

THE SEMIOTIC LEARNING FRAMEWORK

How to facilitate Organisational Learning

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Abstract: The complexity of current organisational contexts implies the need for innovative learning theories and practices at organisational level. Organisational learning represents a critical aspect of each organisation's capacity to innovate, and to nurture and maintain its inner dynamism. The Semiotic Learning Framework is presented as an approach to organisational learning and as a working methodology to be applied within organisational contexts. It derives its rationale from social semiotics and from social philosophy and it focuses on critical organisational issues, such as collaborative work and learning, reflexive practices and knowledge creation and sharing. This framework is to be applied as an organisational learning initiative at organisational level, as the content of a post-graduate programme, and as a working methodology for interdisciplinary team works.

1 INTRODUCTION

The presentation of the Semiotic Learning Framework (SLF) includes the following sections: the theoretical background, the inductive methodology, the framework's Learning Steps, the organisational key issues, the possible applications of the SLF, and finally a conclusion.

The SLF's Learning Cycle steps present the four stages of *ice-break*, *experiencing*, *action horizons* and *innovative practice*. The subsequent sections are an account of the elements of the learning cycle itself. Because of paper length restrictions only the *organisational key issues* will be discussed. The framework also includes the *working concepts* that include contributions from key authors, four philosophical categories, and three theoretical approaches. The key authors considered are Bakhtin, Halliday, Wittgenstein, Foucault, Heidegger, and White, and their contributions are critical to the promotion of what is presented as Semiotic Learning, the notions of *dialogism*, *grammar*, *language game*, *discursive formations*, *being-in-the-world*, and *master tropes*. The four central categories are *action*, *language*, *knowledge* and *meaning*. And the theoretical approaches are *social semiotics*, *critical realism* and *action theory*. The richness and theoretical scope of the framework is also a form of syncretism as the contributions from the authors, the

categories, and the theoretical approaches all share a common standing and thus mutually support and reinforce one another. The main applications for the theoretical framework are presented and these include three different levels: organisational learning applications, educational applications, and applied organisational research.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The present paper consists on the presentation of the organisational learning framework that has been derived, in an inductive way, from the analysis of case studies and from theories from the fields of management and organisation science and social philosophy. The central aspect to highlight is the importance of meaning-making for the processes of community building and identity enhancement at organisational level.

The Semiotic Learning Framework uses social semiotics theory as its main foundational theoretical approach. Social semiotics, developed by Halliday (1978) and Kress (1985), among others, raised out of the Saussurean school of thought. Besides the influence of Saussure's theories, through social semiotics, the SLF also draws on Peirce's pragmatism. The SLF, by insisting on the links between theory and practice, the individual and the

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social, the internal and the external, by arguing in favour of practice-based and action-driven approaches, and by focusing on the spontaneous and natural, trivial and quotidian development of everyday organisational life uses a pragmatic approach as developed by Peirce. Focusing on self and agency, from social semiotics theory the SLF takes the interest on the notion of interdependent social practices, on the concept of social subjectivity, and on the contributions from the social theory of discourse. The theoretical breakthrough work of Bakhtin, Wittgenstein, Bourdieu and Foucault are used as foundational background references to the particular approach developed in the SLF, an approach that proposes a new standing in terms of organisational theory and practice.

The Semiotic Learning Framework is a theoretical approach to organisational learning that is to be applied at organisational level, within research projects and as a contribute to post-graduate management and information systems education. This Framework develops, in an inductive way, from the analysis of case studies. Four knowledge-intensive organisations have been studied: two research centres that support policy making at European level, one innovative national policy-research organisation and one service providing organisation that is running a pilot project.

The SLF is organised in a series of four steps that represent the different stages of a learning cycle. The contents of the Learning Cycle steps emerge from the work developed throughout the analysis of the fieldwork and the theoretical discussion. The present section highlights the critical aspects of this development. Organisational learning is a continual, though not necessarily continuous, process, and organisational learning design tools direct, inform and facilitate this learning process. These steps are to be understood as an iterative mechanism balancing the tension between theory and practice, between personal and organisational learning and development, and between the formal and the informal, the structured and the unstructured, and the predictable and the unpredictable elements of

organisational life. The key idea is that theory and practice are interdependent and mutually determine each other. In similar terms, individuals and organisations simultaneously influence one another in a permanent interaction.

The Semiotic Learning Framework refers to an approach to organisational learning and thus its privileged application domain is that on organisations as such, in particular the knowledge-intensive ones. The use of management and organisation theories, when combined with the contributions of social philosophy, bring groundbreaking perspectives to the understanding of the complexity of organisational reality. Therefore, the SLF has a wider range of applications' domains than its immediate organisational field, including the areas of applied organisational research and the field of postgraduate education for both managers and information technology professionals. The SLF assumes the locus of a community as the privileged arena for the promotion of organisational learning initiatives. Its practical application assume that it is within a community that the insights of the SLF may be learnt and fully explored.

The present paper has presented, described and discussed the theoretical framework Semiotic Learning: a working methodology that promotes and facilitates learning in knowledge-intensive organisations. The Semiotic Learning Framework is an approach to organisational learning based on an action perspective and supported by social semiotics and other related theories and concepts. The current paper presents the SLF as the integration of the practical and theoretical works and discussions. The SLF includes a learning cycle, key organisational issues and central working concepts. The possible applications of the framework are also discussed. The SLF is a contribution to the field of organisational learning that focuses on innovation and creativity as critical elements within the current organisational context of increased complexity.

Table 1 presents a summary of the critical characteristics of the SLF.

Table 1: The inductive and multi-grounded character of the SLF.

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|---|---|
| <i>Central elements from the Analysis of the Case Studies</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The quality of community life and of organisational vision - the strength of organisational identity and strategic thinking - the integrating role of organisational meaning-making processes |
| <i>Inductive developments from Organisation Theory</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisational Learning, Knowledge Management and Communities of Practice - the context of the Knowledge Economy |
| <i>The mediation role of Social Theory</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Semiotics, Critical Realism, and Action Theory - Hermeneutical, ontological and epistemic grounding of reflexivity |
| <i>Multi-grounded Theory Building</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Semiotic Learning Framework - a pragmatic, non-dualist, action-driven and process-centred approach |

3 THE INDUCTIVE DEVELOPMENT FROM THE EMPIRICAL WORK

The empirical analysis focused on several organisational factors including the organisation's structure, culture, communication, leadership style, degree of control, strategic vision, degree of innovativeness and creativity, routines and procedures and, most importantly, the quality of the organisation's community life.

There was a difference in the degree of work satisfaction and in the perceived effectiveness at organisational level among the cases analysed. In general there was a lower quality of community life, organisational cohesion and clarity of organisational identity at the first two cases, which concerned two European agencies, as compared to the two cases related to smaller and innovative service providing units and pilot projects. From the perspectives expressed at the interviews and from the observations of formal and informal meetings at the European agencies there was a general difficulty in communicating across the different functional areas and often this was reported to be related to the lack of leadership at management level. Also, there was strong group identification within each of the professional groups and this created a difficulty in terms of promoting a cohesive and rewarding community life at organisational level as a whole.

Among the problems that have been identified are the non-alignment between organisational goals, structure and leadership style, the low degree of internal cohesion at organisational level, the lack of a holistic approach, and the low degree of sensitiveness and awareness to the complexity organisational reality. The reports related to the two last cases showed a high degree of work satisfaction and perceived organisation effectiveness that may be interpreted as a result of high quality of the organisations' community life.

The analysis of the four case studies enabled the further development at theoretical level that was conducted through a literature review of organisation theory and of social theories. The next section presents the Semiotic Learning Framework's Learning Steps that follow from the empirical and theoretical discussions.

4 THE LEARNING CYCLE STEPS

The predictable elements of organisational procedures may have an enabling or a restraining influence in relation to organisational learning

initiatives. Formal organisational practices are a medium as well as the result of the unpredictable and informal components of organisational dynamics, i.e. structures determine, condition and influence processes, and these simultaneously recreate and transform the structures, in an interdependent way.

A crucial issue within the SLF is the identification and acknowledgement of these interdependencies and interactions, and the development of alternative creative and innovative organisational practices that enable the exploration of each organisation's full potential. This potential critically depends on the degree of openness and flexibility present in every institution and the SLF works on these characteristics. The four learning-steps of the SLF are the following:

(i) Ice-break - Raising key issues: The first step of the learning process consists on an introduction to the domain of organisational learning from the perspective of the SLF. More important than delivering prescriptive notions is the raising of key issues that may enable a questioning process to develop. Within the broad field of organisation theory, several approaches are relevant. These correspond to the *organisational key issues* summarised in the next section: a) appreciative inquiry; b) open complex systems; c) socio-technical systems; d) collaborative work and learning; e) knowledge creation and sharing; f) reflexive practice and double-loop learning; and g) trust and social capital.

(ii) Experiencing – Confronting reality: From the first introductory step a general understanding is developed that has to be confronted with the individual and organisational reality that is specific, situated and circumstantial. The degree of detail of the first step depends on the prior knowledge and familiarity with the areas and approaches included as the framework's key issues. As the SLF involves the repetition of the learning cycle, some of the aspects may be omitted from the first round and/or others added later. The central idea is to grasp one or several notions that are able to open new grounds for analysis and debate. From the analysis and debate of step one, step two consists of bringing forth the key issues raised, and confronting them with the daily organisational life. "Experiencing" is thus a process of attentiveness to the specific circumstances of organisational reality. It aims at gradually making explicit the conditions of possibility for organisational learning to occur in a conscious and intentional form. These conditions of possibility involve both action-possibilities and thought-possibilities (Karl Jaspers' terms, Young-Bruehl, 1981), i.e. both the ability to perform and the interest in doing so. This ground-zero field-work step

incorporates two simultaneous lines of development. In the sense that every individual and every organisation has an intrinsic capacity to learn, to develop and to innovate, it is important to focus on the issues that limit and restrain this capacity, the barriers, blockages and dead-ends. This innovation capacity is a raw material, a hidden potential that needs to be fostered, promoted, encouraged and facilitated. So there is a negative focus, of reducing the barriers and limitations, and a positive focus, of improving and strengthening the creative learning capacity.

(iii) Action Horizons - Transformative learning: The third step returns to theoretical presentation and discussion. The broadening of horizons and the development of new perspectives is fundamentally rooted on the kind of mentality, mind-set, and world-view prevalent in each community and organisation. In order to improve the understanding and questioning capacity, certain key theoretical concepts have to be explored and operationalised. This developmental process may be characterised as consisting of both learning and un-learning instances and it reflects a disclosing and dialogical standing. The SLF's *working concepts* (not developed here for space restrictions) consist of philosophical concepts from six relevant thinkers, four philosophical categories, and three theoretical approaches. The central concepts within this framework are the following: a) Bakhtin's concept of dialogism; b) Halliday's notion of grammar; c) Wittgenstein's concept of language-games; d) Foucault's discursive formations; e) Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world; and f) White's master tropes.

The four philosophical categories that are relevant are the following: g) Action; h) Language; i) Knowledge; and j) Meaning.

And the three theoretical approaches are the following: k) Social semiotics – pragmatism, interdependent social practices, social theory of discourse and social subjectivity; l) Critical realism – social agents, social structures and human agency; and m) Action Theory and Hermeneutics – as an ontologically grounded epistemic transformation.

These key concepts, categories and theories may only be operationalised gradually, in a disclosing and dialogical way, as was referred above. They are to be developed according to the conditions of possibility identified in step two. The critical idea is the transmission of the SLF rationale that is based on the development, intensification and deepening of communities within organisations. Working concepts are thus a critical element within the process of internalisation of the reflexive practice that constitutes this learning framework.

(iv) Innovative Practice – Open dynamism:

The fourth and last step of the learning cycle focuses on acknowledging the emergence of developmental and innovative learning patterns, and on opening new windows of opportunity for organisational development and community building. It is critical to insist on the issue that organisational learning must first be promoted and fostered within communities and only then may it be spread throughout the organisation. The community level represents both the focus of the theoretical aspects of the framework as well as the focus of its practical application. In this sense, and within this framework, the notion of situated-action refers to the deepening and intensifying of communities at organisational level, as it is community level situated-action that enables collective meaning-making and shared understanding that is at the basis of knowledge creation and sharing at organisational level. There are specific organisational learning design initiatives that arise from the theoretical development of step one and step three, however, these have to be situation-specific and cannot be generalised or recommended and implemented in a normative and prescriptive way. The theoretical concepts refer to that which is possible to generalise, but the practical application of this organisational learning framework does not propose specific practices. On the contrary, the SLF ascertains that the organisational practices should be transformed and improved according to the situated reading, interpretation and understanding of specific communities confronted with concrete realities. Again, the key issues are openness and flexibility, not in terms of functionalistic roles or job-profile, but in terms of mentality, mind-sets and world-views. Not as rationalistic mental-models but as reflexive and insightful pragmatic oriented action-centred and practice-based approaches.

Organisational learning never ends, and as each community and organisation develops new areas are disclosed that in turn need further understanding and development, so that the cycle restarts with the step one - ice-breaking and the identification of key issues. There is not a clear cut division, either among different steps in the cycle or among different cycles so that it is possible, and even desirable, that there is not a perfect, homogenous and symmetric development in relation to different issues and aspects of organisational life. The point that has to be made is that this framework consists on a possible approach to organisational learning and that it presents an idiosyncratic theoretical perspective that is renitent to accept a single, unique, monolithic and standardised discourse on organisational practices. Therefore, though there is a constant subjacent reference to organisational practice throughout the

development of the SLF, it cannot subscribe specific practices as these are themselves the result that is delivered through the application and use of this theoretical framework for organisational learning. If the SLF were to list a set of specific practices to be applied uniformly at organisational level it would be a contradiction in its own terms.

5 ORGANISATIONAL KEY ISSUES

The SLF acknowledges the early contributions of social theory research to the field of organisational studies. Current organisational approaches may be enriched by the incorporation of key insights from pioneer, though still active, research traditions. Appreciative inquiry is a fundamental aspect to be acknowledged (Cooperrider *et al.*, 2001).

G. Vickers (1965) work on appreciative systems developed a tradition that is still relevant in today's organisational settings. According to Vickers, we perceive reality selectively according to our judgement making, our 'appreciation', and this process consists of a relationship management, within which goal seeking represents one of its particular cases. Vickers rejects the goal-seeking model of human behaviour, and also the cybernetic paradigm, where the course to be steered is available from outside the system, whereas systems of human activity themselves generate and regulate multiple and mutually inconsistent courses thus being an autopoietic system (Maturana, Varela, 1980). The process of designing organisational learning initiatives is itself anchored in a systematic collaborative inquiry process into the organisation's learning experience and practice (Shani, Docherty, 2003). Appreciative inquiry thus has advanced beyond being a philosophical orientation to becoming a theory and a method for system's learning and development. It fundamentally seeks to build constructive ongoing dialogue between people in an organisation, a dialogue about past and present learning capacities, processes, innovations, and unexplored potentials.

The contributions from systems thinking and from complexity theories are also critically highlighted within the SLF. Holistic thinking refers to the perspective of perceiving reality as a whole, not as 'the whole' but as 'wholes'. Historical examples of holistic thinkers are Aristotle, Marx and Husserl, however the institutionalisation of holistic thinking only occurred in the 1950s through the development of systems thinking and of the general systems theory (Checkland, 1984, 1999). In the 1970s, the soft-system approach developed, and

instead of perceiving the world as systemic, it perceived it as a complex whole that could be explored through alternative world-views and a systemic process of inquiry, that focused on learning leading to action rather than on optimisation. Hard-systems focus on problem-solving, and model organisations as coordinated functional task systems seeking to achieve declared goals, and thus see the task of management as decision making in support of goal seeking. H. Simon (1996) developed this type of approach that proves to be extremely effective in situations where there are clear-cut performance measures, and goals are objectively defined.

Soft-system methodology arises as a complement to hard-systems perspective and it focuses on open complex systems, systems that are in constant interaction with their environment, and where the social and political aspects of the system are especially taken into account. Within the theoretical development relevant to the present organisational context the theories about complexity, emergence, turbulence and chaos are critical. From a non-mathematical perspective, chaos theory, the non-linear, and complexity may be taken to be a single paradigm (Urry, 2003, Prigogine, 1980). Complexity has also been theorised beyond systems thinking, and Stacey (2001), though acknowledging the importance of systems thinking, and being closely related to the aims of soft systems methodology, focuses on organisations as *complex responsive processes of relating*, where iterative processes sustain continuity with potential transformation at the same time. According to Stacey (2001), analogies drawn from natural complexity sciences are based on a Kantian and idealistic view in which nature is assumed to unfold from already enfolded forms. However, this perspective does not encompass an explanation of the emergence of truly novel forms. This strand of complexity thinking is an extension of systems thinking about nature. An alternative perspective is that derived from Hegel as interpreted by Mead, in which the future is understood to be under perpetual construction, and it is this second strand of the complexity sciences that consists the source domain for analogies with human action (Stacey, 2001). Chaordic systems thinking is a conceptual contribution for explaining human performance management under turbulent conditions, that is presented as a new paradigm for working life (Eijnatten, 2003). This approach tries to account for the emergence of real novelty in terms of Stacey. Chaordic systems thinking recognises that systems are complex, dynamic and non-linear, in which chaos and order co-exist. This approach is based on an understanding of systems as holons, entities that are both wholes and parts, both

autonomous and dependent, and it agrees with Stacey's argument of the previous system approaches as suffering from a Kantian split and from being highly embedded in a control paradigm (Eijnatten, 2003). The perspective of chaordic systems thinking (Eijnatten, 2003), that uses the chaos metaphor as an interpreting lens, and that recognises systems as being simultaneously ordered and chaotic, is presented as a new holistic approach and as the next-generation framework for socio-technical systems design. Holons are entities that are both wholes and parts of a greater whole.

Socio-technical approaches are gaining wide recognition. The term 'socio-technical systems' was coined by E. Trist to describe his team's work at the Tavistock Institute on the interrelatedness of environmental, social, and technical systems of organisations (Emery, Trist, 1969). The origins of socio-technical systems date from the period after the second World War, when E. Trist and F. Emery, two social scientists, pioneered the movement toward experimentation with alternative work redesigns, different forms of employee involvement, varied degrees of autonomy and responsibility in work teams, participative management orientations, and the development of learning systems, all with deep concerns regarding economic performance. The present study acknowledges the overwhelming importance of both systems thinking and of structuralism in current interpretations of both organisations and societies as a whole. Nevertheless, this acknowledgement of systems thinking and of structuralism aims at searching beyond them, thus contradicting the dominant and mainstream management approach that takes for granted a systems perspective.

6 THE CONTEXT OF THE KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY OF THE INFORMATION AGE

The centrality of information and knowledge in current economic and social processes justifies the concept of the 'knowledge economy'. The knowledge economy of the information age (Kearmally, 1999) stands for the prevalent context of increasing levels of complexity, turbulence, and of the pace of change that characterises the global markets of present times. This context was set forth by the rapid technological development of the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, the last quarter of the century witnessed an increase in the number of organisational theories directed at enabling organisations to deal with and to profit

from the opportunities, as well as to avoid the risks, of the new organisational reality. The Semiotic Learning Framework, as an organisational learning initiative, builds on these theories and highlights some of its key concepts. Core concepts of the SLF are: collaborative forms of work and learning, knowledge creation and sharing, reflexive practices and double-loop learning. The fundamental need for collaborative practices and forms of work and learning is intrinsic to the current context of the knowledge economy. While in traditional neo-classical economics knowledge was understood to be an implicit production factor that was subject to the rule of diminishing returns, within the present context, knowledge represents a central factor of production that presents the unique characteristic of increasing returns, thus increasing its value while being used and shared (Kearmally, 1999, Drucker, 1999).

The importance of learning arises directly from the need to disseminate and share knowledge across an organisation, though learning, within the context of the SLF, refers to more than the reductive view of formal organisational training or to the aggregation of individual learning processes. In similar terms, collaboration acquires an emphasis and a connotation that surpasses previous protocol or superficial etiquette rules within organisations to become the main drive for, and key issue behind, organisational growth and development. The theory of communities of practice (Lave, Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1999, Wenger, McDermott, Snyder, 2002, Brown, Duguid, 1991) incorporates a social theory of learning and of collaboration, emphasising the social embeddedness and embodiedness of all learning processes. Therefore, it places the social dimensions of learning and of collaborating as the central and decisive criteria for organisational innovation and success. The degree and capacity that an organisation incorporates in terms of collaboration and learning fundamentally determine its potential to innovate and develop.

Since late 1970s there has been a growing interest in the notions of learning and on the creation and management of knowledge or of intellectual capital in organisations. From an industrial age context, the new age of knowledge work in the information society represents a global pattern of change that includes new forms of organisations and different ways of managing them. The main assets of the industrial age were traded in markets so that the organisations could be objectively valued. In the new knowledge economy, knowledge is the major asset and as it cannot be directly traded in markets there are difficulties in valuing organisations, so that the intellectual capital movement calls for new forms of measuring and managing organisational

knowledge assets (Stewart 1997). The task of managing knowledge assumes that knowledge is in individual minds, mostly in a tacit form, and that it may be converted into an explicit form, and be stored and manipulated by the use of information technology. The cultural reluctance to share knowledge requires leadership, and a management style that encourages and persuades knowledge sharing by promoting dialogue. This mainstream perspective on knowledge management has benefited from the constructive criticism of approaches that call attention to the intrinsic and complementary processes that occur within organisations, such as the importance of communities of practice in the generation of knowledge (Lave, Wenger, 1991, Brown, Duguid, 1991), and also the view of organisations as sense-making systems (Weick, 1995, 2001). The importance of informal forms of learning, of conversations, and of storytelling focus on the role of narrative forms of knowledge, and on alternative interpretations to the process of creating, sharing and storing knowledge.

The fields of organisational learning and of knowledge management have been influenced by a web of authors and of baseline theories. Argyris and Schön (1978, Argyris, 1982) notions of individual mental models and of single and double-loop learning processes largely influenced P. Senge's work on the learning organisation (1990). The importance of questioning one's own assumptions and of reflective practice, key concepts in Argyris and Schön's work, are critical foundations of organisational learning theory. Senge also rested on Bohm's concept of dialogue (1965, 1983) and on systems dynamics (Forrester, 1971, Meadows, 1982) thus presenting the learning organisation as a system. Peter Senge (1990), states that "organisations change only when people change, and people change only when they change from within". Equally critical is Nonaka's model of knowledge creation in organisations (Nonaka, 1991, Nonaka, Takeuchi, 1995). Like Senge, Nonaka also draws on systems thinking, including some concepts from chaos and complexity theories (Prigogine, 1980) that he treats as extensions of systems thinking. Bateson's (1973) work on the ecology of the mind influenced Nonaka's learning theories, though the major influence comes from Nonaka's biased reading of Polanyi's (1958) work, therefore differentiating and separating tacit from explicit knowledge.

7 APPLICATIONS OF THE FRAMEWORK

Organisational learning initiatives are the first instance for the application of the framework because it is at organisational level that the SLF is directed. As an organisational learning framework it includes three interrelated dimensions: organisational design, organisational consulting and organisational audit. Another level of analysis also refers to a triangular relation between: (i) web-based community building mechanisms, (ii) group dynamics and training, (ii) and personal support through coaching, mentoring and tutoring. Organisational design corresponds to both the creation and developmental organisational stages where the SLF is applied on a continual basis as the background work supporting the organisations' rationale.

Organisational consulting corresponds to the application of the framework to deal with specific and critical situations, when strategic decisions have to be made or when there is conflict or organisational identity crisis. Organisational audit corresponds to the use of the framework as an evaluation device, as a means to determine the potential for development and the gap between that potential and current reality. Organisational evaluation, self-assessment and internal consulting are areas that the SLF helps to strengthen as key strategic areas for organisational development.

The SLF application within an educational setting potentially includes a postgraduate course, an on-line course, and a vocational and professional training initiative focusing on the relationship between information systems and social theory. The target public of these educational formats is management and information technology professionals, though they may be extended to other organisational directed professionals. The areas of potential development of the framework within an educational setting are: (i) information technology and social theory, (ii) project management and policy formulation, (iii) strategic innovation management, and (iv) information systems analysis and development.

The SLF may be used within the field of applied organisation research focusing on three interrelated aspects: transdisciplinary action-research, social philosophy informed research, and practice oriented research. The framework explicitly assumes a certain theoretical orientation and its application as a research approach does not determine exactly the end product of the research but rather gives a common orientation and rationale that may be understood as a background methodology, i.e. a set

of principles directing the theoretical perspective that supports and grounds the research. Organisational practices are understood as conveying a dynamic rationale that continuously defines the organisation's core identity. The SLF as a potential research approach explores this dynamism and aims at a better understanding and subsequent promotion of organisational innovation and development.

8 FINAL WORDS

The central aspect to be considered is the theoretical standing that this framework proposes: the inquisitive, critical, boundary expanding and creative-thinking perspective. Though reflexive practices are widely acknowledged in organisational learning literature as having a paramount importance, Semiotic Learning draws on theoretical approaches that are specialised in reflexivity *per se*. Though there is a large variety of approaches that have been integrated into the SLF, their scope points into a single direction, that of exploring post-cognitivist and non-mentalistic approaches to reflexivity. The SLF calls attention to the taken for granted assumptions of mainstream management thinking and explicitly proposes an alternative and complementary perspective. This perspective includes a theory and also a praxis, i.e. it has to be lived through and experienced in order to be fully understood. Nietzsche, Dilthey, Heidegger, Jaspers, Wittgenstein and Foucault also emphasised the practical nature of their philosophical work and they all explicitly claimed that their thought could only be valued as making a difference in terms of how life itself is lived.

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