainty about the tangible long-term benefits of critical reflection limited their commitment to learn through CAL.

From this perspective, I argue that the participants' practices in the LDP can be seen as strategies to protect their positioning in and the well-being of their communities. I argue, however, that this does not necessarily suggest that the managers were not interested in learning in the LDP. As shown, participants have demonstrated a keen interest in gaining knowledge that would serve as cultural capital. For example, they took the initiative to get their turn and were generally interested in getting input to find solutions for their problems. Therefore, I argue that, rather, their strategies represent a balancing act in the face of a dilemma: participation in the program was mandatory and the program was declared a high priority by top management and so the managers felt obliged to participate and fulfilled this obligation to a large extent. They did so, however, using strategies that allowed them to protect those resources they had learned to appreciate as important forms of managerial capital and which were put at risk by the LDP design, in an attempt to safeguard the achievement of their performance objectives and, ultimately, their financial income. At the same time, they strived to maximise the potential benefits from their participation in the LDP by accumulating as much knowledge as possible in a short time. Managers' individual strategies were actively supported by their peers in the learning sets and, increasingly, sustained by my own practices as facilitator.

In summary, the exploration of the participants' practices in the set through the lens of their habitus has shown how the participants' hidden interest in protecting their positioning and the well-being of others in their communities has limited their commitment to learning through critical inquiry. The participants' strategies, which were mobilised by these concerns, have reproduced their incorporated relation between managing and learning by giving primacy to managerial performance. As a result, critical inquiry was constrained and learning in the LDP was based on a more traditional process of knowledge accumulation, where the experienced managers provided advice and ideas to those who were less experienced.

7.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the managers' local cultural context in a Tanzanian MFI has mobilised three political dynamics. These cultural dynamics were

rooted in conflicts and tensions rather than synergies between the design and the participants' habitus and as such have contributed to constraining learning from CAL in the LDP in several ways. Central to these cultural dynamics were the managers' incorporated structures in relation to three layers of context: the CAL sets in the LDP, the MFI and the community, as well as the relation between these layers of context, which promoted interpretations of CAL as a threat to their managerial authority, the harmony in their peer relationships, their managerial performance and, ultimately, their financial income.

Furthermore, the results have shown that in light of these contradictions, participants acted according to their habitus, employing strategies to protect their hidden interests, namely their managerial authority, the harmony in their relationships and their financial income. Thereby, individual strategies were actively supported by the peers in the learning sets, and increasingly sustained by me as facilitator. Specifically, participants' interests have limited their commitment to learning through inquiry, (shared) self-organisation and critical reflection, which were important components of the CAL design.

Taken together, these findings highlight that the CAL design was experienced as highly countercultural, which has limited the emancipatory potential of CAL in this context. As such, the results emphasise that Tanzanian organisations are a challenging context to introduce CAL. In the next chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to existing literature to draw out my contributions and discuss the implications of these findings for CAL in organisational settings in Tanzania.

8 Discussion & Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I have presented three cultural dynamics that arose in the LDP. The analysis has shown that Tanzanian managers in the LDP experienced CAL as highly countercultural. On one hand, the design mobilised the participants' concerns about their positioning in the organisation by threatening the recognition of their managerial authority and the harmony in their peer relations, which they considered as valuable symbolic and social capital in the organization. On the other hand, the participants experienced the design as threat to their financial income, which due its role as economic capital and its potential to convert into symbolic and social capital, raised concerns about their positioning *in* and the well-being *of* their communities. These cultural conflicts have created dynamics that limited learning through critical reflection, which I have supported and sustained through my facilitation. Together, these dynamics provide a holistic understanding about how the cultural context has shaped CAL practice in the LDP.

In this chapter, I discuss my findings in relation to existing literature, highlight what these findings mean in relation to CAL in Tanzanian organisations and draw a conclusion to the thesis. In the first four sections, I discuss how my findings broaden our understanding of CAL in Tanzanian organisations and beyond. In section 1, I discuss the structure of peer relations in the LDP, where set members met as 'experts and apprentices with commonalities' rather than "adversaries with commonalities" (Vince, 2004, p. 64) and show how the dynamics mobilised by these relations limited the potential of the collectivistic sense to promote learning as Marquardt (1998) and Dilworth et al. (2010) have suggested for more conventional approaches to action learning. In section 2, I highlight the important role of the socioeconomic context to make sense of participants' tendency to prioritise managerial performance over managerial learning and establish CAL in Tanzanian organisations as luxury that needs to be afforded. In section 3, I explore an underdeveloped area of Bourdieu's (1992; 1992) concept of illusio by surfacing that the illusio for a specific field is embedded in a hierarchical system of several illusio by showing that even if agents have incorporated a positive illusio for a specific game, through their strategies they may pursue stakes in other fields at the expense of the benefits at stake in the field in question. In section 4,

I provide insights into my lived experience to discuss some emotional and political dynamics of CAL facilitation. In section 5, I explore some implications for introducing CAL in Tanzanian organisations that can be deducted from my study. In section 6, I close the thesis by offering some concluding thoughts.

8.1 Peer relations: set members as 'experts and apprentices with commonalities'

In his original work on action learning, Revans conceptualises set members as "comrades-in-adversity" (Revans, 1982, p. 720), where managers are seen as community whose members, in their effort to solve their problems, engage in collaboration and mutual support with equal rights and responsibilities. From a more critical perspective, Vince (2004) challenges Revans' idealistic take on peer relations highlighting the role of emotional and political dynamics in the sets. Vince conceptualises CAL sets as an arena of political power games and fights for status. He proposes the notion of set members as "adversaries with commonality" (Vince, 2004, p. 64), who share similar challenges, but stand in competition to each other. It is this view on set relations, which has fuelled the development of CAL, where working with and through such emotional and political dynamics becomes part of the learning process to create organising insight (Vince, 2012, p. 213).

By providing in-depth insights into the power dynamics in the LDP, my study builds on Vince's work, but provides an alternative to think about peer relations in the context of Tanzanian organisations. In alignment with Vince's proposition, the set members in the LDP did not meet on equal footing and did not assume the same rights and responsibility as proposed by Revans. Rather, the rights and responsibilities of each set member were seen as dependent on their status and positioning in the group. While the managers in the LDP shared similar challenges, the participants enacted what they had incorporated as culturally appropriate ways depending on their respective position in the organisational peer group. For example, those ascribed high levels of experience and knowledge showed the tendency to take control over the process, assume responsibility and provide solutions to their less experienced peers. The junior managers, who legitimately lacked this expertise, did not only follow their lead, but

expected their peers to take over a leading role in the group. Hence, set members shared a clear understanding about how roles and responsibilities were distributed, which was shaped by the informal hierarchy in the organisation. In this sense, the set relations in the LDP were not characterised by a somewhat anarchistic in-fighting as Vince's notion of "adversaries with commonality" (Vince, 2004, p. 64) suggests, but the political power games were guided by clear rules for behaviour. Set members did not perceive themselves as direct adversaries, but the roles were clearly distributed as experts and apprentices, and acting accordingly was crucial to maintain organizational hierarchy and thus the harmony in the group. In this sense, my study offers an alternative way of thinking about peer relations in organisational CAL sets in Tanzania, where set members are likely to meet as 'experts and apprentices with commonality'.

The finding that the set members in the LDP shared a strong collectivistic sense and pursued harmony in their peer group resonates with the proposition by Marquardt (1998) and Dilworth et al. (2010), who see peer relations in some non-Western settings as shaped by a strong sense of community. Marquardt (1998) suggests that compared to the individualistic tendencies in Western countries, action learning sets in the Global South are characterised by a collectivistic spirit that supports team work. Dilworth and Boshyk (2010) make a similar argument when they suggest that the tradition of *Ubuntu*, an "African" approach to management, promotes communalism by highlighting notions of supportiveness, cooperation and solidarity. They claim that compared to the individualistic tendencies in Western settings, this communal sense supports learning through action learning and makes it more likely for action learning to unfold its potential in non-Western contexts.

While this might apply to conventional approaches to action learning, the results of my study challenge their claim in relation to CAL in organisational settings. My study has shown that whilst the participants' sense for harmony promoted high levels of support in relation to both the discussion of others' problems as well as the organisation of the learning groups, this proactivity was largely limited to those participants who had accumulated managerial experience and several years of seniority within the MFI. Those participants who occupied lower status positions tended to remain silent and withdrew from supporting their more experienced peers, and refrained from taking

responsibility for collective tasks when it came to organising the learning process. This was seen as a culturally appropriate way to act since providing answers and solutions to problems was seen as the responsibility of those who were better positioned in terms of knowledge and access to the top managerial network. As such, inexperienced participants could remain in their comfort zone and cede control without jeopardising their peer relations or managerial authority. As a result, genuine collaboration in the sets was limited and characterised by high levels of control on part of those managers who were ascribed higher status. Additionally, while the participants' sense for the collective facilitated the support from experienced managers, the way in which they showed their support was characterised by advocacy and advice rather than by asking critical questions, which was not conducive to support critical reflection. Similarly, in their attempt to maintain harmony and protect their managerial authority, these managers assumed shared responsibilities without hesitance and tended to use strategies to avoid the critical analysis of these dynamics. Hence, the participants' collectivistic sense and their interest in maintaining harmony have mobilised dynamics that limited learning through CAL. This shows that a collective spirit is not necessarily conducive for action learning in Tanzanian organisations, particularly in those approaches that aim to foster critical inquiry, such as CAL.

Issues of authority and deference that are shaped by organisational positioning resonates with experiences from action learning programs in Mozambique (Ussivane and Ellwood, 2020) and the Philippines (Stevens and de Vera, 2015). In an account of practice, Stevens and De Vera (2015) reflect on the impact of local culture on the practices of a staff action learning set at a university in the Philippines and suggest that the participants' tendency to avoid honest and critical feedback in the program was mobilised by concerns about face-saving. Furthermore, they discuss how the group dynamics, where those in higher organisational positions exerted control over the agenda, were shaped by considerations about organisational status, age and seniority. Similarly, in an account of practice about an organisational action learning program in Mozambique, Ussivane and Ellwood (2020) link participants' tendency to avoid challenging disagreeing with each other to the fear of being impolite and causing someone to 'lose face', particularly in relation to more senior colleagues. This points to

the possibility that these findings might also be relevant to other organisational settings in the Global South.

Insights into how peer relations in CAL sets are structured and how these may limit learning from critical inquiry is important, since such an understanding provides a starting point for facilitators to work with these dynamics in an attempt to overcome the cultural conflicts that a CAL design may inevitably create in certain contexts.

8.2 The role of the socioeconomic context: CAL as luxury that needs to be afforded

My study has shown that the participants in the LDP used strategies to prioritise managerial short-term performance over learning through critical inquiry. For example, they did so by taking a flexible approach to participation, coming late, using the set for business talks as well as covertly and openly resisting my interventions to address their involvement into the learning process. Specifically, the latter tendency was surprising, given that the participants had incorporated hierarchical teacher-student relations, which one might have expected to generate a certain degree of deference to the facilitator.

Such strategies to deal with the competing demands of managerial performance and managerial learning in CAL are not unique to Tanzanian managers. Vince (2008) reports of similar tensions in Western organisational contexts and suggests that these tensions are a result of diverse organisational dynamics. For example, he found that the dynamics in the organisation created implicit rules that there is not enough time to invest into learning, which has promoted managers' prioritisation of action over reflection/action. He also found that in the organisation the managerial role was constructed in a way that carried a tension between keeping control and making change happen, promoting an implicit rule that learning is important as long as it is not disruptive to performance.

In the context of Tanzanian organisations, my study provides an additional perspective to make sense of these strategies by contributing a socio-economic lens that surfaces the role of the participants' communities in these political dynamics. This perspective

was furthered by the Bourdieusian framework that underpins this study, specifically by the notion of external field relations in combination with the concepts of capital and stake, which facilitated an analysis that extends beyond the set and organisational level and highlights the connection between the participants' interest in managerial performance with the incorporated relations in their communities. Specifically, my findings suggest that the participants' tendency to prioritise managerial performance over learning was mobilised by the important role of their monthly financial income as economic capital with the potential to convert into symbolic and social capital in the communities. These were closely knit social systems which were guided by the principle of *umoja* (unity). In their position as well-earning community members, the managers in the LDP were exposed to high social expectations in terms of their financial contribution to community welfare. An inability to meet this obligation would limit their recognition as "good" community members (symbolic capital) and could have serious consequences for the harmony in and cohesion of their communities, which, in absence of a functioning state, fulfilled a critical role as a safety net (social capital).

In a country where roughly 50% of the population lives of less than US$1.90 per day, these considerations are not trivial. Hence, this study draws attention to the role of the broader socioeconomic context and the hidden but tangible opportunity costs involved for managers in organisational CAL programs in Tanzania and their communities at large. This casts learning from CAL in Tanzanian organisations as luxury that needs to be afforded and creates awareness of an additional ethical dimension in CAL. Thereby, this notion is not only relevant to CAL, but may equally apply to more conventional approaches of action learning, which also require time investments and high levels of personal involvement.

To my knowledge, the role of the socioeconomic context and the hidden financial costs of CAL have so far been unexplored in CAL literature. One reason for this might be that this dynamic may be less relevant to CAL programs in Western settings, which are usually characterised by more affluent economic conditions and more individualistic tendencies, and the as such pose fewer social expectations on the participants. However, these socio-economic conditions are not unique to Tanzania, and it seems

plausible that similar dynamics may also play a role in other organisational settings in culturally similar countries in the Global South.

Furthermore, these findings challenge Marquardt's (1998) claim that non-Western cultures, where time is often a more flexible concept, might be more conducive to action learning, since participants are more willing to take time to question, reflect and discuss. The findings of my study have shown that in the context of the LDP, the participants' incorporated hierarchical relations between learning, managerial performance and their community life have mobilised the participants' interests in limiting the cost of time of their participation in the LDP by avoiding both reflection and action. This was particularly relevant given the opportunity cost of performance time, which was furthered by the fact that the LDP took place in an organisational context, which directly linked the costs of learning to the participants' managerial performance. In other words, the participants considered protecting their positioning in and the well-being of their communities more important than investing time in the potential long-term benefits of learning through critical reflection. Hence, while Marquardt's (1998) proposition might apply to action learning in non-organisational settings in the Global South, my findings put this idea into question in relation to organisational programs in Tanzania.

These findings underline the value of exploring CAL programs in the broader sociocultural context, going beyond the organisational level. Understanding how different layers of context (or fields of practice) are connected and interact to promote or limit CAL practice is important, since they provide a starting point for CAL program designers to address some of the conditions that may limit learning through CAL and offer CAL facilitators a starting point to work with the dynamics. Bourdieu's field theory and his notion of field habitus can be a useful framework to analyse the relations between fields and how they affect each other.

8.3 Illusio as embedded in a hierarchical system

An important concept in Bourdieu's field theory is the concept of illusio. Bourdieu (1992; 1992) describes illusio as the belief in the value of a specific game, an

"enchanted relation to the game" (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 77), which makes the participation and investments in the field worthwhile. It is the precondition for the competition between actors in the field and the reproduction of the game. Illusio is socially instituted and incorporated by agents and as such unconsciously shared among the participants in the field (Bourdieu, 1992). In this sense, the concept provides insights into agents' engagement in the field, and a positive illusio exerts a strong hold on agents in the field which usually results in the agents' blind acceptance of the rules of the game. Nevertheless, at times, agents may attempt to change the rules of the game. Bourdieu, however, does not take this as indicative of a lack of illusio (or disillusion), but rather as an expression of illusio within the horizon of possibilities of each player in the field (1992). In other words, agents' strategies to change the rules of the game are attempts to make more valuable those forms of capital that agents possess to improve their position in the field.

What is underexplored in Bourdieu's conceptualisation of illusio is how the way in which illusio materialises in agents' strategies is also shaped by external field relations. My study contributes to shed light on this connection by illuminating how the participants' illusio was embedded in a hierarchical system of several illusio and how the positioning in this hierarchy shaped the way in which illusio was enacted.

The results of my habitus analysis (see chapter 6) suggest that the managers in the LDP shared a strong illusio in relation to learning in general and managerial learning in particular. For example, they were willing to make personal sacrifices to embark on diverse learning journeys, and it was their own requests for further leadership development initiatives that had prompted the LDP. In the introductory session, the participants expressed a strong interest in developing as managers. Nevertheless, despite their belief in the value of managerial learning, the managers continuously prioritised their performance over their participation and involvement in the LDP at the expense of learning (see chapter 5). In other words, while the illusio for managerial learning was incorporated in the managers' habitus, it did not materialise in ways that supported their learning, which was at stake in the LDP.

In difference to Bourdieu, my study suggests that the managers' strategies were, at least partially, mobilised by their incorporated hierarchy of fields and the incorporated

rules of conversion of the respective stakes in one field into forms of capital in another field (i.e., managerial knowledge as stake in the LDP into cultural and symbolic capital at work; financial income as stake at work into financial, symbolic, and social capital in the community). Rather than to improve their positioning in the CAL sets, their strategies aimed at protecting their positioning in the organisation and their community. In other words, the managers' incorporated belief in the value of managerial learning was subordinated to their belief in the value of managerial performance as basis for financial income and their communities as safety net. This suggests that even if agents have incorporated a positive illusio for a specific game, with their strategies agents may pursue the stakes in other fields at the expense of the reaping the benefit at stake in the field in question.

Bourdieu (1992; 1992) discusses external field relations in some depth and highlights that one field can dominate or even absorb another. He does, however, not make explicit what this means for the concept of illusio and the relations between different field illusio. While this is implied in his work, I argue that this relation deserves more explicit attention, since, as my study shows, the ways in which illusio plays out are complex and nuanced. To understand agents' engagement in a field through the lens of illusio, it is not sufficient to determine whether agents have or have not a strong belief in the game, but it also requires exploring illusio in the broader context and determine how the illusio for one field is positioned in relation to diverse illusio for other fields. While this finding is contextual and emerged in the specific context of a leadership development program in a Tanzanian organisation, it might also be relevant for studies in other contexts, where fields are as closely connected as they were in this case.

The concept of illusio carries a lot of potential to illuminate actors' engagement in CAL or management development at large. However, it requires an in-depth understanding of its dynamics and a keen engagement with how to operationalise it. The findings of my study contribute to this.

8.4 Emotions and politics of CAL facilitation

CAL takes its starting point in the assumption that people are positioned unequally in a group due to the ways in which their identity is constructed (Vince 2003, 1994). These power asymmetries are rooted for example in differences in class (Rigg and Trehan 2004), race (Reynolds and Trehan, 2001; Rigg and Trehan 2004), gender (Reynolds and Trehan, 2001; Rigg and Trehan 2004, Mughal et al 2018) or organisational positioning (Vince 2008) and generate political and emotional dynamics that may encourage or limit learning (Vince and Martin, 1993).

What makes CAL facilitation more complex than the facilitation of more conventional approaches is that CAL facilitators aim to work through these dynamics by promoting organising insight (Vince 2012). Thereby, their role is both to challenge existing assumptions and discourse as well as to surface ways in which participants resist or reinforce power relations (Ram and Trehan, 2009). Several studies show that these attempts are often resisted and limited by the very dynamics the interventions aim to address (e.g., Vince & Saleem, 2004; Vince 2008, Rigg & Trehan 2008; Rigg and Trehan, 1999; Mughal et al. 2018). Therefore, it has been suggested that CAL facilitators need a strong commitment to critical reflection (Ram and Trehan, 2009) and high levels of critical reflexivity (Rigg and Trehan, 1999).

What has not received much attention in the literature on CAL facilitation are in-depth insights into the lived experience of CAL facilitators and their critically reflexive engagement with this experience to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges that may make a commitment to critical inquiry difficult. While CAL facilitation was neither the focus of my study, nor subject to rigorous analysis, my reflexive insights contribute to illuminating some of its complex emotional and political dynamics. Specifically, my study foregrounds how my diverse positionings and interests have mobilised my own emotional and political dynamics that resulted in my colluding with the participants and sustained their practices to avoid critical reflection. These initial findings provide some insights into the specific forces that impinged on me as CAL facilitator that limited my commitment to critical reflection. These insights were enabled by my approach to ethnography, where as a practitioner I researched a practice of which I was part and, in doing so, rigorously engaged in critical reflexivity

along the way with my reflections on my role as researcher and facilitator increasingly becoming part of the corpus of ethnographic material that underpins this study.

As briefly described in chapter 5, while I initially attempted to intervene to foster the participants' critical reflection, increasingly I refrained from addressing their collective resistance to avoid imposing myself. At the same time, I tended to involve myself in the process stronger than intended by supporting participants with knowledge and advice and getting actively involved as a rather dominant set member in the problem-solving process. The reflexive engagement with my own roles and practices sheds light on my considerations for doing so by surfacing my concerns about my own positionings in the social context, and the doubts and anxiety I experienced in the process of facilitating the LDP.

First, my facilitation practice was increasingly shaped by my concerns about how the participants' evaluation of the benefit of the program would affect my reputation as consultant in the MFI. Initially, my interests as internal consultant and CAL facilitator seemed to be aligned. As internal consultant in the organisational network, I was interested in the satisfaction of my client with my services, which was linked to how the outcome of the LDP was evaluated. This seemed to sit well with the interest of my role as facilitator, which was to promote meaningful learning through critical reflection. However, with the program advancing, I became painfully aware how the competing interests of diverse stakeholders created a conflict between my two roles. While top management was interested in furthering critical reflection to harvest the long-term potential of transforming managerial practice in the MFI, the participants adopted a short-term perspective and wanted to get solutions for their problems without engaging in critical reflection, which they received as threat to their managerial capital. I needed to decide whether to continue with a focus on critical reflection or not. Should I intervene to promote critical reflection to satisfy top management's interests or give in to the participants' resistance and their chief interest in solving their problems? This dilemma raised the question of who my client actually was, as the following extract shows:

> "Who is my client now? Is it [top management] who pay me? Is it the participants? To whom do I 'owe allegiance'?" (Reflective diary).

On one hand, as internal consultant, I was interested in satisfying top management interests to maintain our relationship and secure further consulting assignments. On the other hand, the program was intended for the benefits of the participants, and it was them who would evaluate it. If they were not satisfied with the outcome, how would they assess their experience? And how would this shape top managements' opinion on my services? It was primordial for me that participants were satisfied, and, in the end, I caved to their collective resistance in a desperate attempt to provide participants with a perceived value added in the program.

This experience resonates with Rigg and Trehan (2008), who have shared their insights from a CAL program in an organisational setting and found themselves in a similar position of diverging interests, arguing that there is an "inherent contradiction between the pull to keep the customer satisfied and the conception that organisation change needs disruption to the existing order" (p. 380). This highlights the political nature of CAL facilitation, especially in organisational programs, where facilitators are usually not the owner of the programs they facilitate, but the executors. In this role, they are situated in a more complex network of expectations and diverging interests and are more dependent on how the outcome of CAL programs are evaluated.

Second, the notes in my reflective diary shed light on my concerns about my positioning in relation to the participants given the broader historical relations. Sensitised by an engagement with postcolonial theory, I became increasingly aware of my positioning as white European facilitating CAL in relation to Black participants in a formerly colonised setting. With the program advancing, I was concerned with not reproducing these historical relations in the learning groups, as the following extract from my reflective journal shows:

> "So what now? I am aware of these historical relations that are present. But what does this mean now for my facilitation? Am I to refrain from pushing participants out of their comfort zone to avoid reproducing these relations? Or can I, ethically speaking, do that? Would *not* challenging them not mean to rob them of their opportunity to learn? Should *they* not take this decision on their own? But does their collective resistance not exactly reflect this choice? Would I act differently with white participants? Sometimes ignorance *is* a bliss." (Reflective journal)

This increasing awareness and my concerns related to it contributed to shaping my facilitation practice to the extent that I was very careful to not being perceived as imposing my view on both problems and process and limited my interventions on their attempts to change the rules of the LDP.

This experience puts the spotlight on the facilitator-participants relation, which so far has only received limited attention. To my knowledge, the debates on facilitator-participants relations focus on the benefit of the transformed learning relation as source for self-directed learning. The stream of literature that problematises hierarchies through difference in the sets tend to focus on differences among set members. What is largely absent in this debate is the positioning of the set advisor in relation to the set members, and how this relation of power may shape CAL practice to avoid learning. A notable exception is Rigg and Trehan (1999) who, based on their CAL experience with black women, highlight the importance for facilitators to be aware of their assumptions and practices around race and gender issues. My study underlines the complexity of facilitator-participant relations, particularly when doing CAL as White European in former colonised setting.

Third, the notes in my reflective diary illuminate the emotional dimension of CAL facilitation. Throughout the program, I was rattled with doubts, uncertainty, and anxiety. This emotional experience was mobilised, on one hand, by the tensions and concerns stemming from my social positioning, and, on the other hand, by the participants' collective resistance as outcome of my facilitation practice. For example, my reflective notes illustrate how in the light of the participants' cultural collusion, I felt like facing a "wall of resistance" (Reflective journal) which triggered feelings of loneliness and being excluded from the group: "It feels like one against all" (Reflective journal). This emotional experience was reinforced by me being a first-time CAL facilitator, who lacked comparable experience, which mobilised doubts about my own abilities to facilitate CAL.

> "They are so resistant. Am I doing it right? Is this supposed to happen? Can I turn this around? Not sure what to do now." (Reflective journal).

As shown in chapter 1, literature that explores the emotional dimensions of CAL do so from a participant rather than a facilitator perspective (e.g. Vince and Martin, 1993;

Vince, 2004, 2010). This study surfaces that CAL facilitators too are confronted with real risks in relation to their own positioning in- and outside the set, which has the potential to generate high degrees of insecurity and anxiety. This emotional experience shapes their facilitation practice and may contribute to facilitating learning inaction rather than learning-in-action.

These initial experiential findings suggest that there is value in promoting a research agenda that turns the lens on the experience and role of CAL facilitators and the different ways they contribute to shaping CAL practice.

8.5 Implications for CAL in Tanzanian organisations

In this section, I explore what my findings mean for CAL in Tanzanian organisations. First, I engage with the question whether CAL is an appropriate approach to management development in such contexts before suggesting some specific implications for program design and the role of the CAL facilitator.

8.5.1 Is CAL an appropriate approach to management development in Tanzanian organisations?

The findings of my study show that despite my attempts to anticipate the participants' concerns and address them in the design (see chapter 4), the managers experienced the LDP design as highly countercultural, and resisted learning through critical inquiry. These findings indicate that cultural conflicts are not easily resolved and that CAL as pedagogical approach to management development in Tanzanian organisations has some serious limitations. This bears the question whether CAL is an appropriate approach to use in Tanzanian organisations. I argue that despite its challenges, CAL can be a powerful alternative for management development in such contexts.

As discussed in chapter 1, dissonances and tensions are an inherent part of the CAL process and are not only mobilised in organisational settings in Tanzania, but also in organisational and academic settings in Western countries (e.g. Vince and Martin, 1993; Rigg and Trehan, 1999, 2008; Vince, 2008; Trehan and Rigg, 2015). Furthermore, my research has shown that the participants' collective resistance was not only mobilised by the 'critical' components of the design but by the very collaborative

inquiry process that is at the heart of any action learning, including more conventional approaches. This suggests that cultural tensions and contradictions are likely to be an intrinsic part of any action learning program in Tanzanian organisations - critical or not. If the experience of dissonance would be an argument against using a pedagogical approach, then any form of action learning would be a bad choice in Tanzanian organisations or anywhere else for that matter. However, as Rigg and Trehan (1999) point out, learning and change are frequently uncomfortable, but this is not a reason for disengaging from the attempt to promote critical management education. I agree with them and suggest that when considering action learning as approach to management development in Tanzanian organisations, there is value in adopting a critical approach. While CAL's focus on critical reflection might add an additional layer of complexity and is likely to mobilise more resistance than conventional approaches, it also offers the possibility to examine these dynamics and transform the social conditions that underpin this resistance by promoting organising reflection. It is precisely this line of thinking, which has fuelled the development of CAL in the first place.

Clearly, as this study has shown, this is not an easy endeavour. However, while in the first phase of the LDP the attempt to promote organising insight was predominantly resisted, initial observations from the second phase suggest that the cultural conflicts have played out differently in phase two, where the CAL design was modified. As mentioned in the introduction, the two key differences between the first and the second phase were that (a) instead of working on individual problems, the participants collaborated on shared organisational challenges that had emerged in discussions during the first phase, and (b) each challenge was sponsored by a top manager to whom the participants would report their findings and make suggestions about how to address them. While I did not include the ethnographic material from this phase in the detailed and systematic analysis that underpins this study, my pre-analytical observations suggest that the participants' habitus manifested itself in different ways and, as a result, the dynamics in this phase played out differently.

For example, in the second phase the managers were more open to point out and critically explore the collective challenges and shared their feelings to a surprising

extent. The habitus analysis in chapter 6 suggests that the managers experienced the work on shared organisational problems as less threatening to the recognition of their managerial authority, since they felt that the systemic nature of the problems legitimised not knowing and that they acted under the protection of the group. Furthermore, the second phase was characterised by the managers' increasing willingness to challenge their peers in relation to their engagement with the process. For example, while in the first phase non-participation was legitimised and framed as individual choice, it was not in the second phase. Even more, both senior and junior managers used their incorporated collectivistic sense strategically by appealing to their peers' sense of responsibility towards the group and enforce individual engagement. The habitus analysis suggests that the fact that the middle managers were held accountable for their joint work by a top manager has mobilised a different prioritisation of interests, where set members viewed the recognition of their managerial authority by a top manager, which was associated with delivering solutions, as more valuable than spending time on their monthly performance targets or maintaining the harmony within their peer group.

Hence, the initial sense-making of these observations suggests that some adaptations in CAL designs can result in different habitus manifestations which may promote the engagement with critical inquiry. Therefore, I believe that CAL is a worthwhile approach to management development in Tanzanian organisations. Rather than to discourage, I take the complexities foregrounded by this study as starting point to become better equipped to introduce CAL in Tanzanian organisations and the Global South more generally. In the following, I suggest some implications for both the set up and the facilitation of CAL programs.

8.5.2 Implications for program set up

My research suggests four implications for the set-up of CAL programs in Tanzanian organisations. First, my study has foregrounded that the participants' strategies to avoid learning through CAL were mobilised by their concerns about their positioning in the organisation. These concerns were mobilised by their incorporated logic of managing and learning and the resulting interests in protecting the recognition of their managerial authority and the harmony in their peer relationships. This suggests that in

Tanzanian organisations there is value in designing CAL programs in a way that embeds organising reflection in a larger process of organizational learning to promote the transformation of organisational structures and logics that limit learning through critical reflection in the sets. Nicolini (2017) suggests the notion of a 'structure that connects', which links the learning from action learning sets to the broader organisation and creates conditions that leverage the insights from critical reflection in the sets. Given the logic of managing and learning that underpins many organisations in Tanzania, a focus on connecting the sets to the broader organisation seems to be particularly important not only to leverage the insights gained through critical reflection in the set, but to create conditions that promote critical reflection in the sets in the first place.

Second, my research has shown that the interests of top management as sponsors and the interests of the participants were not aligned. While top management was interested in promoting critical reflection to induce the transformation of managerial practices, the participants were not on board with this endeavour. One reason for this misalignment was that the participants were not included in the design process but presented with a fait accompli. As a result (and despite our best efforts – see chapter 3), our understanding of the managers' concerns was limited, and we did not manage to appropriately address them in the design of the program. This experience highlights the importance of taking time in the design phase to negotiate and anchor critical reflection as shared objective, and gain commitment from all stakeholders involved, including the participants themselves.

Third, my research has foregrounded that the participants' strategies to avoid learning through CAL were, in parts, mobilised by their concerns about their positioning in their communities given the prevalent socioeconomic conditions. This suggests that when introducing CAL programs in Tanzanian organisations, there is value in organising CAL programs in a way that accounts for the participants' concern about their financial income. Therefore, it could be beneficial to address these concerns by organising the program in ways that limit the impact on participants' business results and/or compensating for the financial opportunity costs associated with the participation in CAL, for example through a training bonus, which is not uncommon in Tanzania.

Fourth, the initial findings from phase 2 suggest that working on shared organisational challenges which are sponsored by top management might prove beneficial in Tanzanian organisations to limit the perceived threat to participants' managerial authority and promote their ownership of the challenges they work on.

8.5.3 Implications for facilitation

My study also highlights several implications for facilitation of CAL programs in Tanzanian organisations. For example, the research has shown that participants in the LDP used strategies to avoid and resist critical reflection. Bourdieu (1992) highlights that the practical sense is pre-reflective, and that the incorporated rules of learning and managing are taken-for-granted. Hence, the participants in the sets were not necessarily aware of their own cultural dynamics and how these limited learning in the LDP. Given that CAL was an unfamiliar approach might have contributed to this. In this sense, there is a role to play for set facilitators to support participants in Tanzanian organisations to learn CAL and to surface the assumptions about management and learning that underpin their strategies and to create awareness of their consequences. In this role, the set facilitator should work to provide alternative perspectives that support working through the contradictions that have been mobilised by the design to support the possibility to transform the social conditions that underpin them. Such an active role of action learning facilitators has been emphasised by several proponents of CAL in both Western contexts (e.g. Vince, 2008; Ram and Trehan, 2009), as well as in the Global South (Mughal, Gatrell and Stead, 2018). This approach to facilitation is different to the one envisaged by Revans (Revans, 1982), who frames set advisors as "accoucheurs" who have a limited role in helping to set up the program and get the sets started, but otherwise keep involvement to a minimum to avoid interfering with the self-organising properties of the set. The findings of this study suggest that in Tanzanian organisations a more active role throughout the program is particularly important, since CAL is experienced as countercultural by all participants and the tensions and contradictions are a collectively shared phenomenon, which has the potential to mobilise their collusion in avoiding critical reflection.

However, such an approach to CAL is not easy to facilitate and my study provides some insights into some of the challenges and the requirements they pose on facilitators in such a context. For example, while I anticipated some of the cultural politics that have played out in the LDP, I was unaware of their deeper roots and manifestations – a circumstance that was the reason for embarking on this explorative journey in the first place. Had I had prior in-depth knowledge of these dynamics, I would have designed and facilitated the program differently. Hence, my experience underlines the importance of the suggestion brought forward by Mughal *et al.* (2018) that promoting both critical reflection and organising reflection in the sets requires CAL facilitators to have an in-depth understanding of the local context and the relational dynamics that may unfold in the learning process. The findings of my study contribute to such an understanding in the context of Tanzanian organisations.

Additionally, Ram and Trehan (2009) suggest that the facilitation of CAL requires a keen commitment to critical reflection. My study has shown that my own commitment to critical reflection was limited by my own emotional and political considerations which were mobilised by my multiple roles and positioning in the broader context, and the contradicting expectations and interests that came along with it. This suggests that CAL programs might benefit from facilitators who are more experienced and less trapped in the web of organisational relationships. This raises the general question about whether internal facilitators are the best choice to facilitate such a program.

Furthermore, independent of whether the facilitator is internal or external, the study highlights the important role of critical reflexivity on part of CAL facilitators to become aware of these own emotional and political dynamics mobilised by their positioning in relation to the participants and other stakeholders in the program. Critical questions to grapple with are for example: What are the consequences of our facilitation practice? To whose interest we are catering? These questions are particularly important when introducing critical reflection in Tanzanian organisations, where managers, and their communities, may incur high symbolic, social, and financial costs.

This brings to the fore the complexity of CAL facilitation in Tanzanian organisations, which requires finding a balance between challenging participants to promote critical insights and break through their collective resistance on one hand, and respecting

participants' boundaries and choices about the ways and extent to which they wish to engage in learning through CAL, on the other hand - even if these choices are counterproductive for the learning CAL aims to achieve. This tension between challenging participants and respecting their boundaries is not easily resolved and as Rigg and Trehan and Rigg (2015) argue, there is no recipe for CAL facilitation. In contrast, my study highlights that it requires personal judgement and high levels of flexibility on part of CAL facilitators and may imply accepting that, for some, CAL might not be the most appropriate approach in this specific moment in time. I concur with Stevens (2015, p. 220) who, reflecting on the importance of methodological purity, conclude:

> "I ask myself how important it is to adhere to a specific mental model of action learning, particularly with reference to the structure of set meetings and outcomes to be achieved."

Finally, the emotional dimension of CAL facilitation surfaced by my experience suggests that to keep the stand in the face of such collective avoidance strategies requires a high degree of resilience on part of CAL facilitators and the ability to cope with stress. For facilitators it is important to be aware of their own boundaries and emotions, which equally requires high degrees of reflexivity. While this is relevant to CAL facilitation in general, I suggest that this is particularly important when facilitating CAL in organisational settings of the Global South, where there is a greater likelihood that participants collude to avoid critical reflection and facilitators are more likely to face "a wall of resistance" (Reflective diary).

8.6 Concluding thoughts

In this last section, I offer my concluding thoughts to this thesis. First, I provide a summary of my contributions and highlight some avenues for future research. Then I engage in some conclusive reflections on both my roles and positioning in the study before closing with reflections on own learning as management development practitioner, which was the starting point for this study.

8.6.1 Summary of contributions

This study originated from my professional scepticism about the cultural compatibility of CAL in relation to the managers' local culture in countries of the Global South, which raised the question whether CAL can unfold its critical potential in organisational programs in such countries like Tanzania. The existing literature on action learning and CAL provided arguments for and against this concern but lacked empirical evidence about the specific case of Tanzanian organisations. Given that each context is unique and generates distinctive possibilities and limitations, in this study I set out to explore the cultural politics in an organisational CAL program in Tanzania by investigating the following research questions:

1. What tensions and/or synergies did participants experience between the cultural requirements of the CAL design and their local culture?
2. How did these tensions and/or synergies shape participants' practices in the LDP?
3. How did these practices promote or constrain learning through critical reflection in the LDP?

In providing answers to these questions, my study adds to our understanding of CAL as approach to management development in two ways. First, it provides a Tanzanian organisational perspective to the conversation, which so far has been marginalised in the academic discourse. Second, my systematic and comprehensive use of Bourdieu's (1992) theory of practice as conceptual framework and my approach to ethnography enabled a particular depth and level of analysis, which allowed me to provide an integrative and holistic understanding of how different layers of the local context have interacted to create complex and interrelated cultural dynamics, and how these, despite a shared habitus, have manifested themselves in the participants' distinct, often contradicting strategies in the sets, depending on the social positioning of the participants in their peer group.

I have shown that Tanzanian managers in the LDP experienced CAL as highly countercultural and identified three cultural dynamics that were mobilised by the design. These dynamics were rooted in the participants' concerns about their positioning in the organisation by threatening the recognition of their managerial

authority, the harmony in their peer relations and their business performance. Furthermore, participants experienced the design as threat to their financial income, which due its role as economic capital and its potential to convert into symbolic and social capital, raised concerns about their positioning *in* and the well-being *of* their communities. These cultural politics have created dynamics that limited learning through critical reflection, which I have supported and sustained through my facilitation.

Overall, the exploration of these cultural dynamics in the LDP extend our understanding of CAL by surfacing some dynamics that so far have not received attention and highlighting some limitations of findings from CAL programs in Western settings in reflecting the realities in Tanzanian organisations. I have discussed four areas, where my study contributes to knowledge.

First, my study deepens our understanding of how peer relations are structured in CAL programs in Tanzanian organisations and how these contribute to shaping the dynamics in the set. Specifically, I have highlighted how the sense for the collective and the strict hierarchies participants in Tanzanian organisations have incorporated result in set members meeting as 'experts and apprentices with commonalities' rather than as 'comrades-in-adversity' (Revans, 1982, p. 720) or 'adversaries with commonality' (Vince, 2004, p. 64), and how this has limited learning through inquiry.

Second, through the exploration of external field relations, my study highlights the importance of a socioeconomic lens to make sense of CAL practices in Tanzanian organisations, which so far has been unexplored in CAL literature. In this regard, I have suggested the notion of CAL as luxury that needs to be afforded, highlighting the financial and social opportunity costs CAL might entail for Tanzanian managers given their positioning and social expectations in their communities.

Third, my study contributes to shed light on an underdeveloped area of Bourdieu's (1992; 1992) concept of illusio by surfacing that the illusio for a specific field is embedded in a hierarchical system of several illusio, and that even if agents have incorporated a positive illusio for a specific game, with their strategies they may pursue stakes in other fields at the expense of reaping the benefits at stake in the field

in question. This underlines that to understand agents' engagement in a field through the lens of illusio, it is not sufficient to determine whether agents have or have not a strong belief in the game, but also requires exploring illusio in the broader context and determine how the illusio for one field is positioned relation to illusio for other fields.

Fourth, my study contributes to our understanding of the emotional and political dynamics of CAL facilitation, by providing insights into my lived experience and foregrounding how diverse positionings and interests shape facilitation practice. This underlines the value of promoting a research agenda that turns the lens on the experience of CAL facilitators and the different ways they may contribute to both supporting and limiting learning through critical inquiry.

Rather than to discourage, I take the complexities foregrounded by this study as starting point to become better equipped to introduce CAL in Tanzanian organisations and the Global South more generally. I take this conviction not least from some initial observations during phase 2 of the LDP, which show that some adjustments in the CAL design may mobilise different habitus manifestations and thus have the potential to promote different learning dynamics.

Drawing on the findings of this study, I propose that to harvest the potential of CAL in Tanzanian organisations, there is value in establishing organising reflection as a clear focus of the program. I have suggested how these concerns can be addressed in the design by connecting CAL sets with the broader organisation to promote conditions (and rules of the game) that are more conducive for critical reflection; promoting work on shared organisational problems; negotiating commitment to critical reflection with all stakeholders including the participants; and compensating participants for the financial opportunity cost they may incur by participating in the program. Furthermore, I have explored the implications of my findings for CAL facilitation, and have suggested that it is important that facilitators assume an active role to surface and work through the cultural dynamics that are mobilised by the design. This requires: a keen sensitivity to and knowledge of local culture and the relational dynamics that may unfold; considerations about who should facilitate such a program by assessing facilitators' positioning in the organisational network and the broader historical relations; and high degrees of critical reflexivity on part of the set advisor in

relation to how own roles, positionings, interests and emotions may shape facilitation practice.

Overall, this thesis underlines the value of empirical in-depth analyses in diverse contexts and emphasises the role of appropriate frameworks to gain a deeper understanding of the cultural and social conditions in which CAL programs take place and the dynamics that are mobilised in practice.

8.6.2 Avenues for future research

This study was explorative and as such highlights several avenues for research that offer considerable potential and would be interesting to pursue:

First, for the purpose of this study I have consciously excluded the ethnographic material I gathered from the second phase of the LDP, which was designed differently than the first phase that underpins the findings of this study. As discussed, my pre-analytical observations suggest that the dynamics in this phase played out differently and that the participants' habitus manifested itself in different ways. It would be valuable to analyse the material of this phase in the same level and depths to explore whether and how this design might have mobilised a different prioritisation of interests on part of the participants and how this prioritisation might have manifested itself in their strategies.

Second, the study has foregrounded the complexity of how participants' cultural background shapes CAL practice. This emphasises the importance of empirically exploring the cultural dimensions in CAL in other countries of the Global South. Similarly, in the context of Tanzania, it would be interesting to dig deeper into the dynamics foregrounded by this study in non-organisational settings. To do so, my findings provide a starting point for further research, which could be used to explore whether and how these dynamics play out.

Third, the focus of this research was to explore the cultural politics and their manifestations from the perspective of the participants. Another interesting line of inquiry could be to explore the CAL facilitator's experience and the challenges involved in facilitating CAL programs – not only in Tanzanian organisations but beyond. While my role as facilitator was not the focus of this study, the analysis has provided an initial

glimpse into how I, as facilitator, have contributed to shape and sustain the participants' practices, and how my practice was shaped by my own emotional experience and political considerations.

Fourth, this study was based on an ethnographic design, which was helpful to explore the participants' perspective. However, this approach is explorative in nature and ultimately a construction of me as researcher. It falls short to cooperate with the research participants in more depth and make a real difference in their lives. As elaborated in chapter 3, my first intention was to use an action research approach, which is more collaborative and has the advantage to go beyond creating understanding to induce real change. Given the dependence of action research on the participants' willingness to engage in such an approach, I consciously decided on an ethnographic methodology. However, it seems interesting to connect the exploration of how local culture shapes CAL practice with an agenda of practical change to create specific local solutions to the complexities foregrounded by this study.

8.6.3 Reflections on roles and positionings

In this study, I ethnographically examined CAL practice in an in-house development program in postcolonial Tanzania, in which as White European internal consultant, I had a leading role in both designing and facilitating. As elaborated in chapter 3, this set up positioned me in a complex web of roles and positionings, interests and expectations, which shaped both my research and facilitation practice.

An important part of my research design was a constant engagement with critical reflexivity, which I integrated throughout the piece. In chapter 3, I have engaged with some of the complexities and challenges of my positioning and how they shaped my research design and practice. In chapter 5 and 8, I have elaborated on the reflexive insights on how my complex positioning has shaped my facilitation practice in the program. It now seems pertinent to bring the threads together, highlight some open questions that have arisen in the reflexive process and provide some conclusive thoughts on my critical reflexivity.

8.6.3.1 Role Conflicts

This study is firmly grounded in my experiences as practitioner in the organisation I was researching and was driven by a deep interest in finding practical answers within my specific work context. When setting up the research, I was convinced that combining my doctoral study with my work as practitioner would lead to synergies and enable results that were directly relevant to my professional practice.

To a large extent, this did happen, and the study was greatly facilitated by this role multiplicity. For example, as elaborated in chapter 3, the trustful relationships I had established, my recognition as learning and development expert, and my commonalities with key decision-makers in the organisation were helpful to negotiate the set-up of the program as well as the access for the study with both top management and participants. Furthermore, my simultaneous roles as researcher and practitioner greatly facilitated the access to ethnographic material. As designer and facilitator of the program I had direct access to my own assumptions that underpinned the design of the program and, through critical reflexivity, to my own emotional experience and political considerations, which increasingly became part of the corpus of material and enabled important insights into the complexity of CAL facilitation. In addition, my deep practical interest in the outcome of my academic study kept the fire burning throughout all those years and promoted the necessary perseverance to bring this study over the finishing line.

However, the challenges of this role multiplicity became clear to me only gradually as the research progressed. What I had not expected was the extent to which the interests of each of these roles collided. I have mentioned some tensions in chapter 3 but want to highlight others I have not included there. For example, whilst as practitioner I was interested in the practical value of the outcomes of this study, as academic researcher I had a deep concern for process, rigour, and theoretical contributions. This was often frustrating since I had to force myself to constantly switch back from a practical outcome-oriented to a theoretical process-oriented mindset. There were moments in the analysis process, where I my thirst for knowledge as practitioner was satisfied, however, as researcher I had to engage with the material in more depth. At other times, I pursued issues I found interesting from a practical

perspective, only to realise after a while that these findings did not contribute to my research questions - letting go of these insights was with a heavy heart. These tensions were often frustrating and at times created anxieties and doubts about whether I was "doing it right" as a researcher on one hand, or whether what I found was relevant for my practice or the organisation, to whom I had promised practical insights in return for access, on the other hand. It took me some time to accept that I could not cater to all interests at once within the context of this piece.

Additionally, my practice was not only shaped by tensions between my researcher and practitioner role, but also by diverging interests within my practitioner role, where I was positioned as both internal consultant and facilitator. As discussed in depth in chapter 8, this role duality has generated several conflicts and colliding interests, which have contributed to shape my emotional experiences and political choices as CAL facilitator due to concerns about my positioning in the organizational network. These conflicts emerged gradually, and ultimately led to my collusion with the participants' attempts to avoid critical reflection.

These dynamics illuminate some aspects of the complexity of practitioner research and the challenging role of internal CAL facilitators in organisational CAL programs. Reaping the benefits of such approaches requires the courage to let the roles merge and fertilise each other, which can lead to powerful insights. At the same time, to conduct such research and programs in a rigorous and ethical way requires a high degree of critical reflexivity on own roles and the potential conflicts these might entail. Essential questions are: How do the interests of my roles interact? How do these roles complement each other? Where do they limit each other? How do my interests interact with the interests of others? Whose interest do I serve? What do I do with this awareness? Which interests do I actively pursue? Such questions can be unsettling, and as practitioner researcher and CAL facilitator, one needs to be prepared to embark on a highly emotional and stressful experience, which requires continuous reflective judgement, the understanding that not all interests can be catered at once, and the willingness to take conscious decisions and accept the consequences of such choices.

8.6.3.2 Positioning in relation to participants

My positioning in relation to the managers in the program, who were also my research participants, was complex. It was underpinned by several relational differences my multiple roles and personal characteristics brought about. As researcher, I was in control of the research process. As internal consultant, I was an organisational insider located in the head office and close to the power centre of the organisational network. Being a white European doing research and facilitating a management development program with Black participants in a former postcolonial setting brought historical power relations into the mix.

This complex positioning had the potential to create power asymmetries in both the program and the research process, with me positioned in a rather powerful position in relation to the participants. To conduct both the program and the research in an ethical way, I had to engage in critical reflexivity and make choices to foster relations that were more equitable and where the participants would act as active agents and decision-makers. I had to be conscious how my positioning, methodological choices and facilitation practice affected the participants. Key issues to consider were linked, amongst other, to notions of informed choice and representation.

For example, I have described several strategies I used to make sure that the managers were in the position to make their own informed choice about their participation in the study. For example, I implemented several measures in the research design to inform the participants about the research the best I could; I tried to limit the impact of potential power asymmetries on the managers' decision to participate; I offered different levels of participation and asked for their permission to tape in each session (see chapter 3). In this process, most of the concerns participants raised were related to the program, rather than the study. And while three of the program participants choose not or only partially be part of the study, the overwhelming majority decided to participate without hesitating or asking too many questions about it. Some of them mentioned that if it would help me, then they would be more than happy to participate. I was glad and thankful for this.

However, with the study progressing and silence coming up as important cultural strategy with multiple meanings in the program, I wondered what this silence around

the study really meant. Could they really know what they were getting themselves into with both the CAL program and the study? Not even I was sure how the program would unfold and where the study would lead me. If some of the participants became part of the study as personal favour to me – is that really an informed choice? And what about those with whom I did not have an established relationship? Did they feel pressured to follow the lead of those who knew me? Those I had known for some time, were clearly the more experienced managers, and those less experienced might have felt an obligation to follow their lead. Was this an informed and independent choice? And how could I judge this? This last question seems particularly important when doing research in cultures we are not familiar with, and where it is more challenging to make sense of the research participants' actions and the complex web of relations among research participants and the broader context. While we may act with our best intentions, we may not be able to judge how informed and independent the participants' choices really are.

Another issue I wish to foreground is related to the notion of representation, which was more complex than I had assumed at the outset. I had started the research with the somewhat naïve belief that I would tell the story purely from the participants' perspective. One important strategy to do so was my attempt to back-feed my interpretations to the participants. However, I increasingly realised how much my own interests and perspectives shaped the story. For example, there were a few instances, where participants did not agree with my interpretations, and I had to decide how to proceed. Should I accept their objections although I was aware that these might be coloured by their own limited consciousness of their practices or their concern of how they were perceived? Should I impose my view based on the evidence of my rigorous analysis? Would this still mean to tell the story from their perspective? I decided that in such instances I would go back to the data to look for further evidence for and against my interpretation and take the final decision based on the analysis. Thankfully, these cases were rare, but they helped me to realise that regardless of how much I tried to get participants' feedback, regardless of how reflexive I was, I was still in control of the findings I constructed and the way I told them.

Similarly, I came to realise how the issue of representation is also linked to the frameworks we use to make sense of participants' practices. In this study, I used Bourdieu's theory of practice, which frames individuals as active agents who have good reasons for acting as they do and highlights the possibility for conscious learning and change. This was important given my interest to highlight participants' agency. However, I realised that it also depended on how I used this framework. My initial focus in the analysis was on the different forms of cultural capital participants lacked to effectively participate in CAL. However, increasingly I felt that this would cast the participants as deficient, measured according to a Western standard. Grappling with these questions led me to change the way I used the framework by engaging with other forms of capital to surface their logic of managing and learning to emphasise the agency of the managers. Likewise, I felt that by limiting my analysis to the participants' practices in CAL, I was "blaming" them for the failure of the LDP. I was uncomfortable with this, since based on the reflexive engagement with my facilitation practice, I had come to realise how I contributed to sustaining the participants' strategies to avoid learning in the LDP. This has ultimately contributed to my attempt to include, at least marginally, my own role as facilitator in the co-creation of CAL practice. Hence, both insights gave a new twist to the story and highlighted that how we work with conceptual frameworks plays an important role in the way we represent our research participants.

8.6.3.3 A call for a collective approach to critical reflexivity

The insights presented so far highlight the importance of engaging in critical reflexivity as integral part of practitioner research and the need to do so in an appropriate depth. However, in this last section, I want to offer an insight, which illuminates the limitations of individual reflexivity and provides impetus for a more collective approach to critical reflexivity in practitioner research.

In chapters 5 and 8, I have provided some insights into how my reflexivity has led me to appreciate my own emotional experience and political considerations and how they shaped my facilitation practice in the LDP. I have highlighted how given the participants' collective resistance, I increasingly chose to refrain from intervening to

support critical reflection and involved myself in providing support and advice to facilitate problem-solving. These strategies were shaped amongst other by my constructions of the power asymmetries in my relationship with the participants based on my multiple roles in- and outside the organisation and my personal characteristics as white European facilitating a management development program for Black participants in the postcolonial setting. In my desperate attempt to create more equitable relations and let the participants make their own choices, I sustained their practices that limited learning. After the program and with the analysis progressing, I felt increasingly uncomfortable with my decision and found myself often wondering whether this was an ethical choice. Did my attempt to create more equitable relations by respecting their choice to avoid critical reflection not rob them of the opportunity to learn and develop? Would I have had the same concerns if the participants had been white or situated in a Western context or would I feel less need to promote own choices? And was this concern necessary in the first place? Did the participants in the LDP construct our relation in the same way as I did?

I did not find conclusive answers to these questions and came to realise that one reason for this was because I had based all my choices on my own assumptions and sense-making of our relation. I was unaware of how the participants constructed our relation. Did they construct my positioning as more powerful than their own? They did choose to resist my interventions - was this not a sign that they felt well positioned to make their own choices? How did they construct our organisational positionings? What conclusions did they draw from the broader historical relations?

I became increasingly conscious that relations, and the respective positioning of those involved, are constructed and perceptions might differ. Critical reflexivity is essential for both research and CAL facilitation, but when we exclusively act based on our own constructions, there is the possibility that we might limit our practice without good reason. How can we know how others construct these relations? Perhaps, if I had inquired more in the participants' perspective, our practices in the CAL sets might have turned out differently. This points to the value of collective reflexivity to explore mutual constructions and understand how those involved make sense of their own positioning, which can be helpful in both practitioner research and CAL programs. This

is of course not an easy task and requires building trusting relationships where such dynamics and interpretations can be talked about. As this study has shown, the attempt to engage in collective reflexivity on both the researcher-researched relation as well as on the CAL facilitator-participant relations might mobilise emotional and political dynamics that may prevent insights. Nevertheless, as in CAL, I believe that this should not be a reason for not trying. Rather than to discourage, it could be a starting point to explore these dynamics in different contexts to be better equipped to deal with the challenges and complexity of such a collective approach.

In conclusion, the reflexive process in relation to my roles and positioning foregrounded the complexity of ethical questions and highlighted the importance of engaging in critical reflexivity as integral part of research and of doing so in an appropriate depth. Critical reflexivity is not just about ticking boxes but requires a genuine and continuous engagement with the concepts we work with, which are more complex than it might seem at the outset. At times, this process raises more questions than answers and we need to accept that, in practice, we might not achieve the ideal state of equal power relations we might strive to. However, adopting a more collective approach to critically engaging with our roles and relations, while not an easy endeavour, has the potential to support the creation of more equitable relations.

8.6.4 Personal reflections

This study has originated from my professional concerns as an international consultant in leadership development in diverse countries of the Global South. As such, this thesis is inextricably linked to my own work and interests, and it was this interest which has made me persevere for many years. As a part-time student with diverse professional and family obligations, this journey has been challenging, exhausting and tiresome at times. However, it has also been incredibly insightful and rewarding on many levels, both professionally and personally. During this journey, I not only gained a deeper understanding of the participants and the broader organisation, which were the focus of my study, but also of myself. In this respect, this study was the starting point of a

journey towards becoming a more critically reflexive practitioner, which led me to inquire into my own practices, assumptions, and biases.

To a certain extent, the tensions and contradictions that surfaced in the study resonated with my initial hunches. However, the in-depth understanding of the participants' practical sense-making has transformed not only my understanding of their practices in the CAL program, but also in the wider organisation. I realised that in many aspects I had underestimated the importance of some of these tensions and contradictions and that the ways in which I had previously tried to address them was at times naïve and limited by my own lens to make sense of situations. For example, when I had initially interpreted the participants' lack of participation in the program as a general disinterest in their own development, the results of the analysis contributed to see these practices in a different light and appreciate the magnitude of the symbolic, social and financial costs involved for participants. Furthermore, the depth of the habitus analysis provided a sound base to discuss with the management of the MFI and highlight how their own strategies contributed to sustain the very practices they aimed to change by highlighting some contradictions between what they said they wanted and how they acted in practice. In this sense, this study also had, to a certain extent, a practical impact.

However, perhaps, the most powerful insight for me personally was the awareness of my own role in sustaining these practices in the set. Whilst my experience as a facilitator was not the focus of this study, the critically reflexive research process led to deep insights into how my own positioning in the organisational network and the emotional experience as facilitator in the sets had shaped my practice. This was eye-opening on many levels, and whilst initially this created high levels of anxiety, increasingly I came to understand them as an inherent part of not only CAL facilitation but of my professional practice in general.

Moving forward, I have made the choice to continue my work on the ground as a practitioner rather than an academic researcher. In this work, the insights and skills I have developed during this study – academic, professional and personal – are infinitely valuable to continuously develop my professional practice. Without doubt, action learning, in some form or another, will play an important role in it. Despite its

challenges and complexities, particularly in settings such as Tanzanian organisations, I wholeheartedly believe that it can make a difference to managers' lives and that it is important that our own anxieties about working with these dynamics do not impede experimenting with such approaches. Ultimately, we encounter such ambiguities in the workplace every day, and learning to navigate this complexity is at the very heart of leadership development.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Additional statement to research ethics

Additional statement to research ethics

Ulrike Burger

In this statement I would like to address the concerns raised by the Ethics Committee regarding my study, Action Learning in East Africa", namely the conflict of interest in my role as facilitator-researcher and the related power issues in the researcher-researched relationship. I am aware that this type of research is intrinsically permeated with 'unique' (Zeni, 1998) political and power issues that require my careful attention to ethical considerations, and thus I fully acknowledge the concerns raised by the ethics committee. In this statement, I set out the grounds for ethical approval, in making my case by drawing on the framework suggested by Zeni (1998) related to these issues; further I draw attention to leading-edge research contribution and ethical evidence based on prior studies and illuminate the safeguards I have put in place in the design of the research and the educational program in general.

Free and informed consent: key issue raised by the committee - concern that participants may feel coerced into participating in the study.

A number of studies that have utilized this form of research - as teachers studying their own classroom (e.g. Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Mohr, 1987; Tickle, 2001), as managers researching their own department or organisation (e.g. Watson, 1994), as social worker inquiring in service users (e.g. Coy, 2006), or as parents studying their own children (e.g. Adler & Adler, 1997) - show that while ethical dilemmas are a critical issue, such research can still be conducted in ethical ways when the researcher engages in a reflective process with her role.

I recognize that as a facilitator I am in a powerful position, which may make potential participants feel obliged to participate in the study out of concerns about negative consequences in the program (MacLean & Poole, 2010; Zeni, 2001). Furthermore, politics and power issues in the wider organizational context may exert pressures on potential participants thus masking their unwillingness to participate (see Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). I am aware of this risk and acknowledge the potential concerns participants may have concerning their future careers, their treatment in the program or 'social penalties' (MacLean & Poole, 2010) in and outside the program. While I concur with others (Williamson & Prosser, 2002; Zeni, 2001) that I may not be able to neutralize these issues completely, I have addressed these in the design in two ways:

- By reducing potential negative consequences
- By ceding my 'power over' potential study participants.

Unfortunately, due to the geographical distance between university and study location, it is not possible to involve a university-based third party in the process of obtaining consent as suggested by MacLean and Pole (2010). At the same time, I judge the option of involving a study-unrelated person from the organisation as even more risky due to issues of privacy and confidentiality. Instead, I have opted for the following safeguards:

- In the introduction event I have emphasised that the study is not related to my professional mandate, that participation is completely voluntary and that non-participation has no consequences either in- or outside the program. The same is stipulated in the consent form.
- I am not part of the organisation in which I will be implementing the leadership program, but am contracted as a consultant. I have thus no formal functional relationship or

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managerial authority over the participants. I am thus an 'insider' in the program, but at the same time an 'outsider' in the organizational context (Mercer, 2007).

- As common in organizational action learning programs, the leadership program does not involve any form of grading or assessment. Thus my potential 'power over' the participants is limited and will reduce the program participants' concerns about potential negative consequences (MacLean & Poole, 2010). This has been discussed with and agreed upon by the management team and explained to the participants in the introductory workshop.
- The leadership program is a pilot project, whose continuation (and the continuation of my working relationship with the organisation) depends on the perceived benefits of the participants. It is thus in my strongest interest that all program participants whether being part of the study or not, benefit and learn from the program.
- In case participants may feel that their learning experience in the program is impeded due to their non-participation in the study, they have the opportunity to refer to my academic supervisor, the HR department or the CEO, as indicated in the consent form.

Respect, protection and free will throughout the process (participants and non-participants)

My concerns and commitment to ethical conduct in my role as facilitator-researcher do not stop with the informed consent but continue throughout the research process. Four ethical principles guide my design and practice:

(1) treat participants equal and provide the same learning opportunities whether they are part of the study or not (MacLean & Poole, 2010)
(2) Protect those who participate in the study from harm by safeguarding their identity and well-being (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007; Tickle, 2001; Williamson & Prosser, 2002)
(3) Respect autonomy and boundaries of program/study participants (McGill & Brockband, 2004; Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007; Williamson & Prosser, 2002)
(4) Avoid undue influence of the research on the learning process (MacLean & Poole, 2010)

These principles not only inform my research ethics code, but are an integral part of my professional responsibility as action learning facilitator which extends and goes beyond this code. I concur with Zeni (1998) and Wilson (1995) that 'research' is – and has been for me - an integral part of teaching and that "the line may be hard to draw" (Zeni, 1998: 10). This is particularly true, as action learning – the methodological approach the leadership program is based on – is in itself a type of research and emphasises issues such as openness, confidentiality, responsibility, protection of well-being, attention to process and recognition of boundaries on part of the participants and the set facilitator (Hauser, 2012; McGill & Brockband, 2004). A key role in bringing this ethical code to life is therefore my day to day practice in the program (Nolen & Vander Putten, 2007; Tickle, 2001; Williamson & Prosser, 2002). As Hutchings (2002: 2) puts it: "What is needed most is not, then, a set of rules but a process of reflection, self-questioning and discussion". As it is impossible to foresee and address all potential dilemmas in advance, continuous reflexive engagement with my role(s), my relationships with the participants and my professional values throughout the process are a critical factor to be able to take moral decisions and conduct the study in an ethical manner (Hertz, 1997). Tickle (2001) was helpful in sensitizing me for a number of potential tensions that may come up during the process. She illustrates her role conflict and the tension between possessing information, but not be able to act upon or use it as she only had obtained a conditional consent and was bound to confidentiality. As she describes it: "Sometimes the need (or desire) to know will result in the promise not to reveal". She also underlines the necessity to balance among two opposing interests: the desire as researcher to know more and the responsibility as teacher to protect in the face of vulnerability and allow for gradual, autonomous

Appendix 2: Information Sheet

[TO BE PRINTED ON ORIGINAL UNIVERSITY LETTER HEAD]

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

Study: Action Learning in the East African Context

Dear LLA participant,

As you know I am currently enrolled in a doctoral program (PhD) at Lancaster University (UK). In this context I am conducting a study that enquires into how action learning is practiced and experienced in an East African context. In undertaking this research, I will be exploring my role as facilitator, and examining participants' experiences and engagement with such interventions.

What does your participation entail?

The participation in this study is completely voluntary and is not a condition for your participation in the LLA program. Not participating in the study will have no bearing on your position in the LLA program. Your participation can take place at different levels and you are free to decide whether to participate in none, one, two or all parts of the study.

- Part 1 - Observations during the training program: If you agree to participate at this level, you allow me to take notes on our conversations and discussions in the training program as data for my study, plus occasionally, with permission, allow me to record selected sessions.
- Part 2 – Written materials: If you agree to participate at this level, you allow me to use selected pieces of written work you produce during the training program as data for my study.
- Part 3: Individual Interviews: If you agree to participate at this level, you allow me to interview you regarding your experience in the leadership program after the program has ended.

If at any point you change your mind, you can withdraw from the study without providing any reason up to two weeks after the LLA program has finished. Your data will then be destroyed and not used. It is also possible withdrawing temporarily, for example when you do not wish a particular conversation to be used as data.

What will happen with your information?

- The data I collect through observation, interviews and written materials will be recorded and then made into an anonymised written transcript.
- Your data will be incorporated with the anonymised responses of other participants, analysed and coded into themes.
- The results of the study may be published in academic journals or conferences.
- The audio recordings and written transcripts will be kept until the research project has been examined, maximal for 10 years after the study has finished.
- Your identity will be kept confidential at all times and will not be disclosed to anyone inside or outside the organisation (including the management team or other participants in the program). You have however the option to be acknowledged with your real name in the introduction of the doctoral dissertation if you wish so.

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Appendix 3: Study consent form

[TO BE PRINTED ON ORIGINAL UNIVERSITY LETTER HEAD]

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH STUDY CONSENT FORM

Study: Action Learning in the East African Context

Before you consent, please read this information sheet and mark each box below with your initials if you agree. If you have any questions or queries, please feel free to ask me.

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet and fully understand the different levels at which I can participate in this study. ☐
2. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and to have them answered. ☐
3. I understand that my data will be audio recorded, transcribed, anonymised, pooled with other participants' responses, and potentially published. ☐
4. I consent to my participation in the training sessions being observed and audio recorded as data for the study ☐
5. I consent to my written work being used as data for the study ☐
6. I consent to being interviewed about my experiences in the training program ☐
7. I want to be acknowledged with my real name in the introduction of the doctoral dissertation ☐

Name of participant: _____ Name of Researcher: _____

Signature: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____

Researcher contact details: Ulrike Burger, Dept. Management Learning & Leadership Lancaster University Management School, Bailrigg, Lancaster, LA1 4YX, United Kingdom, Tel: +44 7450 209 637.

This study has been approved by Lancaster University Research Ethics Committee, if you have any complaints please contact Prof Vivien Hodgson, Lancaster University Management School, Bailrigg, Lancaster, LA1 4YX, United Kingdom, Tel: +44 1524 510920, Email: v.hodgson@lancaster.ac.uk

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Appendix 4: Data structure – behavioural requirements in the LDP

Theme	Sub-themes
Investing time and effort in learning through inquiry	***Development of inquiry competence as program objective***
	Learning as priority over problem-solving
	Learning as inquiry: cycle of action and reflection
	Continuous presence in set meetings
	Reflecting on problem and use interventions of peers and facilitator as food for thought
	Taking action to experiment with new ideas
	Evaluating outcome of action
	Engaging in recurrent cycles of action and reflection
	Promoting a commitment to learning
	Facilitating understanding and importance of process
	Formalising process steps
	Enabling a focus on learning
	Promoting participation
(Collaboratively) self-organising learning	***Fostering middle managers' independence as program rationale***
	Learning as self-directed
	Taking own choices in problem-solving process
	Collaboratively organise and structure set meetings
	Promoting (collaborative) self-organisation
	Possibility to choose own relevant problems
	Possibility to decide on direction
	Possibility to choose concrete actions
	Making space for negotiations

Engaging with not knowing, emotions and novel perspectives	***Learning as critical reflection*** Recognising not knowing Openness to new perspectives to question assumptions and taken-for granted beliefs, incl. power relations Experimenting with new ideas/solutions ***Learning as organising reflection*** Recognising and surface contradictions, conflicts and tensions Admitting to and surface emotions and political behaviour ***Promoting critical reflection*** Coaching workshop prior to LDP to experience and appreciate the power of critical inquiry Encouraging work on high-stake problems Providing readings and tools to support for critical reflection on both problems and dynamics in the set Support of facilitator to surface dynamics as opportunities for learning
Surfacing assumptions, contradictions and conflicts	***Learning as social process*** Peers in the set as main source of learning Facilitator as process consultant ***Promoting support to learning through critical reflection*** Avoiding reporting lines in set composition Providing opportunities for relationship building Establishing of ground rules Supporting of facilitator to surface dynamics as opportunities for learning

Appendix 5: Data structure - participants' tendencies to act

Theme	Sub-themes
Tendency to resist investing time in learning	***Limiting participation***
	Being absent from set meetings
	Accepting and legitimising interruptions for urgent business issues
	Hijacking the set for business discussion
	Disengaging from activities outside the set
	Circumventing inquiry
	Encouraging and expecting solutions and input
	Jumping to practical/efficient solutions in process discussions
	Quickly moving on to new issues/problems
	Refraining from taking actions
Tendency to avoid engaging with not knowing and novel perspectives	***Avoiding recognition of problems/lack of knowledge***
	Concealing not knowing
	Legitimising a problems/lack of knowledge
	Showcasing knowledge and achievements
	Avoiding novel perspectives/actions
	Setting boundaries to critical analysis
	Dismissing alternative perspectives
	Settling for known and "legitimate" solutions
	Commit to but not implementing novel solutions
Tendency to collude in the avoidance of critical analysis	***Refraining from surfacing contradictions and assumptions***
	Keeping silent as critical friend
	Providing advice and knowledge as critical friend
	Supporting the concealment of conflicts and emotions
	Legitimising conflicts and emotions
	Providing practical exit strategies from conflicts

Tendency to transfer shared responsibilities to experienced experts	***Assuming responsibility in the set*** Contributing as critical friends Taking own decisions re. time invested, peer contributions and actions taken Assuming shared responsibilities as experienced manager ***Transferring shared responsibility to experienced experts in the set*** Asking for advice, guidance, explanation Declining shared responsibilities Coalescing to transfer responsibility to experienced managers

Appendix 6: Data structure - habitus analysis

Theme	Sub-themes
Disposition to prioritise short-term performance	***Tendency to prioritise short-term performance over harmony***
	Pushing and controlling staff to promote performance
	Bending rules and procedures
	Prioritising profitability over MFI vision and mission
	Tendency to prioritise short-term performance over personal life
	Working overtime
	Accepting management decisions that affect private life
	Tendency to prioritise short-term performance over learning
	Refraining from using learning opportunities
	Refraining from creating learning opportunities
	"They see you're in the right place": performance as source of managerial authority
	Performance as managerial responsibility
	Performance as driver of managerial authority
	"Performance means bonus": performance as source of financial income
	Experience of performance-based remuneration system
	Importance of money as main reason for work
Disposition to promote image as managers-in-control	***Tendency to showcase expertise and results***
	Providing detailed technical explanations
	Highlighting achievements/results
	Emphasising titles
	Tendency to hide lack of expertise or information
	Pretending to know
	Blaming others/situation for problems
	Justifying a lack of expertise

	Tendency to avoid lack of control Desire to formalise processes and instructions Desire for management approval Reluctance for innovation and change ***Tendency to make managerial position visible*** Emphasising privileges Openly displaying physical status symbols Displaying power by threatening staff with potential consequence
Disposition to invest time and effort in relevant learning	***Tendency to create opportunities to accumulate relevant knowledge*** Desire for further studies Seeking external training opportunities Participating in corporate learning events (if felt relevant) Asking for advice from more experienced experts ***Tendency to work hard to accumulate relevant knowledge*** Determination to learn Investing time in practicing
Disposition to promote harmony	***Tendency to prevent confrontation/dissatisfaction*** Refraining from making unpopular decisions Blaming others/rules and regulations for unpopular decisions Postponing bad news Catering to staff wishes ***Tendency to respect hierarchies/support face saving*** Remaining silent Executing orders Refraining from criticism ***Importance of harmony as driver for "good" relations*** Harmony promotes openness and cooperation Conflicts limits openness and cooperation

Managerial capitals	
"The more you know, the better you perform": Knowledge as cultural capital	***"The more you know, the better you perform": Knowledge as cultural capital*** Expertise and knowledge as driver of performance Leadership competence as driver of performance Knowledge as source of preferential treatment as learner ***Limited knowledge and expertise of middle managers*** Increased requirements of expertise Unequal access/possession of expertise Unequal access to social network/information Limited recognition as subject matter expert as learners
"Managers *must* know": knowledge as symbolic capital	***Knowledge as source of managerial authority*** Knowledge as justification for managerial role Knowledge as ongoing legitimisation of managerial role ***Knowledge as source of reputation as "good" and "capable" learner*** Knowledge as proof of capability Knowledge as proof of role fulfilment
"I cannot do it alone": personal relations as social capital	***Personal relations as driver of performance*** Personal relations with team as driver of performance Personal relations with managerial peers as driver of performance ***Personal relations as source of knowledge*** Personal relations as source of knowledge as managers Personal relations as source of knowledge as learners

"Umoja": financial income as economic, symbolic and social capital in communities	***"We have to take care of ourselves": Money as economic capital in the community*** Challenging economic/political conditions Importance of money as means to provide ***"Who has, gives": Money as symbolic and social capital in the community*** The community as safety net Money as means to fulfil social obligations Importance of harmony in community
Middle managers' positioning in the MFI	
Middle managers in sandwich position	***Work as hierarchically structured*** Hierarchy provides order and clarity Staff as self-interested, lazy, and unknowledgeable Managerial position gives authority to control Managers "are the best" ***Limited authority of middle managers in relation to MT*** Middle managers excluded from decision-making Middle managers excluded from communication flow
Peer relations in middle manager group	
Head office managers constructed as more powerful than branch managers	***HO managers with better access to managerial networks and information*** Geographical closeness to management team Closer cooperation with management team ***HOM with functional authority over branch managers*** HO managers take decisions over branches HO managers control branch managers
HO credit managers constructed as more powerful than non-credit HO managers	***Credit managers with greater access to financial resources*** Credit area as profit centre (in rel. to support functions) Prioritisation of credit as historic core business (in

	rel. to non-credit business areas) ***Credit managers with greater access to networks, information and expertise*** Closer cooperation with management team Access to more extended network in other MFIs More access to internal technical trainings
Managers with seniority and/or higher age constructed as more powerful than younger and/or more junior managers	***Managers with seniority attributed with better access to managerial networks and information*** Managers with seniority work usually in head office Managers with seniority have established social networks Managers with seniority cooperate closer with MT ***Managers with seniority are attributed more knowledge and experience*** Managers with seniority train junior managers Junior managers ask senior managers for advice Respectfully titled as “first-/second-generation managers”

Appendix 7: Illustration of incorporated relations among middle managers