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Reviewing Performance or Changing Routines? An Analysis of
the Experience of Participants in Performance Management
Review Meetings

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Reviewing Performance or Changing Routines? An Analysis of
the Experience of Participants in Performance Management
Review Meetings

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Abstract

The problem examined in this thesis falls under the broad question of the nature of effect of performance measurement and management (PMM) on organizational performance. Responding to the unsuccessful attempts of the current literature to produce conclusive evidence of the effect of PMM on performance and building on the recent studies documenting the effect of PMM on organizational processes, the work reported in this thesis employs the organizational routines perspective as an analytical lens for examining the way in which a particular PMM practice – a performance management review meeting – affects organizational processes that generate performance. More specifically, the study uses Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model of routines in order to explore the ways in which organizational actors experience the ostensive aspect of organizational routines in the context of a performance management review meeting.

Based on two case studies conducted in the UK in 2009, the thesis develops a model suggesting that performance management review meetings influence the dynamics of organizational routines by affecting a number of specific processes that constitute the engagement of the participants at the meeting with the ostensive aspect of the routine. The results highlight the critical role of attention in these processes and suggest a number of ways in which the attention of the participants may be influenced. As such, the study explicates the micro dynamics of the link between a PMM intervention in the form of the performance management review meeting and the organizational processes that generate performance, thus making a step towards increasing the understanding of the direct impact of PMM on performance.

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Reading over these two pages, it is with gratefulness and humility that I put my sole name on the title page of this thesis.

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Pavlov, A. 2008. "How does performance measurement actually work? An exploration of the impact of performance measurement on organizational routines." *A presentation at the AOM OM Division Doctoral Consortium at the 2008 Academy of Management Annual Meeting*, 10 August, Anaheim, CA.

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Chapter 1. The Story.

1.1 Overview

This chapter provides an introduction to the PhD thesis presented in this document. The purpose of the chapter is to explain the rationale for the style and structure of the thesis as well as to lay out some “ground rules” that have been chosen to guide this research.

1.2 The style and structure of this thesis.

1.2.1 General structure considerations. The Story.

There are many various ways to write up the report of a research study. The traditional way of reporting, which harkens back to the realm of natural sciences, normally calls for the writing that is devoid of “all associations, emotional coloring, and implications of attitude and judgment” (Brooks and Warren, 1938 quoted in Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1997, p. 3). Likewise, Pinder and Bourgeois (1982), writing for *Administrative Science Quarterly*, suggest that literary language should be banished from research reports, and that scientific communication should be linked “to observable phenomena by way of direct reference and ostentation” (p. 646). In other words, let the data speak for themselves.

While this style of writing and reporting is sometimes powerful and may promise the possibility of gleaning the truth that is timeless and context-independent, I do not believe it is applicable to the research that is presented in this dissertation. Reducing research reporting to the “direct reference” to the “observable phenomena”, which Pinder and Bourgeois (1982) are arguing for, is possible when both the phenomena under study and the mode of reference have been abstracted and objectified, i.e., when the scientific community has agreed on both the definitions of the phenomena and on the methods of translating them into observable proxies. Neither of these is true for much of qualitative research, where phenomena are often emergent and difficult to define, and it is certainly not applicable for a study that focuses on people’s experiences and relies heavily on the ability of the researcher to build relationships with research participants. In the research reported in this dissertation, “observable phenomena” are time-bound, context-defined, and researcher-dependent; and “direct reference” is mediated by the decisions that I, as a researcher, made in focusing on, selecting, and

interpreting the data that I collected. Thus, it is the development of a coherent argument rather than the presentation of data that becomes the primary task of the researcher (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1997).

Applying Golden-Biddle and Locke's (1997) ideas to the qualitative research in the field of management accounting – the primary domain of literature for this thesis – Baxter and Chua (2008) suggest that "...the writing of "facts" depends on the literary convincingness of [qualitative management accounting field research]: our aesthetic response to a text's authenticity, plausibility and criticality helps to persuade us as to its "facts" (pg. 112). Dealing with this task makes the traditional scientific style of reporting unsuitable. Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997), however, propose an alternative approach to constructing accounts of qualitative research, which accommodates the difficulties raised above while preserving the rigour that is necessary in order to make a valid contribution to the literature. In laying out their approach, they draw on the metaphor of the story.

A story, in their view, is an argument that is developed through time, an argument that starts in the present moment, undergoes certain development and ends in a future state. Applied to research, an argument that is structured this way starts with the current conversations in the literature and ends with the explanation of the way the study has changed these conversations. The middle part provides the evidence for the development of theoretical points that have brought about the change in the literature. This approach combines the thorough grounding of the argument in the relevant domains of literature with rigorous theory development, while formally acknowledging and accommodating the unavoidable discretion of the researcher in the matters of data analysis. For these reasons, the three-stage structure of the argument advocated by Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997) has been employed to form the backbone of the structure of this thesis.

1.2.2 Structural and stylistic consistency

A departure from the traditional scientific method of reporting the conduct and the results of the study does not in any way signify a threat to the rigour and meaningfulness of the reported findings. Reflecting this point, the general structure of

the thesis outlined in the preceding section is supported by a number of measures aimed at ensuring the structural and stylistic consistency throughout the text. Some of them pertain to particular methods or literature domains and will be discussed in detail in the appropriate sections of the document. Several others, however, are general principles running through the thesis and, thus, warrant a brief discussion in the introductory chapter.

1.2.2.1 The “Trail of Evidence”

Although this thesis makes use of the story metaphor, a “story” is not meant to be understood as a carelessly constructed and casually told narrative. As Golden-Biddle and Locke (1997) note, the issue is “...not whether we tell stories, but rather how conscious we are of the stories we tell” (pg. xvii). Likewise, as Baxter and Chua (2008) put it, “...truthful and well-made narratives necessarily invoke both literary and factual forms of convincingness” (pg. 112). The development of the theoretical points that constitute the contribution of the research in this thesis is thus firmly grounded in the empirical evidence collected throughout the duration of the study. In this thesis, special attention has been paid to show evidential origins of every significant claim and conclusion, thus providing the “trail of evidence” and ensuring the link between the data and the results. For this purpose, a specific method of data analysis, which provides a structure for the process of making sense of the data (Template Analysis), has been employed in this thesis.

1.2.2.2 Philosophical and methodological consistency

Preserving the validity of the argument and the consistency of meaning in a qualitative study is a difficult task, considering the degree of indeterminacy in defining, approaching, and analysing the object of study. At every junction throughout the research process, the researcher runs the risk of taking a decision that is valid on the surface yet comes from a set of conflicting philosophical assumptions. In order to mitigate this risk, the philosophical assumptions underlying this study have been made explicit. Moreover, special care has been taken to ensure philosophical and methodological consistency throughout all stages of this research. As such, the set of philosophical assumptions is consistent with the nature of the research question and, in turn, drives the choice of the method of inquiry and, subsequently, the methods of data

collection as well as the instruments of data analysis. The resulting philosophical consistency of the argument lends validity to the conclusions of the study.

1.2.2.3 The use of first person pronouns

One of the reasons for departing from the traditional scientific methods of reporting on the conduct and results of the research is that in a qualitative field study scientific detachment is impossible. The alternative approach selected here explicitly acknowledges the role of the researcher in developing a relevant argument from the collected data. Consistent with this approach is the use of first person pronouns, which are used where necessary throughout the thesis.

1.3 The summary of the thesis

1.3.1 The results of the thesis

This thesis examines performance management review (PMR) meetings in order to understand how meeting participants experience the ostensive aspect of the organizational routine (i.e., their subjective understanding of the routine) reviewed at the meeting. Based on a small pilot study and two in-depth case studies, the thesis develops a model of the participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. The model explicates the micro-processes that link various elements of the PMR meeting to the processes of stability and change in the ostensive aspect of the routine. When routines are understood as the organizational processes that generate performance, the model allows one to begin to understand the micro-dynamics of the effect of performance measurement and management (PMM) practices on performance and, consequently, to make a step towards explaining one of the great current challenges in the PMM literature – the question of the impact of PMM on performance.

1.3.2 The logic of the argument

In order to arrive at the results presented in the preceding section, the thesis developed and presented an argument. Graphically, the entire chain of major decisions, from the general question to the specific contributions, is presented in Figure 1. The PhD Thesis on One Page. This figure contains three columns. The first column presents the questions that I asked, the decisions that I made, and the results that I obtained. As such,

it forms the backbone of the “story” told in this thesis. The other two columns reflect the justifications for the argument that holds together various parts of the story. They come from the literature and from the empirical work and are presented in the second and third column respectively.

The inquiry begins with a general question about the ways in which PMM interventions produce an effect on organizational performance. An examination of the literature on this topic reveals conflicting evidence. While some studies (e.g., Davis and Albright, 2004; Hoque and James, 2000) document the positive impact of PMM on performance, others (e.g., Perera et al., 1997; Ittner et al., 2003) fail to see this effect. What this seemed to suggest was that the effects of PMM are unpredictable and inconclusive. In other words, there is a “black box” that separates PMM interventions from their intended outcomes.

At the same time, another stream of literature noted that PMM may produce its effects indirectly, by affecting the search for performance drivers on the part of the individuals involved in organizational processes (e.g., Mouritsen, 1998; Johanson et al., 2001a,b). This search took place as people iterated between reflection and action, thus changing the processes, and, consequently, the performance of the organization. These dynamics of change in performance in response to PMM might offer an insight into the “black box” mentioned above; however, given the tentative nature of these findings, an appropriate analytical lens was needed to study these processes more rigorously. Such a lens was provided by the organizational routines perspective.

The organizational routines perspective (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Feldman and Pentland, 2003) assumes that performance is generated by organizational routines, which are responsive to performance information and change as the people involved in the routine iterate between reflection and action. Change in performance could therefore be modelled as change in routines, and Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) work provided a theoretical model of such change. The question, therefore, became a question of the impact of PMM on routines.

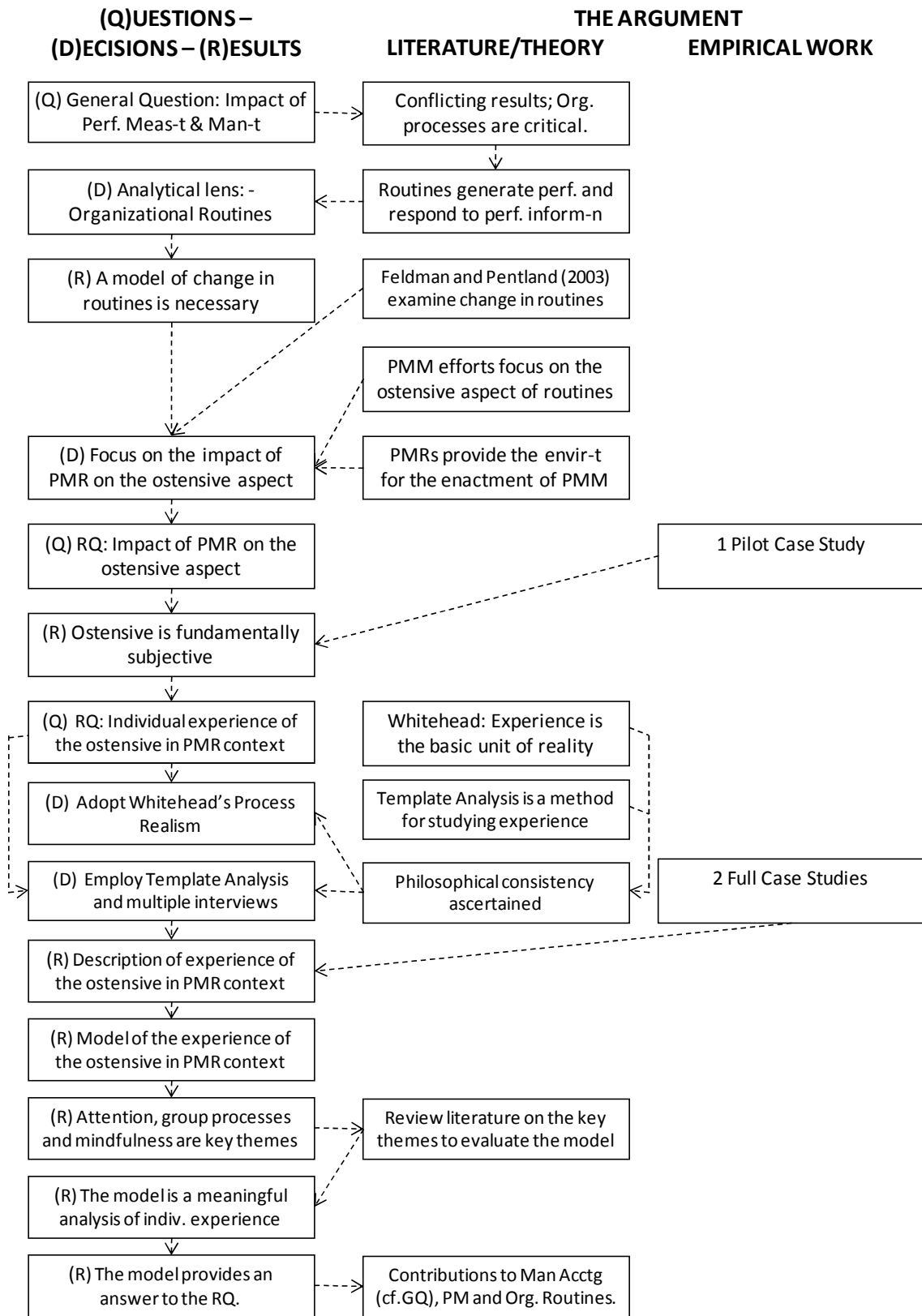


Figure 1. The PhD Thesis on One Page

It was further noted that, in the first instance, PMM affects the reflective component of the routine – the ostensive aspect. Therefore, in line with the aim of discovering the detailed mechanism of the direct effect of PMM on performance, the inquiry focused on the effect of PMM on the ostensive aspect of organizational routines. Moreover, it was shown that PMR meetings were the most appropriate PMM practice to focus on in the examination of the effect of PMM on the ostensive aspect of routines. The preliminary research question was thus formulated as a question of the effect of PMR meetings on the ostensive aspect. With these considerations, a small pilot study was carried out in order to assess the viability of the research question and the proposed research design.

Although the pilot study demonstrated that many elements of the research design were useful, it also revealed a fundamental inconsistency between the preliminary research question and the nature of the ostensive aspect. The data demonstrated that the ostensive aspect was a fundamentally subjective construct and thus could not be objectified and studied as part of a cause-and-effect relationship. After a confirmation of this conclusion by one of the authors of the model (Feldman, 2008), the research question was reformulated to examine the individuals' experience of the ostensive aspect in the context of the PMR meeting. This formulation of the question with its focus on the individual experience as the source of knowledge was supported by the adoption of Whitehead's (1929) process realist philosophy and drove the choice of Template Analysis as the main method of data analysis. In order to ensure the integrity of the research design, the fundamental philosophical compatibility of the method and the philosophical perspective was checked.

The research question was used to drive the design of two case studies that constituted the main part of the empirical element of this thesis. The findings produced a detailed description of the individual experience of the ostensive aspect in the context of the PMR meetings. This description served as the basis for the development of a model that offered a more sophisticated understanding of this experience. This model suggested that the experience of the ostensive aspect at the PMR meeting could be described as a set of group processes that drew on people's attention as a limited resource and included a state of decision making unconditioned by the past that was very similar to the state of

mindfulness. As these themes were derived from the data, a brief review of literature on these themes was carried out in order to contextualize the relationships postulated in the model. The review confirmed that the model represented a meaningful analysis of the individual experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine reviewed at the PMR meeting.

As such, the model answered the research question by explicating the processes in the individual experience that link the PMR meeting to the ostensive aspect of the routine reviewed at the meeting. In so doing, it provided a micro step towards opening the “black box” that connects PMM interventions to organizational performance by showing the processes comprising the link between one of the key PMM practices – the PMR meeting – and the ostensive aspect of organizational routines – the first element of the organizational processes that generate organizational performance. The model of this link is the primary contribution that this thesis claims to make to the management accounting (and the broader performance management) literature. Secondary contributions include a description of the key elements in the PMR meeting and an extension of Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) model of organizational routines.

1.4 The organization of the dissertation

This dissertation consists of nine chapters organized in three parts according to the structure developed in Section 1.2.1 of this chapter. Part I consists of Chapters 2-3 and presents the set up of the main study. Chapter 2 describes the general interest that drove the research reported here and provides a critical analysis of the literature domains that allowed this general interest to be distilled into the preliminary research question. This preliminary research question is then used for the design and execution of the pilot study reported in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 demonstrates that, based on the results of the pilot study, the research question needs to be reformulated and a number of modifications in the research design need to be introduced. The discussion of these changes concludes Part I of the thesis.

Chapters 4-6 comprise Part II of the thesis, which reports on the main empirical study executed within the framework of this research. Chapter 4 lays out the philosophical and methodological considerations underpinning the research design of the study.

Chapter 5 presents the description of the two organizations where the main study was carried out and discusses various issues with fieldwork encountered in these organizations. Chapter 6 reports the findings of the study and concludes Part II of the thesis.

Part III is dedicated to the analysis of the findings and their contribution to the literature. Chapter 7 presents a theoretical analysis of the case data and moves the discussion from the description of the phenomena to a conceptual model. The chapter also contains a small review of literature on the key emergent themes in the model. Chapter 8 discusses the primary and secondary contributions that the thesis claims to make to the literature on management accounting, performance management, and organizational routines.

Chapter 9 forms an epilogue of the dissertation, retracing the development of the research question, briefly restating the main contributions of the study, discussing its limitations and outlining the implications of the study for the general task of performance management as well as for the future research and practice.

The words “thesis” and “dissertation” are used interchangeably throughout this document.

PART I
SETTING UP THE STUDY

Chapter 2. The Literature before the Study. The Preliminary Question.

Chapter 2 outlines the development of the preliminary research question – the question that will drive the pilot study – through the analysis of the existing state of knowledge in three domains of literature: performance measurement and management (PMM), organizational routines, and performance management reviews. However, a review of literature has to be done for a purpose less it turn into a presentation of a long list of studies that are claimed to be related to each other. Therefore, this chapter begins with a discussion of the general interest driving the study reported in this thesis and reviews the literature with the aim of developing a research question that is grounded in the literature and is amenable to empirical research. The literature review presented in the chapter frames the general question in terms of the current research in the PMM literature, introduces the organizational routines perspective as an analytical lens for studying the phenomenon of interest, and discusses the value of research on performance management reviews for shaping the question for the next phase of the study. After a brief summary of the argument, the chapter closes with a statement of the preliminary research question.

2.1 General interest

The general interest that lies at the origins of this study is related to the ways in which various PMM initiatives affect organizations and their performance. With the issues of performance and performance management high on managers' lists of priorities, it is interesting to know whether PMM-related actions do indeed produce an effect on performance, and if so, *how* they accomplish that objective and what shape performance takes. My personal experience in the industry highlighted both the near-randomness of the success of PMM interventions and the excruciating complexity of translating the original aims into the intended results. This experience left me with a mixture of amusement and curiosity regarding various attempts to implement powerful PMM systems. Observing these attempts in different contexts, I remained with a question of *whether and how PMM produces its impact on performance*. This general question drove the study presented in this thesis. Translating this question into a research

question appropriate for an empirical study required a review of several literature domains.

2.2 Performance Measurement and Management

The literature on PMM, with its multiple strands and interdisciplinary discussions, was the primary domain of literature for the question asked in this study. A review of the themes relevant for this question is presented below.

2.2.1 *The development of PMM as a field*

Performance Measurement and Management is an interdisciplinary field of study where academic research is fuelled by contributions of different management disciplines and complemented by the work of practitioners. Such diverse disciplines as strategy, HR management, management accounting and control systems, economics, psychology, and sociology inform the debate in the field (Marr and Schiuma, 2003; Franco-Santos et al., 2007). Measuring and managing performance is also a theme with a long history, where studies discussing the impact of measurement on performance go as far back as the 1950s (Neely, 2005), when Argyris (1952) examined the impact of budgets on people's behaviour and Drucker (1954) discussed the benefits of using a diverse set of measures for organizational performance.

Nonetheless, when such key precursors of the field as management accounting (Franco-Santos and Bourne, 2005) and management control systems (MCS) (Otley, 2003) are examined, it becomes evident that the history of measuring and managing organizational performance stretches far beyond the 1950s. For instance, major advances in the field of accounting were accomplished as early as in the beginning of the 20th century (Kaplan, 1984). Likewise, the issue of control has been central to management since the emergence of the field in the early 1900s. It was discussed by Taylor (1911) as one of the prerequisites of achieving maximum efficiency and was named one of the five general functions of management by Fayol (1949).

However, it was argued that it was argued that since then, accounting has not kept pace with changes in the business environment and by the end of the century was more of an impediment than an enabler of effective management (Johnson and Kaplan, 1987).

Similarly, management control systems research with its emphasis on ensuring compliance of business activities with the overall plan (Anthony, 1965) was criticised as an inadequate conception for the evolving task of measuring and managing performance (Hofstede, 1978). Moreover, the prevailing paradigm of management accounting in the second half of the 20th century determined the lens through which performance and performance management were examined both in the management accounting and in the MCS research. In many cases organizational performance was equated with financial results and measured with corresponding financial indicators. Such indicators of performance were emphasized in early performance management practices (e.g., Hopwood, 1972), which in turn resulted in a narrowly defined view of performance even when it was managed within the overall organizational context.

Nonetheless, early management accounting and MCS research represented an important step in the development of the PMM field. Management accounting in a way provided the operational power for performance measurement as it developed a set of metrics that could be used for measuring organizational performance. The research on MCS in turn examined a very important link between performance measurement and strategy (e.g., Merchant, 1985; Simons, 1987). However, despite the prevailing focus on financial measures and a mechanistic view of management control, several studies noted that management accounting and MCS may produce the desired effect by virtue of being embedded in organizational processes.

For instance, new accounting methods, such as activity-based costing (ABC) appeared in the 1980s (Cooper, 1988) and received some success. However, it was later argued that this success was not so much a result of a new and better paradigm of measurement, but an indication of the fact that ABC delivered its benefits indirectly – by forcing managers to analyse business processes or, in other words, challenge the assumptions underlying the supposed structure of the firm's resources and processes (Neely et al., 1995). Likewise, Hofstede (1978) emphasised the human-centred nature of organisational control systems, arguing that a control system should be viewed as a living cell rather than as a set of measuring and communicative devices. Such a system is controlled locally, governed by human relations, and develops strategically in

response to the organisation's environment. The value of these insights for the argument developed in this thesis will be discussed further in Section 2.2.3.

By the beginning of the 1990s, the accumulated contribution of the research in management accounting and MCS had led to the recognition of the systemic approach to the task of measuring and managing organizational performance and of the value of complementing financial measures of performance with non-financial counterparts. This in turn triggered an explosion of performance measurement frameworks, and it could be argued that the last decade of the past century marked the emergence of PMM as a field in its own right. The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) (Kaplan and Norton, 1992, 1996) was the most famous of these frameworks, and others included the Performance Pyramid (Lynch and Cross, 1991), Performance Measurement Questionnaire (Dixon et al., 1990), Performance Prism (Neely et al., 2002) and others¹. Much of the research in the field was dedicated to examining the issues of implementing and using these frameworks (Neely et al., 1995; Bourne et al., 2000). However, the current decade saw the emergence of a steady stream of contributions evaluating the impact of the performance measurement frameworks as well as PMM efforts in general. The next section is dedicated to the discussion of these contributions.

2.2.2 Evaluating the impact of PMM on performance. The “black box”.

This section examines the evidence of the effect of PMM on performance. However, in order to ensure the clarity and coherence of further discussion, it is necessary to state what precisely is meant by PMM in this thesis.

2.2.2.1 Defining PMM in this thesis

Although the issues of measuring and managing performance have been discussed for several decades, there is no clear and universally accepted distinction between performance measurement systems, performance management systems, management control systems, business performance management systems and other variations of the term. In discussing the task of managing organizational performance, this thesis has used the term *Performance Measurement and Management*, and before the discussion

¹ See Pun and White (2005) for a good review of performance measurement frameworks.

can proceed, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the term. For the purposes of this thesis, PMM means *any management intervention with the primary aim of affecting organizational performance*.

The rationale for this definition is as follows. Performance *measurement* can certainly be defined as a separate phenomenon. For instance, Flamholz and Das (1985), writing from the MCS perspective, view measurement as one of the four core components of a MCS, which provides performance feedback and focuses the attention of managers. As such, it is an integral component of a MCS and cannot be considered or implemented on its own. Supporting this point, Bititci et al. (1997) view performance measurement as a major instrument of performance *management*, as it provides and integrates all information relevant for making decisions related to the task of managing performance. Lebas (1995) also emphasizes the integral connection between performance measurement and performance management. Taking this a step further, Otley (2003) suggests using the term *performance management* to describe the approach to managing performance that relies on a diverse set of performance measures and places the early MCS research in the wider organizational context.

Moreover, as the discussion in Section 2.2.2.2 will show, even the studies that claim to focus on the impact of measurement on performance are often discussing the issues of performance management. This is consistent with the idea that measurement is but an instrument in the overall task of performance management (Folan and Browne, 2005; Otley, 1999)

What this discussion means is that performance measurement is *inseparable* from performance management. Therefore, in discussing any managerial interventions specifically aimed at affecting organizational performance, this thesis will use the term PMM. In general, this term might be gaining attention, as it has been used in a series of recent studies describing the research devoted to the broad issues of managing performance (Modell, 2009; Radnor and Barnes, 2007; Sousa et al., 2005).

2.2.2.2 The impact of PMM on performance

Most of the studies evaluating the direct impact of PMM on performance appeared in the management accounting literature. The review of these studies, however, shows that these studies fail to produce a clear conclusion. Some studies indicate the positive effect of PMM efforts on organizational performance. For instance, Hoque and James (2000) studied the use of the BSC in a survey of manufacturing companies and found that the extent of BSC usage is positively related to organizational performance as measured by five performance metrics. Davis and Albright (2004) examined the impact of the Balanced Scorecard on financial performance in a bank. In a quasi-experimental study they demonstrated that the business units that adopted the BSC significantly outperformed the business units in the “control” group. Performance was measured by a composite of key performance measures used by the bank. Malina and Selto (2001) in a case study of implementing the BSC for distributors in a *Fortune 500* company also found that the BSC as a management control framework led to positive outcomes, but noted that the effectiveness of the implementation would depend on the way the BSC was implemented. Positive outcomes included perception of improvement, change in processes, and recommendations to modify BSC measures reported in the interviews.

Other studies, however, provided evidence to the contrary. Perera et al. (1997) examined the link between the emphasis on the use of non-financial measures and firm performance and found that no such relationship existed. In their study, performance was measured by a self-reported measure based on a questionnaire item. Ittner et al. (2003) examined the effect of measurement alignment techniques, including the BSC model, on economic performance in financial services firms and reported similar findings – almost no relationship between such techniques and economic performance. Moreover, the effect of the BSC usage was negatively related to financial performance. Ittner et al. (2003) measured performance with accounting and stock market measures. Furthermore, in a cross-sectional survey study, Franco-Santos (2007) examined the relationship between the use of non-financial measures in executive compensation and the firm’s financial performance and found that the relationship did exist but was negative. Finally, Griffith and Neely (2009) studied the implementation of an incentive scheme based on the BSC in a quasi-experimental study in a distributor of plumbing

and heating products. They examined the impact of the BSC on financial performance and found that the results are inconclusive – while the BSC implementation does affect sales and costs, it either does not affect net profit or leads to its decrease.

The review of these studies shows that, while PMM has the ability to affect organizational performance, its impact is unpredictable and its mechanism is poorly understood. In a sense, what these studies suggest is that there is a “black box” that separates PMM interventions from the outcomes they aim to achieve. Moreover, the output of this “black box” is far less certain than would be necessary for making a conclusive evaluation of the impact of PMM on organizational performance. As Otley (2003) puts it in his discussion of dysfunctional consequences of PMM efforts, “...the designers of such measurement schemes do not generally appear to predict the likely outcomes of their implementation” (pg. 319). Gaining insight into the mechanism that connects PMM to performance would therefore represent a step towards closing the rift left open by the studies discussed above.

2.2.2.3 Organizational embeddedness of PMM efforts

While the studies discussed in Section 2.2.2.2 focused on evaluating the direct impact of PMM on performance, another stream of studies assessed the “softer” aspects of PMM implementation. Analysing the reasons the majority of performance measurement programmes fail, Neely and Bourne (2000) discuss design and implementation issues, suggesting that at the implementation stage, the most common causes of failure are related to organisational politics, information management, and attention span. This is further explored in the study by Bourne et al. (2003), who note that performance measurement processes involved in the design of a performance measurement system can be seen as a mechanism powering organisational change. Mapping performance systems design research against the organisational change literature, the researchers observe that the former provides little guidance beyond the initial phase of the change process and conclude that for the implementation to be successful, lessons from the change management literature should be considered throughout the implementation process.

This is consistent with later studies (Kennerley and Neely, 2002, 2003), which introduced findings from organizational culture, organizational change, and process management literature into the discussion of performance measurement to develop a comprehensive framework of factors that influence the evolution of PMM systems. Likewise, Franco and Bourne (2003) noted that the “softer” aspects of PMM, such as the appropriate culture and managerial competence, were as critical to the success of PMM intervention as the issues of PMM system design. These views echo Hofstede’s (1978) point mentioned earlier in the sense that they explicitly address the human relations underlying the process of managing performance and conceptualize PMM as a living and evolving process.

These studies point out the deep embeddedness of PMM in the fabric of organizational factors and the ensuing complexity and uncertainty of implementing PMM initiatives. However, they may also provide a hint about the nature of the contents of the “black box” separating PMM interventions from the intended outcomes. In light of these studies, it may be speculated that the effect of PMM programmes hinges on a number of organizational factors and requires active involvement of the people in the organization. These contributions highlight smaller-scope issues that are left largely unexamined by the studies evaluating the direct impact of PMM on performance. In a way, these contributions respond to the calls for relating management accounting research to the actual issues managers are facing (Hall, 2009; Johnsson, 1998) and, in the words of Otley (2001), for putting “the ‘management’ back into ‘management accounting’” (pg. 255).

A number of studies examining the effect of PMM on organizational processes support the speculation in the paragraph above and offer an insight into the organizational dynamics that takes place as a result of PMM interventions. This insight is useful for opening the “black box” that connects PMM efforts with organizational performance.

2.2.3 The impact of PMM on organizational processes

A number of studies suggested that PMM produces an effect on organizations by affecting the dynamics of organizational processes that generate performance. Similar to

the case with the work evaluating the direct impact of PMM on performance, these studies appeared mainly, although not exclusively, in the management accounting literature. For instance, Askim (2004), discussing the implementation of the BSC in a municipality in Norway, notes that measurement intensified the learning processes on the part of the people involved in the organization. He talks about measures as “tin openers”, where by themselves they provide “...only an incomplete and inaccurate picture. Such [measures] do not give answers, but prompt further interrogation and inquiry, or at least discussion” (Askim, 2004, pg 434). In so doing, the measures fuel the change in organizational practices that constitute performance. This effect, however, is most pronounced when PMM efforts are directed at resources and processes that are inherently difficult to quantify.

Johanson et al. (2001 a, b), for instance, examine the measurement (2001, a) and management control (2001, b) of intangibles in a small number of organizations in Sweden. They note that the process of measuring intangibles mobilized change in organizational processes, as measurement prompted the people involved in these processes to go through the cycle of reflection and action that was necessary for determining the value of the intangible resources. In their words, the change took place as “...dominating beliefs has changed and co-ordinated action has taken place” (Johanson et al., 2001 a, pg. 433). Moreover, their findings indicate that the primary value of measuring intangibles lies in directing attention of managers towards critical organizational processes and in articulating tacit assumptions so as to make them amenable to action (Johanson et al., 2001 a, b).

Continuing this line of thinking, Vaivio (2004), examining the effect of non-financial measures of performance in a chemicals company in the United Kingdom, notes that non-financial measures are a powerful medium for disrupting practices, articulating assumptions, and driving grassroots change through localized learning. These measures provoke debates about the drivers of performance, which in turn leads to the development of new patterns of action. Moreover, Vaivio (2004) notes that, owing to the nature of the change in organizational processes activated by non-financial measures, the outcome of the change is not easily predictable. Likewise, Mouritsen

(1998), comparing EVATM with the intellectual capital approach, notes that the superiority of the latter is determined by its ability to use non-financial measures to drive endogenous growth through encouraging the reflection about the assumptions underlying the drivers of performance and the subsequent change in action.

Furthermore, Bourne et al. (2005) observed the differences between high- and low-performing units in a UK subsidiary of an international automobile repair company and noted that people in the higher-performing units tended to use PMM for continuously moving between interrogating the performance data and taking action on its basis. Finally, in a recent study of a PMM system implementation in a software development unit of Siemens AG, Fried (2010) finds that, depending on the way the PMM system is used, it may stimulate the change in organizational practices.

What these studies suggest is that PMM may produce its effect on organizational performance by affecting the development of organizational processes that generate performance. Moreover, this effect seems to take place through stimulating the cycle between reflection and action on the part of the people involved in these processes. This organizational effect of PMM is not an unexpected phenomenon, given the firm embeddedness of PMM in various organizational factors that was discussed earlier. Therefore, it brings one tantalizingly close to opening the “black box” and describing the detailed process that links PMM with organizational performance. However, it does not quite accomplish this task, as it simply describes how organizations respond to PMM, without explicating how exactly PMM affects the organizational processes.

2.3 Analytical requirements for opening the “black box”

Building on the discussion above, what is necessary for truly opening the “black box” is an analytical perspective that provides a construct that first, explicitly connects PMM to performance in a theoretically robust way; second, changes in response to PMM interventions; third, explicitly incorporates the iterations between reflection and action as a model of change; fourth, is inherently connected to multiple aspects of organizations; and fifth, possesses a conceptual apparatus that is sufficiently mature to be translated into empirical work.

As the discussion in the following section will demonstrate, the concept of organizational routines offers an exceptional opportunity to gain insight into the processes that link PMM interventions with organizational performance as it meets all of the necessary requirements for an analytical lens described in the preceding paragraphs. First, building on the insights from the behavioural and the evolutionary theories of the firm, the organizational routines literature conceptualizes routines as vehicles of organizational performance. Second, responsiveness to performance feedback and thus to PMM interventions is one of the defining characteristics of the organizational routine concept. Third, routines change as the people involved in their execution iterate between reflection and action. Fourth, routines are by their nature organizational entities performing a variety of organizational functions, including most notably organizational learning and change. Fifth, the adopted model of routines possesses a sophisticated conceptual apparatus which has been used in empirical work.

Thus, the organizational routines perspective provides a unique opportunity for opening the “black box” separating PMM interventions from their intended outcomes and for examining the detailed processes that link PMM to performance. Section 2.4 provides a detailed discussion of these considerations.

2.4 Organizational routines as the analytical lens

After Becker’s (2004) review of literature on organizational routines, attempting a comprehensive review of the topic is at the least ambitious. However, unlike Becker’s work, the review of literature on organizational routines in this thesis does not aim to give a complete account of various views, aspects and functions of routines. Rather, it aims to examine the existing perspectives to determine the one that is best suited for responding to the issue outlined in Section 2.2 and to discuss the usefulness of this perspective for answering the question developed through the review of the PMM literature.

2.4.1 The development of the concept

The earliest coherent definition of the organizational routine in management literature was given by Stene (1940), who used the concept to explain the mechanism of

coordination in organizations and defined a routine as the “...part of any organization’s activities which has become habitual because of repetition and which is followed regularly without specific directions or detailed supervision by any member of the organization” (pg. 1129). From today’s viewpoint, this definition is open to criticism primarily because it views routines as overly mechanistic and discounting the value of individual actors involved in the execution of a routine. However, what is important is that Stene views routines as organizational building blocks that are essential to organizational structure and decision processes.

2.4.1.1 The behavioural theory of the firm

Stene’s (1940) viewpoint foreshadows what came to be the true beginning of the organizational routines literature – the contribution made by the behavioural theory of the firm. The behavioural theory of the firm is rooted in the works of Simon (1955) and Cyert and March (1963). The fundamental premise upon which the theory is constructed is the notion of bounded rationality. The theory assumes that organizational actors have cognitive limits on rationality, which in turn necessitates a number of “essential simplifications” of the classical economic theory (Simon, 1955). Developing these ideas, March and Simon (1958) state that for organizational actors, rationality is always relative to a frame of reference, which is in turn caused by the conditions of bounded rationality. That in turn means that choices are made within simplified models of real situations. Given the assumption of cognitive limits on rationality, organizational actors will respond to the demands of such models with a learned routinized action or sequence of actions which requires minimum effort spent on acquiring and processing new information. These routinized responses make up performance programmes which constitute the structure of organizational processes.

However, although these programmes are highly routinized and are often described as semi-automatic, they are nevertheless mutable. If an execution of a performance programme does not lead to a satisfactory outcome, organizational actors will change the programme (or revise their expectations) so as the performance of the programme is deemed satisfactory. The search for a new decision-making rule and the judgement of the outcome against the aspiration level (i.e. the expectations) are central characteristics that describe the change in the routinized performance programmes (Simon, 1979).

The behavioural theory explained the formation and function of routinized organizational activities, weaving them into the general theory of organization. Thus, it provided a strong foundation for the subsequent development of the research on organizational routines. In fact, the next significant contribution to the organizational routines literature was a direct descendant of the behavioural theorists' views and assumptions. However, it went further by making organizational routines its central concept. This contribution – the evolutionary theory of economic growth – is discussed next.

2.4.1.2 Evolutionary theory of economic growth

The principles of the evolutionary theory of economic growth were formulated by Nelson and Winter (1982), whose seminal work focused on the “...dynamic process by which firm behavior patterns and market outcomes are jointly determined over time” (pg. 18). Their main idea was that the survival of the firm over a period of time was jointly determined by the conditions external to the firm (or a group of firms) and the internal characteristics of the firm. As time passes, market conditions change; however, so do the firms as they search for the way to adapt to these conditions. The dynamics of economic development are then determined by the interplay of the selective pressures of the market and the adaptive capabilities of the group of firms. Just as in the case of the behavioural theory of the firm, the notion of search is crucial for explaining the adaptation of existing processes to the changing demands of the environment. However, the question then is, What exactly serves as the source of continuity and the vehicle of adaptation in the firms? In order to answer this question, Nelson and Winter (1982) employ the term “organizational routine”, making it the central concept of their theory.

Organizational routines in Nelson and Winter's (1982) most commonly quoted interpretation are “...all regular and predictable behavior patterns of firms” (pg. 14), ranging from simple operating procedures to revisions in the firm's strategy. Routines can also be described hierarchically: operating characteristics are the lowest-level routines and do not change in the short run; processes that govern the changes in the firm's capital stock over time occupy the intermediate position; and high-level routines modify operating characteristics (Nelson and Winter, 1982). The crucial point, however,

is that, regardless of the hierarchical level, organizational routines are learned stable patterns of behaviour, which are nonetheless open to variation and responsive performance feedback. As such, organizational routines are very similar to the performance programmes of behavioural theorists discussed earlier. Routines are programmed sequences of action acquired through experience and shaped by performance feedback.

Nelson and Winter's (1982) conceptualization of routines as patterns of behaviour and the ensuing rich discussion of the organizational roles and functions of routines proved to be a fruitful ground for the students of organization. In fact, one of the major contributions of Nelson and Winter's (1982) seminal work was that it combined micro-processes of organizations and macroeconomic outcomes in a comprehensive and coherent theory. Organizational routines were placed at the centre of this theory, becoming a unit of analysis that linked decisions and actions of individuals with organizational behaviour and, ultimately, with the evolution of populations of firms.

However, it is argued here that despite this impressive conceptual synthesis, the subsequent research on organizational routines proceeded for the most part in two major – though undeniably rich and diverse – streams. One stream of literature focused on the application of the concept of routines at the organizational and supra-organizational levels, culminating in the evolutionary theories of change. The other major stream focused on examining the structure of the routine itself and its function within the organization, leading to the analysis of the role of agency in routines and the view of routines as practices.

Since the general interest driving the study reported in this thesis is concerned with the ways PMM produces its impact on organizational performance, it is the second stream of literature that is most relevant for its focus, and it is this stream of literature which will be examined further in order to frame the question for the empirical part of the study. However, before proceeding to this task it is useful to mention several perspectives in management literature that lean substantially on the concept of routines, yet fall outside of the mainstream literature on organizational routines.

2.4.1.3 The concept of routines in other fields

Besides the research on the evolutionary theories of change and the analysis of the structure and roles of routines in organizations, which together constitute the main body of literature on organizational routines, the concept of routines has been employed in other domains of literature. Most notably, it has been used by the scholars working in the fields of institutional theory, population ecology, and contingency theory. A separation of these contributions from the main body of organizational routines literature is admittedly somewhat arbitrary, as the work in the institutional theory and population ecology is related to the evolutionary theory stream of research on routines, and contingency theory scholars examine the organizational role of routines. However, these contributions are rarely discussed at any significant degree of depth in the mainstream literature on routines. Nonetheless, they are often used in the literature on PMM, and since this thesis employs a particular perspective in the organizational routines literature for the study of a PMM issue, it is useful to discuss briefly the application of the concept of routines in these fields so as to demonstrate the theoretical distinction of the chosen approach.

2.4.1.3.1 Contingency theory

The concept of routinization was used widely in the work of contingency theorists examining the nature of work tasks and its relation to the structure and functions of organizations (e.g., Perrow, 1967; Woodward, 1965). However, these contributions focused more on the content of the work rather than on the sequence of actions constituting a routine in Nelson and Winter's (1982) sense (Pentland, 2003). An example of the use of the concept of routines in contingency theory is provided by the so-called strategic contingencies' theory of intraorganizational power (Hickson et al., 1971; Hinings et al., 1974). The theory examines the process through which organizational sub-units acquire and retain power and argues that power is conferred to those organizational sub-units that can manage environmental uncertainty effectively. Routinization, however, reduces such power by lowering the level of uncertainty managed by the sub-unit. Nonetheless, in terms of the question asked in this thesis, this view of routines provides limited help owing to its focus on the content of the work and the emphasis on routines as vehicles of stability.

2.4.1.3.2 *Population ecology*

The population ecology school is concerned with the dynamics of organizational populations and examines a different consequence of organizational routines – the structural inertia of organizations. Although rarely using the term “routine” in their work, population ecologists also turn to genetics in the search for a metaphor that can explain the persistent characteristics of organizations. The commonly accepted term is “blueprint”, which is defined in the classical work by Hannan and Freeman (1977) as “...rules and procedures for obtaining and acting upon inputs in order to produce an organizational product or response” (pg. 935). They go on to state that blueprints demonstrate themselves in the form of patterns of activity, formal structure, and forms of authority (Hannan and Freeman, 1989). As such, the notion of “blueprints” closely parallels Nelson and Winter’s (1982) concept of routine. Population ecologists argue that such blueprints are acted upon by internal and external pressures that prevent them from changing, thus ensuring the stability of organizational forms over time. The main focus of this perspective, however, is on populations of organizations (Hannan and Freeman, 1977; Hannan, 1997) and is therefore of little help for the analysis of the structure of routines and the roles they play in organizations.

2.4.1.3.3 *New institutional theory*

The institutional theory (e.g., Meyer and Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) also turns to the concept of routines to explain continuity and persistence in organizational behaviours. Developing its initial statements, institutional theorists integrate cognitive psychology, ethnomethodology, and phenomenology perspectives on organizational action (Miettinen and Vikkunen, 2005). Reviewing the institutional theory view of organizational routines, Miettinen and Vikkunen conclude that for this stream of research, “...the internal schemes and scripts of cognitive psychology of the 1970s and the ethnomethodological concept of rule-governed action seem to constitute the two complementary foundations of routines as an explanation of the continuity of organizational behaviour” (pg. 440). However, the focus of the institutional theorists’ analysis of routines is primarily on the institutionalisation of new routines rather than on the structure of routines. They “...have...not dealt much with the very onset of the change process, e.g. how the transformation of the ways of acting takes place locally” (ibid., pg. 440).

The view of routines informed by the new institutional theory has been used in management accounting research to explain the change in management accounting systems (Burns and Scapens, 2000, 2008). However, as the discussion in this section demonstrates, this view of organizational routines is of little help for analyzing the change in the structure of the routine that takes place in response to performance feedback.

Section 2.4.1 discussed the development of the concept of organizational routines and noted that routines can be viewed as collective sequences of action that are responsive to performance feedback. The research on organizational routines can be separated into two broad streams – one dealing with the function of routines in the evolution of organizations and populations of organizations and the other examining the roles and functions of routines in organizations. It is the second stream that provides the analytical lens for opening the “black box” discussed in Section 2.2.2 and for studying the effect of PMM on organizational performance.

2.4.2 Routines in organizations

The definition of routines as patterns of action or patterns of behaviour, suggested by Nelson and Winter (1982), has proved to be a useful perspective for examining a wide range of organizational behaviours. Perhaps reflecting the focus on organizational issues and behaviour, an important theme that characterises this stream of research is the emphasis of the mutable nature of routines. Research in this direction has leaned on the insights from sociology to describe the processes of change in routines and introduced the concept of agency to understand the mechanism underlying such change. This research has also led to a refinement in the definition of routines as behavioural patterns. The following discussion describes the major contributions leading to the modern view of routines from the viewpoint of organizational scholars.

2.4.2.1 Defining the routine in organizational studies

Before the analysis of routines in organizations can be taken further, it is necessary to explain what is meant by a routine. However, this is a challenging task. There is still no consensus among scholars in the field of organizational routines as to how routines

should be defined. In a comprehensive review of literature, Becker (2004) suggests that routines have been historically understood either as behavioural patterns or as cognitive regularities. In other words, while for some scholars, routines represented recurrent patterns of action (e.g., Teece et al., 1997, Edmondson et al., 2001), for others, they meant mental or written rules and heuristics (e.g., Cohen, 1991).

This distinction between what Becker (2005) later called action and representation is a crucial notion in the study of routines, because it determines the object of inquiry, the methods of data collection and analysis, and influences the conclusion of the study. In a famous example, Pentland (2003) reports on the ways of identifying routines, noting that different research methods produce different results. This is due to the fact that different methods capture different aspects of routines. When travel agents were asked to describe their job (the representational aspect of the routine), they described it as very simple – book a flight, book a car, find a hotel. However, observation (capturing the action aspect of the routine) revealed a great variety of actions comprising the routine. Thus, the aspect of a routine needs to be specified before the routine can be meaningfully described. Feldman (2000) and Feldman and Pentland (2003) also propose the distinction between the performative (a concrete action) and the ostensive (an abstract idea of the action) aspects of the routine, which closely parallels the distinction proposed by Becker (2005).

Feldman and Pentland (2003) distil what they call a *core definition* of the routine, defining the concept as “a repetitive, recognizable pattern of interdependent actions, involving multiple actors”. In a way this is the most comprehensive definition of the routine that involves both the representation (pattern) and the action levels. This is the definition of the organizational routine that is adopted in this thesis.

2.4.2.2 Routines as processes – organizational learning and change

The research on organizational learning and change provided perhaps the most fertile ground for the application of the concept of routines and the contribution of the organizational routines perspective to the study of organizations. As Becker et al. (2005) note, “...organizational routines are fundamental to understanding change partly because they provide a basic definition of what change ‘really is’ at the organizational

level” (pg. 776). It is argued here that this was due to the fact that it is in the context of organizational learning and change that organizational routines could demonstrate their fundamental and potentially the most useful characteristic – their processual nature. In a famous statement, Pentland and Rueter claim that routines “...occupy the crucial nexus between structure and action, between the organization as an object and organizing as a process” (1994, pg. 484). Indeed, if organizations – in line with Nelson and Winter’s (1982) original insight – are conceptualised as structured sets of processes, it is the change in the content or structure of such processes that characterises any organizational change. Becker (2004) notes that routines are process-based constructs almost by definition, which is why “...they provide a ‘window’ to the drivers underlying change, enabling us to observe change in more detail” (pg. 649). Supporting this observation, the concept of routines has been used in a number of empirical studies examining organizational change (e.g., Tranfield and Smith, 1998; Bresnen et al., 2005, Feldman 2000, 2003, Adler et al., 1999).

The understanding of routines as processes also encompasses the processes of organizational learning. For behavioural (e.g., Cyert and March, 1963) and evolutionary (e.g., Nelson and Winter, 1982) theorists alike, organizations possess a set of processes (sequences of action) which adapt in order to respond to the changing demands of the environment. The adaptation of this processes which leads to the change in behaviour, therefore, represents organizational learning. Extending the early insights into a full-blown theory of learning from feedback, Greve (1998) notes that “...an organization learns when its experience results in behavioral changes” (pg. 84). However, it is not only the changes in the observed behaviour that represents organizational learning. Huber (1991), while still adhering to the behavioural perspective, states that “...an entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its *potential* behaviours is changed” (pg. 89, emphasis added). Scholars from the behavioural tradition also conceptualised learning explicitly as a change in routines (e.g, Levitt and March, 1988, March, 1991; Argote, 1999).

2.4.3 Change in organizational routines

The discussion of the ontological levels of routines and the conceptual separation of routines to the representation and action aspects is useful for identifying and describing

organizational routines. However, it is somewhat static in the sense that it explains what routines are rather than what they accomplish and how they do it. This is perhaps the consequence of the historical focus on routines as sources of continuity, stability and persistence. The common metaphors of routines as programmes (e.g., March and Simon, 1958), scripts (e.g., Gioia and Poole, 1984) or genes (e.g., Nelson and Winter, 1982; Baum and Singh, 1994) reflect this view. Like genes, routines preserve the enduring part of organizations through time. However, until recently, the other characteristic of routines as genes – their mutability – has been largely neglected. The questions of change in routines – its causes, mechanisms, and underlying processes present an equally fruitful and useful area of research. As the preceding section shows, routines have the greatest potential to explain organizational change when they are viewed as processes. Indeed, if organizations are viewed as sets of such processes, it is routines that are the object of management; and in order to be manageable, they need to be mutable, and the processes of change need to be understood.

2.4.3.1 Nooteboom and Bogenrieder's model of change

In the present literature there are two major models of change in routines. One of these models focuses on the changes in the structure of routines and was proposed by Nooteboom and Bogenrieder (2003). This model draws on the concepts of scripts (Shank and Abelson, 1977, Gioia and Poole, 1984; also Barley, 1986 for application to routines) to develop a model of a routine. Scripts describe sequences of actions and are represented by a sequence of nodes connected by linkages. Each node contains a repertory of actions (or “subroutines”) that could be triggered depending on the demand of the task. The linkages describe the relation of nodes to each other. Nodes and linkages together define the architecture of a script. When routines are understood as scripts, the changes in the structure of the script describe the change in the routine. According to Nooteboom and Bogenrieder (2003), four types of change are possible. The first type of change keeps the original architecture, but changes the content of the nodes. Another type of change keeps the original architecture, but expands the application of the subroutines within nodes. The third type of change rearranges the linkages between the existing nodes. Finally, the fourth type of change involves new linkages and new nodes.

Nooteboom and Bogenrieder's model is concerned with describing the change in the structure of routines; however, it does not explain the mechanism of such change. In other words it answers the question of what a change in routine looks like rather than how such change occurs. Moreover, this model has not been formally developed and published in a peer-reviewed publication. Although it does present a coherent way of looking at the change in organizational routines and has been occasionally referenced by other researchers, it has remained on the preliminary level of development. For both of these reasons, Nooteboom and Bogenrieder's model is not used in this thesis.

2.4.3.2 Feldman's and Feldman and Pentland's model of change

On the contrary, Feldman's (2000) model of the change in routines is considerably more suitable for opening the "black box" described in Section 2.2.2. It has also proved to be a rich and promising model that has generated substantial interest and prompted subsequent empirical work in the field. The refined conceptualization of this model (Feldman and Pentland, 2003) has recently been judged as producing the greatest influence on the field of organization theory since it was published (Rao, 2009).

2.4.3.2.1 The model

Before the model itself can be described in detail, it is necessary to note that Feldman (2000) uses the insights from structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) and theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1990) to inform her approach. While still positioning her work in relation to the mainstream research on routines, Feldman (2000) brings in a new perspective, which suggests that routines have a dual nature, embodying the aspects of structure and action.

Two notions are central to Feldman's (2000) model of change in routines: the distinction between action and representation described earlier and the concept of agency². In the true spirit of the processual view of routines, Feldman (2000) moves beyond the action/representation dichotomy and suggests that organizational routines evolve through the iterations between the levels of concrete actions and abstract representations. The levels can be separated only conceptually. In practice, however,

² Here agency is understood in its sociological definition (i.e. as the ability to exercise judgment and take action (cf. Emirbayers and Mische, 1998) rather than in the sense in which it is used in agency theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976).

they are “recursive and mutually constitutive” (Pentland and Feldman, 2005, pg. 804). One is meaningless without the other. However, simply stating that routines change by moving between action and representation does not accomplish much. Organizational routines do not exist *in abstractia* – they are carried out by people who are involved in them. Agency is thus crucial to this model of routines. Is it organizational actors who are “... doing things, reflecting on what they are doing, and doing different things (or doing the same thing differently) as a result of the reflection” (Feldman, 2000, pg. 625). In other words, routines are inherently mutable. From the viewpoint of the question driving this thesis and in line with the PMM literature described earlier, it is this view of routines that makes them the suitable analytical lens for studying the processes of change stimulated by PMM efforts.

Feldman’s original propositions (2000) were developed in later works (Feldman and Rafaeli, 2002; Feldman, 2003; Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Pentland and Feldman, 2005). The aspect of the organizational routine that is closely related to representation is called the ostensive aspect. The one that is related to the actions aspect of the routine is called the performative aspect. The physical manifestation of a routine (regardless of the aspect) is an artifact. Graphically, the model of change in routines is represented by Figure 2. It is by constant iterations between the ostensive and the performative aspects of the routine, which are carried out by the agents and may or may not manifest itself thorough artifacts, that organizational routines change.

The *performative aspect* of a routine describes concrete actions taken by specific people in specific circumstances. They are certainly enacted with a view of the abstract rules, norms, and principles, but they are always determined by their immediate context and therefore call for an interpretation. They are abstractions translated into practice. Pentland and Feldman (2005) note that performances are improvisatory by their very nature. Feldman and Pentland (2003) suggest that performances create, maintain, and modify the abstract representations of the routine. When an action is performed repeatedly it can be conceptualised as a routine - hence the creation function. Performances are also necessary to maintain the abstract capability that already exists. Drawing a parallel to performing arts, Feldman and Pentland state: “Over time, if no

one chooses to read the script [of a play] or play the music, the capability to do so vanishes” (2003, pg. 108). Finally, organizational actors may decide to change the current rules or try new things. The resulting variation in performances may or may not lead to the modification of the abstract idea of the routine.

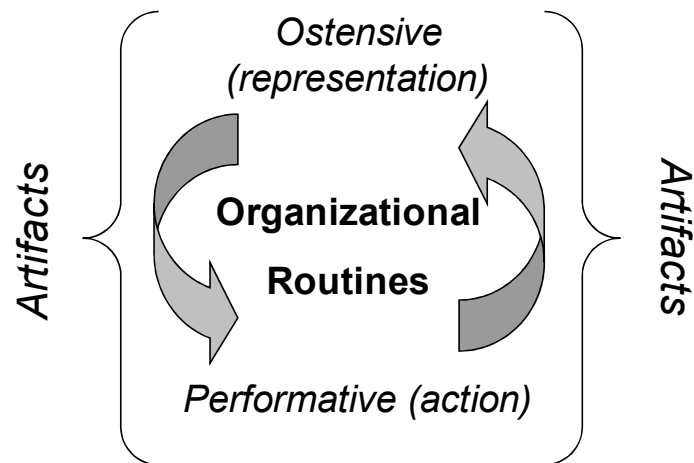


Figure 2. The model of organizational routines in their dynamics (adapted from Feldman and Pentland, 2003)

The *ostensive aspect* “...is the abstract or generalized pattern of a routine”, a routine in principle (Pentland and Feldman (2005, pg. 796). It represents people’s understanding of what a particular routine is and what it accomplishes. Feldman and Pentland (2003) suggest that the ostensive aspect performs three functions – guiding, accounting, and referring. The ostensive aspect is the blueprint of the routine. It is “...a template for behavior or a normative goal” (Feldman and Pentland, 2003, pg. 106). However, it can never specify the concrete expression of the behaviour, as the latter will depend on choices and decisions of the individuals involved in the execution of a routine. The ostensive aspect is also used to account for specific behaviour by “fitting” it into a routine. It helps to explain why certain actions have been taken and to make sense of the activities. Finally, the ostensive aspect can be used to simplify the reality and refer to an understandable pattern of action.

Artifacts capture the manifestations of routines in the physical world. They can be created purposefully (e.g., manuals, standards, codes) or be more subtle in nature. For

instance, Pentland and Feldman (2005) suggest that "...the fact that an office includes a 'reception area' facilitates the routine intake of visitors, but it does not directly prescribe who should be seen first" (pg. 797). Artifacts play an important role by embodying the structure of action.

Connecting these aspects of the routine is the concept of agency. As mentioned previously, agency has been a neglected part of organizational routines. Yet it is indispensable for the study of change, because change in the abstract sense is the change in what specific people do and think. As it was mentioned earlier, agency refers to the ability of people to exercise their judgment, will, and power to act. If organizations are viewed as sets of processes, it is necessary to understand the mechanism that powers these processes. In terms of the model described earlier, agency is needed to translate the ostensive aspect of the routine into specific performances. However, perhaps more significantly, agency is needed to create the ostensive aspect, as agents make sense of the actions and their outcomes, create shared understandings (Feldman and Rafaeli, 2002) and communicate them across the organization and over time.

2.4.3.2.2 The use of the model in empirical work

The model has been used fully or partially in a number of empirical studies. In what is currently the most comprehensive application of the model, Volkoff et al. (2007) employed Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model as the analytical apparatus for driving their study of implementing the SAP R/3 system in a large company in the United States. Soeparman et al. (2008) used Feldman and Pentland's model to arrive at a better understanding of the patterns of resilience of organization routines to standardization programmes in an emergency response control room in the Netherlands. Likewise, Wright (2009) employs the categories of Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model to design a longitudinal study of the dynamics of a management consulting project. Wright further uses the findings of the study to examine the relationships postulated in Feldman and Pentland's model.

2.4.4 Summary

The discussion of the organizational routines literature demonstrated that the organizational routines perspective provides a construct that meets the analytical

requirements that were laid out in Section 2.3. Organizational routines in general and Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model in particular provide the analytical lens for conceptualizing the detailed effect of PMM on performance. Vehicles of organizational performance by their nature, routines are responsive to performance feedback, link multiple organizational processes and change through the iterations between reflection and action on the part of the people involved in their execution. Thus, if the "black box" described in Section 2.3 can be seen as containing organizational routines, the question of this study can be rephrased as, How does PMM affect organizational routines? However, several considerations have led to the decision to focus only on the ostensive aspect of organizational routines and thus adopt a smaller-scope version of this question.

2.5 Defining the scope of the inquiry. The focus on the ostensive aspect of organizational routines.

In proceeding with the design of the study reported in this thesis, a decision was made to focus only on the ostensive aspect of organizational routines. Two main considerations led to this decision. First, the purpose of this thesis, framed in opposition to the studies of the general impact of PMM on performance discussed in Section 2.2.2.2, is to observe the direct and unmediated effect on performance, however small the scope may be. This is valuable because it would represent the first step towards understanding the detailed processes that connect PMM to performance. When organizational performance is seen as generated by organizational routines, the direct impact of PMM on performance is that on the ostensive aspect of routines. PMM by its nature does not directly affect the physical actions of the people involved in the execution of a routine. Rather, in the first instance, it affects their view of the routine – i.e., the ostensive aspect – by providing performance feedback, focusing attention on salient issues and communicating priorities. The translation into action may then take place, and it will be subject *inter alia* to the dynamics of the routine itself. The *direct* impact of PMM on routines, however, is the impact on the ostensive aspect.

The second consideration was of practical nature. Although tracing the effect of measurement through the entire mechanism of the routine to the observable change in

behaviour would have been an even more valuable contribution, the constraints on my time and resources did not allow me to design such a comprehensive study.

Therefore, after the review of the literature in PMM and organizational routines, my general question had morphed into the question of how PMM affects the ostensive aspect of organizational routines.

2.6 Sharpening the question. PMM as a performance management review meeting.

Although the question above is an accurate representation of the general interest viewed through the lens of organizational routines, it needs to be refined further in order to be amenable to empirical research. The last step in sharpening this question for the pilot study is the translation of the general term PMM into a specific type of PMM intervention that can be observed in the organizational context. In order to arrive at the question for the empirical part of the study, this thesis focused on a specific PMM practice – the periodic review of performance and, more specifically, on the regular multiple-participants performance management review (PMR) meetings aimed at reviewing the performance of an organizational routine. This section presents the rationale for this choice by examining the existing literature on performance reviews and establishing the connections with conclusions and decisions made earlier in the chapter.

2.6.1 Performance reviews

Despite the central role of the task of reviewing performance in organizations, the research on performance reviews does not enjoy a coherent field with well-formulated questions and established approaches. The term itself has become an umbrella term for studying the process of evaluating and planning performance at different levels, from individual to national. In this situation, the study of performance reviews is best characterised as being informed by a number of research domains, most notably occupational psychology, strategy review and strategic planning, management control systems, quality management, and PMM.

2.6.1.1 Performance reviews in the literature

In the study of performance reviews, the focus of the occupational psychology perspective is the individual performance appraisal. This stream of literature is very rich and diverse, yet by virtue of preserving an individual-centred perspective it has been almost entirely disconnected from the research on organizational performance³. Given its focus on individual performance, the central interest of the research on performance appraisals is the so-called “criterion problem” – the question of defining and operationalizing the criteria for evaluating an individual’s performance (Bennett et al., 2006). This interest led to substantial research on the process of conducting performance reviews and on the cognitive processes of the evaluated and evaluators during the performance review (e.g., Smither, 1998). Although this literature offered some discussion of the impact of PMM on performance – most notably the feedback intervention theory (Kluger and DeNisi, 1996) – its focus on the individual performance severely limits its usefulness for the question asked in this thesis.

The literature on strategic planning and strategy review takes the opposite perspective in terms of the level of analysis – it reviews corporate performance at the highest organizational level. This perspective brings several insights to the study of performance reviews. First, by examining performance reviews as an organizational phenomenon, the strategy review perspective emphasises the role of the organizational settings, discusses the periodic nature of the reviews, and links them to business results (e.g., Charan, 1982). Second, it links strategy reviews to organizational change and emphasises the complexity of the process. As early as in 1980s, Lenz and Lyles (1985) suggest that debates and discussions during performance reviews may be best suited for capturing the complexity of organizational factors underlying corporate strategy. Such debates are necessary for the development of a common understanding of the firm’s strategy.

Finally, a performance review on the corporate level is a forum for linking historical performance with future plans, which makes it one of the drivers of organizational

³ The field, however, is beginning to recognise the external organizational factors influencing individual performance reviews. See Austin and Crespín (2006) for an excellent review of the historical development of this view or Farr and Jacobs (2006) for a model of evaluation based on the factors in organizational environment.

change. Berry (1979) describes a case of developing and executing a high-level performance review process at Carleton Board of Education in Ontario, Canada and demonstrates its impact on organizational change. It is interesting that most of the studies examining the process of reviewing organizational performance were described by the early literature on strategic planning, and the topic is virtually absent in the modern research in strategic management. Nonetheless, these studies make several important points, most notably the link between performance reviews and organizational performance and change.

How corporate strategy is translated into operational performance is, generally speaking, the question of the management control systems literature (Merchant and Van der Stede, 2007). As such, the MCS literature recognises the need for reviewing operational performance at various levels below corporate (Daft and Macintosh, 1984). Discussing comprehensive frameworks for analyzing performance management and management control systems, Ferreira and Otley (2009) extend Otley's (1999) original framework, explicitly introducing performance evaluation as one of the elements of the framework. They note that performance evaluation is "...a critical nexus in control activities" (pg. 272) and emphasise that it extends beyond individual performance appraisals. However, since the perspective of the MCS literature is largely system-oriented, most MCS research discusses functions of performance reviews as an element of the overall control system rather than focusing on the review process itself and its effect on organizational processes (Merchant and Van der Stede, 2007; Daft and Macintosh, 1984)⁴. Similar to strategy reviews, the functions of performance reviews from the MCS perspective include the evaluation of the past performance, the review of performance targets (linking desired performance to the strategy), and planning preventive actions (deWaal, 2001).

Regular reviews of performance have also been emphasized in the quality management movement (Deming, 1986) as a necessary element of the continuous improvement process. In this role they entered the international standards of quality, most notably

⁴ However, see Ahrens and Chapman (2005) for an interesting deviation from this general rule. They describe a case where the focus of a MCS was on practices and discussions rather than on the control system *per se*.

ISO 9001 (2010) and ISO 14001 (2010). These standards identify a distinct role for management reviews and prescribe a specific structure for them. This structure includes the standard inputs and outputs of the management review, noting, among other things, that the output of the review must include the analysis and the revisions in the organizational processes overseen by the management system. Other applications of the general principles of quality management to performance review processes have also been proposed (Marien, 1992). However, with the exception of the schematic description of the structure of management reviews in the quality standards, the discussion of the reviews and the mechanism of their impact on processes has been scarce. Nonetheless, quality standards explicitly note – and encourage – the effect that performance reviews can make on organizational processes.

The PMM perspective takes a broad look at organizational performance measurement, examining the issues of design, implementation, and use of comprehensive performance measurement systems. Within this perspective, performance reviews are seen as a critical component of PMM systems, maintaining the relevance of performance management efforts and linking past and future performance (Kaplan and Norton, 2008; Marr, 2006; Neely et al., 2002; Storey and Sisson, 1993). They are carried out periodically at different levels of the organization, and their functions include management control, coordination, and organizational learning. Kaplan and Norton (2008) see operational and strategy review meetings as an integral part of the functioning of a PMM system. Linking them to the quality management perspective, they see review meetings as the “check and act portions...of the plan-do-check-act cycle” (pg. 221). They further speculate about the effect of particular elements of the review meetings on the engagement of the participants with the performance information. Crucially, they emphasize the role of the individual participant in translating the pressure of the performance review into the actual changes in organizational processes.

One can see a number of common themes in the perspectives that these domains of literature bring to the study of performance reviews. Performance reviews are elements of organizational PMM systems that involve individuals or groups and that are designed to perform a number of functions in organizations. The primary functions include

coordination and communication. Another important point is that performance reviews not only focus on evaluating past performance but also enable organizational actors to forecast future conditions and plan adequate actions. This makes performance reviews an instrument for driving change in organizational processes.

2.6.1.2 Defining performance reviews

The characteristics described above make performance reviews an important coordination mechanism and a potentially powerful instrument of managing organizational performance. The benefits and significance (e.g., Marr, 2006; Neely et al., 2002) of performance reviews are well documented. However, the absence of a coherent definition of a performance review hinders progress in this work. In an attempt to clarify the state of the field and provide a common ground for conducting further research on performance reviews, Martinez and Kennerley (2006) carried out an analysis of existing definitions of the concept. Based on this analysis, they define a performance review as:

...a formal and periodical mechanism to monitor and assess the actual performance of organisations. It is an integral element of a performance management system, which injects action into the performance measurement systems of organizations. It provides rational policies, review levels, and structured processes to analyse and evaluate the performance of organizations. And its ultimate aim is to improve the organization's learning and performance, to encourage proactive and corrective actions (pg. 470).

Developing this thinking further, Martinez et al. (2010) adopt this definition in a conceptual analysis of the structure and functions of performance reviews. However, in order to emphasize the distinction of this process from performance appraisals with their focus on individual performance, Martinez et al. (2010) change the name of the concept to “performance *management* review”.

This definition captures most of the themes identified earlier in this section. It adds one – the importance of performance reviews in initiating organizational action – and omits

one – the central place of organizational actors in performance reviews, both as evaluating and as evaluated participants, in creating an account of the performance.

With this modification, the definition given above is the definition adopted in thesis. The adapted version is stated as follows:

A Performance Management Review (PMR) is an integral element of a PMM system, which provides a formal mechanism to monitor and assess the actual performance of organizations on a regular basis. It specifies rational policies, review levels, and structured processes that enable organizational actors to form an understanding of the organizational performance and its drivers. As such, it injects action into the performance measurement systems of organizations. Its ultimate aim is to improve the organization's learning and performance by encouraging corrective and proactive actions.

2.6.2 Performance management review meetings

Section 2.6.1 focused on the analysis of performance management review as an element of the PMM system. However, PMR is an abstract concept – a function performed by an organizational PMM system. In order to study its effects in an empirical setting, one needs to identify an organizational context for the observable manifestation of this concept. Most of the empirical studies discussed in the preceding section examined PMRs as PMR meetings (Kaplan and Norton, 2008; Marr, 2006; Marien, 1992; Berry, 1979), as it is the most common form for conducting PMR in organizations. In line with this reasoning, this thesis examines PMR in the context of a PMR meeting.

The existing academic research on meetings is scarce (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008), which may be caused by the difficulty of gaining access to organizations to study meetings (Volkema and Niederman, 1995). Most of the existing research on meetings originates in the fields of sociology (Atkinson et al., 1977) and anthropology (Schwarzman, 1989) and has focused on the conversational (Clifton, 2006) and cultural (Poncini and Gotti, 2007) dynamics within the meeting rather than on the functions of the meetings and the analysis of their effects. The effectiveness of the meeting is

examined in a recent contribution by Leach et al. (2009), but their study focuses on perceived effectiveness as the dependent variable and as such does not discuss the effects of the meetings on organizations. Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008), however, examine meetings as strategizing episodes in the process of strategy formation and note that one of the effects of strategy meetings is that they allow the participants to suspend the current view of the strategy and allow the emergent strategy to take shape.

The analysis of meetings in the management accounting literature is similarly scarce. Two notable exceptions are Boland and Pondy's (1986) analysis of a budgeting meeting and a more recent contribution by Vaivio (2006). Boland and Pondy (1986) analyzed the decision-making process in a budgeting meeting and noted that this process did not conform to the traditional notions of rationality and that the decisions were shaped in a dialogue between the participants. Vaivio (2006) examined "The meeting" as a form calculable space, noting that the meeting provided an arrangement for the fusion of departmental boundaries. These studies are significant because they offer an insight into the functioning of the meeting. However, similar to the studies examined in the preceding paragraph, they do not focus on the organizational effects of meetings. In case of Vaivio's (2006) work, the meeting is also an abstract "calculable space" rather than a concrete practice with specific functions and boundaries.

Studies examining PMR meetings specifically are even rarer. With the exception of Kaplan and Norton's (2008) work that provides illustrative examples of PMR meetings, research on the structure, functions and effects of PMR meetings is very limited.

With little guidance as to the specific elements of PMR meetings that may be useful for affecting organizational routines, in conceptualizing the PMM intervention this study focuses on the PMR meeting as a whole.

2.6.3 PMM as a PMR meeting

The discussion in Sections 2.6.1 and 2.6.2 as well as its links with the literature examined earlier provide support for the decision to focus on the PMR meeting as the PMM intervention in the empirical part of this study. First, the literature on PMRs and

PMR meetings demonstrates that a key role of these meetings is to drive the change in organizational processes. This is consistent both with the adopted analytical lens of organizational routines and with the findings in the literature evaluating the impact of PMM on organizational processes that was reviewed in Section 2.2.3.

Second, the focus on *meetings* as the observable practices of performance management reviews is consistent with the focus on the ostensive aspect of organizational routines. The performative aspect of the organizational routine that is reviewed at the meeting is inaccessible at the time of the meeting, and it is the ostensive aspect – the idea of the routine – that is placed under the pressure of PMM in a PMR meeting. During PMR meetings, understandings are articulated and representations are proposed; different interests compete and an agreed-upon model of action may be forged. Pentland and Feldman’s (2005) specifically state that reflection may lead to a change in the routine and that “opportunities to reflect *with other participants in the routine* can have similar effects” (pg. 809, emphasis added). Thus, PMR meetings are in a sense a magnifying glass, under which the ostensive aspect of the routine comes to light and can be closely examined.

As such, PMR meetings provide a coherent and powerful way of analysing the effect of PMM on the ostensive aspect of the routine. It is important to note, however, that, given the distinction of PMR from performance appraisals, PMR meetings are always *group* meetings.

2.7 Summarizing the argument

Chapter 2 has presented the development of the general interest in the ways PMM affects organizational performance into a question for an empirical investigation in the pilot study. The chapter started with the review of literature evaluating the impact of PMM on performance and noted that the studies that attempted to observe the direct impact of PMM on measurable performance produced conflicting evidence. PMM efforts therefore could be viewed as unpredictable and their mechanism as poorly understood. In other words, there was a “black box” that separated PMM interventions from their intended outcomes.

At the same time, another stream of studies examining the effect of PMM on organizations noted that PMM seemed to affect the structural elements of performance by affecting the organizational processes that generated performance. Moreover, the effect was achieved by stimulating the cycle of reflection and action on the part of the people involved in the processes. Explicating the effect of PMM on these processes would allow one to open the “black box” of the effect of PMM on performance. However, in order to accomplish this objective, a powerful analytical lens was needed.

Such a lens was provided by the organizational routines perspective. The routine, an organizational unit generating performance, responsive to performance feedback, and changing through the iterations between reflection and action, provided the necessary conceptual apparatus for examining the dynamics of organizational processes affected by a PMM intervention. The ostensive aspect of the routine was identified as the most appropriate element of the routine to focus on in the study of the impact of PMM on routines.

In order to be amenable to empirical research, the abstract concept of PMM, however, needed to be translated into an observable organizational practice. Moreover, the effect of this practice needed to be consistent with the literature reviewed earlier. Performance review meetings (PMR) were identified as such a practice.

The outcome of this process was the development of the preliminary empirical research question – the question asked in the pilot study. This question is presented in the next section.

2.8 Preliminary research question

On the basis of the analysis presented in this chapter, the general interest in the ways PMM affects organizational performance was translated into the following preliminary research question:

Preliminary Research Question: How does the PMR meeting affect the ostensive aspect of the organizational routine reviewed at the meeting?

This question serves as the research question for the pilot study.

Chapter 3. The Pilot study. The Research Question.

Chapter 3 presents the pilot study that was conducted in order to evaluate the feasibility of designing a full-blown empirical study based on the preliminary question developed in Chapter 2. Although it is small in scope and does not aim to produce significant findings, the pilot study is an empirical study in its own right and, therefore, it is presented as such, including the discussion of research strategy, methods, and results. Chapter 3 is structured in the following way. It begins with a restatement of the preliminary question crafted in Chapter 2. This is followed by the presentation of the full pilot study that notes the discrepancies between the assumptions underlying the research design and the nature of the findings that emerged during data analysis. Next, a detailed discussion of the significance of these discrepancies for research design and research question is presented. The chapter closes with the statement of the final research question developed on the basis of the analysis of the pilot study data and presents a summary of the changes in the research design that will be introduced in the main part of the empirical study. Chapter 3 describes the last step in the set up of the main empirical study and as such closes Part I of the thesis.

3.1 Preliminary research question

The preliminary research question that was developed in Chapter 2 through the analysis of the literature is the question that is asked in the pilot study. It reads as follows:

Preliminary Research Question: How does the PMR meeting affect the ostensive aspect of the organizational routine reviewed at the meeting?

3.2 The pilot study

The pilot study conducted in this thesis is presented as a separate empirical study, although admittedly small in scope. It is important to remember, however, that the purpose of the pilot was to evaluate the feasibility of the preliminary research question developed at an earlier stage rather than to arrive at any far-reaching conclusions based on the analysis of the data. This section presents the rationale for the research strategy, the description of the research context, a discussion of the methods of data collection and analysis, and the findings of the study.

3.2.1 Research strategy

Robson (1993) proposes three broad strategies for conducting research: experiment, survey, and case study. Considering that the research question presented in the preceding chapter is a “how” question, whose aim is to gain an detailed understanding of the way in which the PMR meeting affects the ostensive aspect of the routine under review, a case study is the most appropriate strategy for answering this question empirically. As Saunders et al. (1997) note, this strategy is most useful for researchers wishing to “...gain a rich understanding of the context of the research and the process being enacted” (pg. 76).

3.2.2 Research Design

3.2.2.1 Case selection strategy

Since the aim of this research is to answer a specific question derived from literature analysis rather than to explore a complex phenomenon on its own, the approach advocated by Yin (2003) was chosen over other approaches (e.g., Stake, 1995). The research question allowed substantial freedom in the choice of cases, as it focused on organizational routines, which are by definition the building blocks of all organizations, and PMR meetings, which are a ubiquitous practice. Consequently, the choice of the case in the pilot study was driven primarily by the considerations of feasibility and access.

3.2.2.2 Operationalization⁵ of the constructs

In line with Yin’s (2003) recommendations, the constructs were operationalized to the extent that was possible prior to the start of the data collection phase. Below is an indication of the way the elements of the preliminary research question were translated into the corresponding observable phenomena.

3.2.2.2.1 The PMR meeting

The concept of the PMR meeting presented the least number of difficulties, as it is sufficiently focused to restrict the research only to the meetings at which performance data are discussed and sufficiently broad to include periodic meetings at any level with

⁵ Since the pilot study is a qualitative inquiry, operationalization here does not mean the process of identifying specific measurable proxies. Rather, it refers to the process of translating the theoretical concept into observable phenomena by defining the scope of the empirical inquiry.

any number of participants. The formal test to which the meeting was subjected in order to qualify for being used in the research was whether it was a meeting that incorporated performance review as defined in Section 2.6.1.2 of this thesis.

3.2.2.2.2 *The routine under review*

The question of the organizational level of the meeting, however, leads to the consideration of the level of the routine that is discussed at the meeting. Nelson and Winter's (1982) definition of the routine accommodates recurrent action patterns at all organizational levels, from small teams to boards of directors. Feldman and Pentland's (2003) definition adopted in this thesis⁶ is silent about this issue and, thus, does not clarify the question. Therefore, the choice of the routine was a judgment call, which reflected the following considerations. The routine under review needed to be relatively simple in order to be frequently reviewed and in order for the research to be feasible given the aims and the scope of the pilot study. It also needed to conform to the definition of the routine adopted in this thesis.

3.2.2.2.3 *The ostensive aspect of the routine*

Operationalizing the ostensive aspect presented the greatest difficulty in this research. Feldman and Pentland (2003) define the ostensive aspect as "...the abstract, generalized idea of a routine, or the routine in principle" (pg. 101) and refer to it as a narrative, a script, an understanding, a story, a summary of the way tasks are performed, and a generalized pattern of the routine. This array of definitions is a double-edged sword: on one hand, it does not provide researchers with a ready-made proxy for the concept; on the other hand, it allows a lot of room for manoeuvre. In a sense, any method of operationalizing the construct, provided it is done rigorously, is not only acceptable, but also has the potential for making a contribution. A recent work (Volkoff et al., 2007) makes Feldman and Penland's (2003) model of routines a centerpiece of its empirical research and "extracts" the ostensive aspect from the interviews and documents. In so doing, it effectively builds on the understanding of the ostensive as a *narrative* or a *summary of the routine* (cf. Feldman and Pentland, 2003), as such essentially treating the ostensive aspect as the collectively shared summary of the routine.

⁶ Cf. Section 2.4.2.1 Defining the routine in organizational studies.

This thesis follows the same path, analyzing the interview data to determine the narrative or the summary of the routine under review that would reflect the “abstract, generalized idea of a routine” which constitutes the ostensive aspect. The task of identifying this summary of the routine was further aided by the fact that I observed the routine in detail and verified the validity of my own understanding of it in my conversations with the Manager, which ensured my ability to refer to it in the interviews and distinguish it in the interviews data. This summary of narrative of the routine was never formalized or recorded – otherwise, it would be an artifact of the routine⁷. Rather, it was seen as a summary of the routine collectively shared by the participants⁸.

In order to make the effect on the ostensive aspect more easily observable, the pilot study further focused on the specific processes of change in the ostensive aspect identified in the literature. As the discussion in Section 2.4.3.2.1 demonstrates, the ostensive aspect of the routine is formed or changes through three specific processes – creation, maintenance, and modification (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). As people choose to recognize a set of actions as a coherent pattern, they *create* the corresponding ostensive aspect. In this sense, a collection of random actions which has not been recognized as a meaningful activity does not have a corresponding ostensive aspect and, therefore, is not a routine. Furthermore, as routines are performed, they *maintain* the corresponding ostensive aspect. If a routine is not executed regularly, the narrative reflecting what it is and what it entails disappears. Thus, the ostensive aspect of the routine is actively maintained through the interpretation of actions. Finally, as people decide to incorporate new actions into what is understood as a routine, the summary of the routine – the ostensive aspect – is *modified*.

Maintenance, modification, and creation are thus the specific processes through which the ostensive aspect is formed. Maintenance is aimed at preserving the stability of the ostensive aspect of the routine, modification changes the ostensive aspect, and creation makes formalizes the recognition of a new pattern of action as a new routine. All of

⁷ Cf. Section 2.4.3.2.1.

⁸ As the discussion of the findings will demonstrate, this assumption is so restrictive that it may render this operationalization of the ostensive aspect invalid, and the design of the main part of this study specifically avoids this assumption. However, at this point, it represents a logical conclusion made on the basis of the definition existing in the literature and the earlier attempts to operationalize it.

these processes, however, take place through conscious decision of people involved in the execution of the routine, thus reflecting the central role of agency in organizational routines.

3.2.3 Research context

3.2.3.1 The Organization

The pilot study was conducted in a UK provider of housing standards and insurance in January-February of 2008. The organization sets standards for the construction industry and provides housing insurance for residential property. It is registered in Amersham, Buckinghamshire, and has seven representative offices nationwide. It employs over one thousand people and its primary services include setting construction standards, inspecting construction sites for compliance, maintaining a register of approved builders, issuing insurance policies for home owners, and providing a number of housing-related services. The organization has approximately 350 building inspectors who visit buildings and construction sites nationwide in order to carry out the inspection. In the process of examining a particular site, the inspector draws on multiple sources of information. These include housing development plans, soil test results, legal and other official documents and need to be instantly accessible to the inspector. Likewise, surveyors and builders often have a need to have access to these documents.

Collecting these sources, digitizing and organizing them, and making them accessible is the task of the Technical Services department, where the case study was conducted. The department employs both permanent and temporary staff, and the total number of employees varies between thirty and thirty-eight. As the documentation arrives in the post, the employees sort it, assign a reference number, manually scan it into the system, index it (i.e., provide a comment as to what each document is), and organize the information so that it could be easily used. The employees also respond to phone calls, providing information about the status of the work on the documents.

The department is headed by the Business Administration Manager for Technical Services (hereafter, “the Manager”), who is assisted by three Technical Administration Supervisors (hereafter, “supervisors”, each responsible for a specific area of operations.

The supervisor in charge of the scanning and indexing operations – the largest area – is assisted by two Senior Technical Administrative Assistants (hereafter, “assistants”). These six people are full-time employees and make up the management team of the department.

3.2.3.2 The PMR meeting

This team meets each month in a team performance management review meeting which is always chaired by the Manager. The meetings last an average of four hours and are concerned primarily with reviewing the operations of the department, analyzing the performance of specific functional areas, and planning future actions. The supervisors prepare and discuss performance reports, and their bonus depends on the results they demonstrate.

3.2.4 Data Collection

In order to obtain the data necessary for answering the preliminary research question, a two-tiered design was drawn up. It called, first, for the observation of PMR meetings; second, for interviews with the participants directly after the PMR meeting; and finally, for collecting data over time. The rationale for this design was as follows. Since the research question focuses on the effect of the PMR meeting on the ostensive aspect of the routine, it is not necessary to collect data about the performative aspect of the routine. Knowing that the ostensive aspect is a general idea of the routine that exists in the participants’ minds, the data were expected to come from the interviews. However, in order to ask relevant questions in the interviews, it is necessary to know the details of what is discussed at the particular meetings. Therefore, the design also called for the observation of the meetings (as a secondary source of data). Finally, the study was designed to collect data over time in order first, to increase the depth of access and thus to improve the validity of the results; second, to explore the possibility of tracing the change in the ostensive over the course of several meetings. Figure 3 provides a visual representation of the data collection elements of this design.

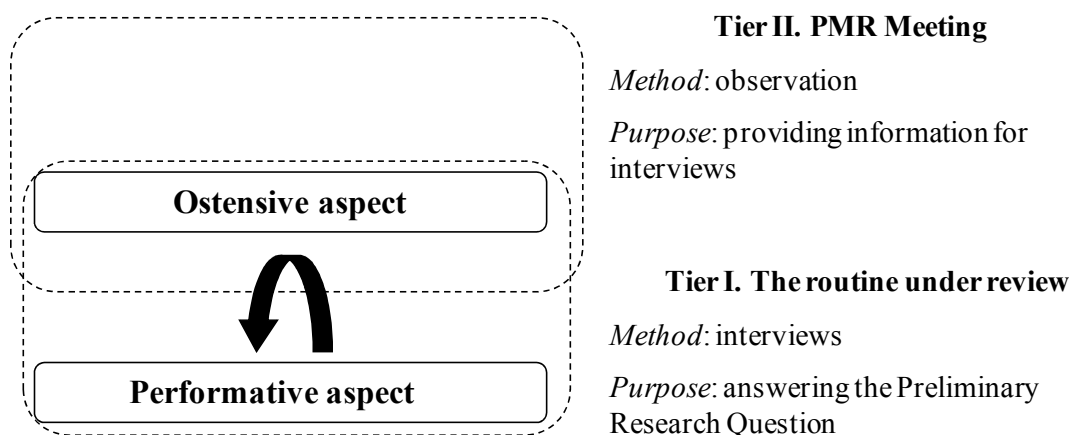


Figure 3. The data collection elements of the research design

The data were collected during the first two months of 2008. I was given an informal introduction to the department, getting a chance to observe people at work and ask questions to clarify my understanding of the routine. I also had lunch with the team before the second meeting, which gave me an opportunity to ask more informal questions. This contact time with the organization is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. General contact time with the organization

Company introduction with observing the operations	90 min
Lunch with the team	45 min

Formally, however, the data were collected during two PMR meetings and consisted of two phases – observing the meeting and conducting interviews with the participants directly after the meeting. The research design aimed for interviewing each participant after each meeting. My formal contact time with the organization is presented in Table 2⁹.

3.2.4.1 Observation of team meetings

Since the research question focuses on the ostensive aspect of routine, which is understood as a narrative, the data that would answer this question were expected to come from the interviews (cf. Pentland and Feldman, 2005).

⁹ The names of the people were changed to protect identity.

Table 2. Formal contact time with the organization

Date	24-Jan-08	28-Feb-08		
Number	1	2	Times	Length (min)
Meeting Length	210	135	2	345
Helen (Chair)	Interview Date 24-Jan-08	Interview Date 28-Feb-08	2	
	Length (min) 20	Length (min) 19		39
Ida	Interview Date 24-Jan-08	Interview Date 28-Feb-08	2	
	Length (min) 10	Length (min) 7		17
Olivia	Interview Date 24-Jan-08	Interview Date 28-Feb-08	2	
	Length (min) 9	Length (min) 8		17
Sarah	Interview Date 24-Jan-08		1	
	Length (min) 12			12
Ulrica	Interview Date 24-Jan-08	Interview Date 28-Feb-08	2	
	Length (min) 15	Length (min) 29		44
Hannah	Interview Date 24-Jan-08	Interview Date 28-Feb-08	2	
	Length (min) 10	Length (min) 7		17
Interviews	6	5	11	
Interview time (min)	76	70		146
MODE	Face to Face	Face to Face		

Therefore, the observation was used as a supplementary method (Robson, 2002), and was conducted only in order to inform the subsequent interview questions. I took notes of the issues and points in conversations which seemed to correspond to the processes of creating, maintaining, and modifying the ostensive aspect of the routine that was being discussed. Immediately following the PMR meeting, these notes were translated into interview questions which were included in the interview protocol along with the general questions developed earlier.

3.2.4.2 Individual Interviews

Six interviews were conducted after the first meeting, and five interviews after the second one. The same five people were interviewed on both occasions, whereas the sixth person interviewed at the first meeting left the organization shortly after the interview date. Following Yin's (2003) recommendations, an interview protocol was developed in advance, which specified the interview questions to the extent that was possible, provided the links to the literature, and listed the rationale for each question. However, as it was mentioned earlier, not all of the questions could be determined in advance, as they had to reflect the issues discussed at the PMR meetings. Therefore, the

protocol contained only general questions about the PMR meeting and the routine and was supplemented by the additional questions arising after each meeting. The interviews ranged from eight minutes to half an hour in length, depending on the interviewee's involvement in the particular aspects of the routine and in the discussion at the PMR meeting.

3.2.5 Data analysis

The general approach to data analysis employed in the pilot study was the one advocated by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) in the sense that it favoured the rigour and relevance of the methods of data analysis over strict adherence to any particular school of qualitative research methods. In order to conduct data analysis, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded. QSR NVivo 8.0 was used to facilitate the coding process and to organize and manage the data¹⁰.

The analysis focused on the content of the interviews and went through several iterations between data reduction and data complication (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), as I moved between looking for broad categories relevant to the research question (e.g., description of PMR meetings) and delving deeper into these categories to discover distinct themes within them (e.g., specific ways in which the PMR meeting affected the ostensive aspect). After each iteration, as I recoded the data, NVivo node reports were re-created and re-analyzed. This allowed me to move from coding to interpretation¹¹ (Wolcott, 1994), asking progressively deeper questions of the data and looking for common themes and outliers.

The presence of an existing set of categories derived from the literature made the search for the common themes easier, as I looked specifically for the evidence of the processes of the PMR meetings that *created*, *maintained*, and *modified* the ostensive aspect of the routine. On the other hand, recognizing the outliers and making sense of them

¹⁰ This is the latest version of the software, which allows easy management of diverse sources of data and accommodates various types of research design. However, the software does not possess any analytical power and hence was used simply for organizing and managing data, not for producing any substantive conclusions.

¹¹ As understood here, interpretation does not mean any remarkable or highly sophisticated process. Rather, it is similar to Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) idea of interpretation as "...cautious analysis of what is to be made of [the data]" (pg. 46).

represented a more challenging exploratory element in this research. However, it enriched the research significantly, since, given that the processes of the creation of the ostensive aspect have not been thoroughly studied in the literature, limiting the inquiry to the three processes outlined by Feldman and Pentland (2003) would mean constraining the research artificially and unjustifiably. Therefore, besides the existing categories, the research kept an exploratory element in order to capture the evidence that was not predicted and that could therefore extend the list of processes through which the PMR meeting affected the ostensive aspect. It is useful to reiterate, however, that the role of this exploratory element remained very small relative to the role of the existing set of categories derived from the literature.

3.2.6 Findings: Avoiding a fundamental fallacy

Although the pilot study was designed and executed as an empirical study in its own right, its primary goal was to explore the plausibility of the research design and the empirical implications of the preliminary research question rather than to arrive at powerful and far-reaching conclusions. This section demonstrates that the pilot study accomplished precisely this objective. Although it did generate some findings based on the question asked, its primary value was in highlighting the discrepancy between the nature of the key construct – the ostensive aspect of the routine – and its proposed operationalization. The pilot study demonstrated that the adopted formulation of the preliminary research question might lead to a fundamental fallacy that could render the results invalid. Therefore, the findings of the pilot study led to a re-conceptualization of the research question and to a number of changes in the research design.

What the findings demonstrated was that, in discussing the ostensive aspect of the routine, the interviewees talked about their *subjective experience* of the ostensive aspect and of the effects of the PMR on it. The subjective nature of the ostensive aspect was much more prominent and seemed to be much more important for the understanding of the effects of the PMR meetings than the conceptualization of the ostensive aspect as a collectively shared objectified summary of the routine.

In order to preserve the coherence of the pilot study, this section presents the findings in accordance with the structure of the research design. However, this presentation is supplemented by the commentary regarding the significance of understanding the ostensive aspect as fundamentally subjective in nature.

A general finding was that performance reviews did indeed affect the process of the formation of the ostensive aspect of the routine. All interviewees noted that the regular performance review meetings affected the way they understood their job (i.e., the routine). However, more interesting were the findings pertaining to the specific processes of change the ostensive aspect of the routine. They included the specific processes of maintenance and modification in the ostensive aspect of the routine and the effects of the PMR meeting on the reflection of the meeting participants. These findings are discussed in detail below.

3.2.6.1 Maintenance

The majority of the evidence was related to the process of maintaining the ostensive aspect of the organizational routines. This is perhaps not surprising, as maintaining a desired capacity to perform an action is a commonly understood function of a PMR meeting. In other words, performance reviews are conducted in order to check the performance and ensure that the capacity to perform an action still exists and can be exercised when necessary. PMR meetings then have a regulative or corrective function, ensuring that the specific actions or problems are understood as part of the routine and integrated into it. The pilot study demonstrated several ways in which PMR meetings perform this function. First, they facilitate the exchange of information which is necessary for maintaining the understanding of the job (i.e., the ostensive aspect) current. PMR meetings accomplish it through updating or deepening the ostensive aspect. For instance, one of the supervisors noted, that that if it was not for the performance review meetings,

...we wouldn't be kept so well-informed...And we wouldn't be communicating as much. So we wouldn't know what's going on within the organization. [The Manager] obviously has got more knowledge going to managers' meetings and she's able to pass some of that knowledge on to us. And we wouldn't find out about it. We'd be kept in the dark.

The information exchanged at PMR meetings can not only update but also deepen the ostensive aspect as the individuals involved in the routine increase their individual knowledge of the routine. The supervisor quoted above later stated that PMR meetings are helpful...

...because sometimes I may be asked to help out if they're very busy, if they are short of staff for any reason...So it's useful now they're taking on board for instance the customer services staff. So if I've got some idea of what is being taken on in the future, then I will know what to look out for, for instance.

Updating and deepening the ostensive aspect through the information exchanged at the meeting is then necessary for maintaining the “generalized idea of a routine”. Performance reviews allow people to update and deepen the ostensive aspect in order to maintain it.

However, besides offering a chance to exchange information, PMR meetings have a more sophisticated mechanism for maintaining the ostensive aspect of organizational routines. The results of the pilot study suggest that this mechanism involves three elements: first, during performance reviews the gaps between the individual participants' ideas of the routine (i.e., the multiple ostensive aspects) are exposed; second, the input to the participants' ideas of the routine is invited and provided; and finally, these ideas are validated or reinforced¹². Through this mechanism PMR meetings ensure that actions are interpreted as a part of the existing routine and that any deviation in the understanding of what the routine entails is corrected. Thus, through this mechanism they *maintain* the ostensive aspect of the routine.

For instance, reflecting the role of PMR meetings in exposing the gaps between multiple ostensive aspects, one of the supervisors said,

*...Say we'll take my other member of staff to the... phone calls for example.
If...[she]...didn't bring that up in the team meeting this afternoon, I*

¹² These elements are probably sequential; however, it is impossible to make this conclusion given the limitations of the dataset in this study.

probably would have forgotten to do so. Because...if she didn't bring it up, she could be doing something wrong with answering her phone calls.

When the gaps are exposed, the participants of the performance review invite or volunteer input to the ostensive aspect in order to close the gap. As an assistant stated, when performance reviews expose gaps,

...you can either help them or you can say, well, yeah, I think this is a problem as well. So hopefully we can talk it through and come to the conclusion.

When an input is provided (or invited), the subsequent discussion closes the gap. Finally, PMR meetings provide an opportunity for the participants to validate their individual view of the routine against those of others. In the words of an assistant, without the meetings,

...I don't think we'd all be as confident as we are that we're able to do the work. I mean [the Manager] does give your morale a boost, if you like, because she knows we can do the job before we know we can do the job. She, you know, she sees and she thinks, well, look, go do it, no problem. Or if she thinks there's going to be a problem, she'll explain it in greater, you know, deeper detail.

Summing up this section, the findings of the pilot study suggest that the PMR meeting does affect the process of maintaining the ostensive aspect of routines. It helps the participants to update and deepen their views of routine and to compare them with those of others. In so doing, it keeps the ostensive aspect current and, therefore, maintains the ostensive aspect. However, it is important to note that in the quotations above, the interviewees spoke about the effect of the PMR meeting on their own subjectively held view of the routine and about the interaction of this view with those of others rather than with an objectified summary of the routine. Thus, most importantly, what these results suggest is that the ostensive aspect is essentially subjective and that the PMR meeting is perceived to have an effect on them.

3.2.6.2 Modification

The interview data also suggested that the PMR meeting affects the process of modification of the ostensive aspect of routines. Both modification and maintenance involve changes in the ostensive aspect. However, whereas maintenance preserves the stability of the routine, the processes of modification drive its change. The evidence suggests that the mechanism through which performance reviews accomplish it involves inducing and reducing variation in the ostensive aspect of the routine. Pentland and Feldman (2005) hypothesized that, given the links between the performative and the ostensive aspects of routines, variation in the specific actions can cause the corresponding variation in the ostensive aspect. This pilot study failed to see the evidence of that effect. However, what the findings demonstrated was that the same effect was clearly present in the ostensive aspect alone.

During the first two months of 2008, when the research was carried out, the Technical Services department was preparing for integrating the work of another office into its operations. Since the work was slightly different, it was bound to change the department's routine. I did not have a chance to continue the study as the new work was coming in; therefore, observing the modification of the ostensive aspect based on the variation in the performative was impossible. However, what the evidence showed was that in the ostensive aspect alone, a very similar process took place. For instance, after the meeting at which the new work and its details were announced, one of the assistants described in a lengthy passage a number of variations in the ostensive aspect of the routine that the announcement spurred. In other words, although no actual variation in the action took place, a mere mention of it in the PMR meeting created a whole host of variations in the ostensive aspect of the routine.

This scanning that we are gonna be receiving from Amersham... Helen was saying that we do about 70,000 a day, whereas they are doing 2,000 a day, so it's not a significant amount for us to take on, but that 2,000 pages that have got to be scanned on, how much work is involved in getting it to be scanned on... do you have to reference it and all this sort of things, what sort of things are you having to scan on? Because she mentioned death

certificates and all that sort of... well they're quite important documents, so you can't afford... you don't have the...what's the word... control over a machine if it's gonna chew up a document, but you can put it on the flatbed machine so that it doesn't go through an automatic roller and... because that would take less time than putting it on the flatbed so... I'm not explaining myself very clearly I'm afraid...

You have got to treat those with respect and you've got to keep them as flat as possible so although there are only 2000 documents, they might take a little bit longer to scan on than 2000 of the other documents that we do, so you have to find out all those sorts of information, and then she said they've got to go back to Amersham so that's gonna be time consuming as well so it's 2000 documents that aren't gonna be... [the same] ...as other documents, but it's gonna be time consuming I think...

At the same time, however, when a new course of action is decided upon, the variation in the ostensive aspect of the routine is reduced, and one of these variations becomes the accepted part of the ostensive aspect of the routine, thus modifying it. The evidence shows that this is the mechanism through which PMR meetings modify the ostensive aspect of the routine. As one of the supervisors observed after the second meeting,

...for example if I didn't know what was going on with Amersham scanning I would find it quite difficult next week.

Similarly, one of the assistants noted that the discussion at the PMR meeting

*...**just gives you an idea**, like with the Amersham scanning, it will now sort of help us because we will have to sort the post when it comes into the offices, we'll have to sort it into what queues it gets scanned on to. So it's now told us what we will need to do. So when we actually come to doing it, it will make it easier to do when we actually come to physically do it. [emphasis added].*

In other words, the performance review provides the mechanism through which the variation in the ostensive is reduced and becomes manageable, while the original ostensive aspect is modified.

In summary, the PMR meeting modified the ostensive aspect of the routine through inducing and reducing the variation in it. When the variation is induced, it spurs the exploration of possible modifications in the ostensive aspect of the routine. When variation is reduced, one of these variations becomes an accepted modification of the existing ostensive aspect.

However, similar to the discussion of maintenance in the ostensive aspect, the data shown above demonstrate that the dynamics of the modification take place in the participant's subjective views of the routine. In other words, the effect of the PMR meeting is the effect on the subjectively held ostensive aspect of the routine rather than on a collectively shared objectified summary of it.

3.2.6.3 Creation

The process through which new actions are recognized and accepted as a new routine (thereby creating a new ostensive aspect) is difficult to observe, as new routines are not frequently created. The pilot study did not produce any evidence of the creation of the ostensive aspect and, consequently, could not examine the effect of the PMR meeting on it. One can hypothesize about the role of PMR meetings in such a process, stating, for instance, that it provides a formal mechanism for recognizing a collection of actions as a routine in its own right. However, this pilot study has no evidence to support this conjecture.

The failure to observe the processes of creation of the ostensive aspect is probably best explained by the scope of the study. The length of the involvement with the organization most likely was not sufficient to allow new action patterns to develop, let alone to examine the effects of the PMR meeting on the creation of the corresponding ostensive aspect. Therefore, this pilot study does not provide any insight into the effects of the PMR meeting on the creation of the new ostensive aspect.

3.2.6.4 Emergent findings

Besides examining the evidence of the effect of the PMR meeting on the processes of formation of the ostensive aspect hypothesized by Feldman and Pentland (2003), the pilot study looked for other effects of the PMR meeting on the ostensive aspect. These findings emerged from the open coding and were related to the effects that were external to the processes of maintaining and modifying the ostensive aspect.

First, it was found that one of the effects of the PMR meeting was to stimulate the reflection that underpins the formation of the ostensive aspect of routines. The meeting accomplished this by capturing and focusing the attention of individuals. In the words of the Manager, the purpose of a performance review is

...to bring people in and channel their thoughts at an appropriate time and give them time to reflect on what they are doing... [and the meeting] ...helps them know that I need them to focus on the issues.

Second, the PMR meeting gave the participants a chance to reflect on their actions (and hence go through the processes of maintaining and modifying the ostensive aspect of the routine) by merely removing them from the “battlefield”, by providing an environment that was conducive to discussion and reflection. Every single interviewee made at least one comment pertaining to this function of performance reviews. One of the most colourful statements came from an assistant, who said,

...I think when you're in the actual office, you're spending all the time physically working...so you really don't take time out to go and talk to anybody about what's happening and, you know, what's going to happen, you are just constantly working. So the fact that you're, sort of... in a way it's an enforced point out from work to be able to sort of catch up on things. I think if you didn't have the meetings, you'd just be sitting there working permanently, all the time.

In other words, the meeting allowed the participants to disconnect from the continuous stream of actions and thus provided the broader context for reflection, where ideas could be explored and debated.

3.2.6.5 Summary of the findings

Before the findings can be summarized, it is useful to restate that the substantive findings – i.e., the findings pertaining to the content of the preliminary research question – are very tentative. Neither the aim nor the scope of the pilot study called for the level of involvement in the empirical work that would allow making any far-reaching conclusions. Rather, the substantive findings simply provide a glimpse of where the answer to the question might lie.

These findings showed that the PMR meeting affects the processes of maintenance and modification in the ostensive aspect of organizational routines in a number of specific ways. The effect of PMR meetings on maintenance takes place through the processes of updating, deepening, and validating the ostensive aspect as well as through exposing gaps between the individual ostensive aspects and inviting input to one's ostensive. The effect of the PMR meeting on the modification in the ostensive aspect is accomplished through inducing and reducing the variation in the individual ostensive aspects. The emergent findings of the study also suggest that the PMR meetings stimulate the reflection of the individuals at the meeting and provide the environment for reflection.

Most importantly, however, the findings of the pilot study demonstrated the fundamental incompatibility between the research question in its preliminary form and the nature of the phenomenon it was designed to examine. They have shown that, while the preliminary research question asked about a cause-and-effect relationship, the ostensive aspect was essentially subjective in nature and thus could not be conceptualized as an objectified collectively shared summary of the routine in the question of the effect of the PMR meeting on *the* ostensive aspect. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 3, and the conceptual significance of the discovered discrepancy is discussed in Section 3.3.

3.3 Discussion. Implications of the pilot study.

Summarizing the discussion of the pilot case study presented above, it can be said that the pilot did indeed fulfil its purpose.

Table 3. Summary of the findings from the pilot study

Substantive findings	
<i>Process in the change of the ostensive aspect</i>	<i>Effect of the PMR meeting</i>
Maintenance	Updating the ostensive aspect Deepening the ostensive aspect Exposing gaps between the individual ostensives Inviting and providing input to the ostensive Validating the ostensive aspect
Modification	Inducing variation in the ostensive aspect Reducing variation in the ostensive aspect
Creation	Not observed
Emergent findings	Stimulating reflection Providing environment for reflection
Concept-related findings	
<i>Construct</i>	<i>Nature</i>
The ostensive aspect of the routine	Subjective in essence; a <i>subjective</i> view of the routine

First, it generated a number of substantive findings, which, although very provisional in nature, demonstrated that the overall research design was functional. Second, it allowed the discovery of a major discrepancy between the way the preliminary research question was formulated and the nature of the construct it was designed to examine. These two results of the pilot case study spurred a number of considerations, which led to a substantial alteration of the research question and several modifications in the research design. The implications of these results are discussed in this section.

Before the discussion of the implications of the pilot study for the research design can proceed, it is useful to note that the pilot produced some substantive evidence as to the nature of the effect of the PMR meeting on the ostensive aspect of the routine. In general, it showed that the PMR meeting does indeed produce an effect on the ostensive aspect of the routine and made it possible to glimpse what the elements of this effect are. However, the aim and scope of the study as well as the fundamental incompatibility of the preliminary research question and the nature of the ostensive aspect make it difficult to make any conclusions based on the findings. Most of the implications of the pilot study therefore pertain to the issues of research question, design, and methods.

3.3.1 The implications of substantive findings

As noted above, the substantive findings of the pilot study demonstrated the overall viability of the research design. The research design developed for the pilot study allowed examining the micro-dynamics of the effect of the PMR meeting on the

ostensive aspect of the routine reviewed in the meeting and generated the relevant data. Thus, the broad choice of the case study strategy and the two-tiered design proved to be effective for the goal of analyzing the direct effects of the PMR meetings. Therefore, in designing the main study, I decided to keep these elements of the design. Moreover, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate, maintaining the goal of maximizing the understanding of the phenomenon of interest, I changed the case selection strategy to the strategy of selecting polar cases.

The longitudinal nature of the research did not yield any findings about the change in the ostensive aspect over time. Moreover, in conducting the research I realized that the ostensive aspect is subject to multiple influences that can affect it between the PMR meetings, and thus tracking the change in the ostensive aspect between the meetings would involve controlling for all other factors – a nearly impossible task! Furthermore, as the discussion below will show, the findings demonstrated that there was no single objective ostensive aspect that I could track over time, and doing it for each individual would again be prohibitively difficult (and not necessarily useful). Nonetheless, what the pilot demonstrated was that my continuous involvement with the company fostered the trust and openness of the participants, allowing them to share deeper reflections with me. The significance of this was magnified in light of the emerged conceptualization of the ostensive aspect which is discussed below. Therefore, in continuing the study, I decided to keep multiple interviews in the design.

3.3.2 The implications of concept-related findings

The substantive findings produced a number of implications for the design of the main study. The major implications, however, stem from the clarified conceptualization of the ostensive aspect of the routine as a fundamentally subjective construct. As the data demonstrated, the interviewees talked virtually exclusively about their own subjectively held view of the routine and the effect of the PMR meeting on such rather than discussing a commonly shared summary of the routine, which is what the preliminary question implicitly assumed.

The discrepancy between the preliminary research question and the nature of the model, which subsequently drove my research design, was most likely the effect of the novelty of the framework and the resulting lack of its empirical applications reported in the literature at the time when I designed the pilot study. Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model did not offer a sufficiently nuanced description of the ostensive aspect of routines in order to allow an unambiguous interpretation of its fundamental nature. While, following the literature, I acknowledged the fact that different people would have different views of the routine, the low level of development of the construct led me to underestimate its subjective nature. The results of the pilot changed my conceptualization of the construct of the ostensive aspect from an objectified commonly shared summary of the routine to the subjectively held view of the routine. In order to ascertain the validity of my conclusions, I confirmed them personally with the lead author of the theoretical model I was using (Feldman, 2008).

After the pilot study and the conceptual clarification of the ostensive aspect as a subjective construct, it became clear that the question of the effect of the PMR meeting on *the* ostensive aspect is not a valid question. Since the structure and the dynamics of organizational routines as conceptualized by Feldman and Pentland (2003) are driven by the multiple individual ostensive aspects, the question of the *effect* of the PMR meeting on the ostensive aspect of the routine is in fact a question of the way the participants in the meeting *experienced* their subjectively held view of the routine. Therefore, the original question turned into the question of the participants' experience of the ostensive aspect in the PMR meeting. A refined version of this question became the research question for the main study. It is presented in its final form in Section 3.4.

The conceptualization of the ostensive aspect as a subjective construct and the resulting focus on the individual experience have a number of implications for the research design. Most importantly, the ostensive aspect does not need to be objectively defined – even in the loose form of a summary or a narrative – at the outset. Rather, the participants must be allowed to define the construct for themselves. Therefore, the interview questionnaire was redesigned to focus the interviewee on his or her

understanding or view of the routine rather than referring to a specific description of the routine that is assumed to be commonly shared.

The focus on the analysis of experience highlighted the importance of gaining the interviewees' trust. Since the questions in the main study would have been aimed at the exploration of the personal experience of interviewees, the level of trust and openness in the interviews would be directly related to the validity of the findings. As the discussion in the previous section demonstrated, repeated contact seemed to lead to increased trust and openness. Therefore, in designing the main study, I decided to increase the number of meetings and subsequent rounds of interviews from two to five.

Furthermore, with the focus on the experience of the participants, the usefulness of the existing set of categories of change in the ostensive aspect (i.e., maintenance, modification, and creation) was diminished. These categories emphasised the routine as an objective construct, whereas the new research design would centre on the analysis of the individuals' experience of the routine as a subjective construct. Moreover, the pilot study suggested that the category of "creation" may in fact not be easily observed as new routines are not frequently created. At the same time, the emergent findings suggested that the existing theoretical categories may unnecessarily restrict the findings. For these reasons, using the existing framework of categories was discarded in favour of the more exploratory approach.

Finally, reflecting the focus on the analysis of individual experience and the decision to employ an exploratory approach led to the adoption of Template Analysis¹³ as a specific method of data analysis. It is a method that was specifically designed for the study of individual experiences or attitudes and it provides a structure for data analysis, while still adhering to the general principles of the exploratory approach.

The discussion in Section 3.3 presented the multiple implications of the pilot case study. The pilot examined the viability of the preliminary research question and the initial research design. The results of the pilot study provided a number of tentative findings,

¹³ See Chapter 4 for details.

confirmed several design choices, but most importantly, highlighted certain issues that necessitated the reformulation of the research question and led to several changes in the research design. Table 4 presents a summary of the implications of the pilot study, and Section 3.4 states the refined research question.

Table 4. Summary of the implications of the pilot study for research design

Pilot Study	Main Study	Changed	Rationale
Research Strategy			
<i>Case Study</i>	<i>Case Study</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>The aim of maximizing understanding is the same</i>
Operationalization of the Ostensive Aspect			
<i>A (collectively shared) summary of the routine</i>	<i>A subjective view of the routine</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Reflects the subjective nature of the construct</i>
Case Selection Strategy			
<i>Opportunistic (1)</i>	<i>Polar Cases(2)</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Maximizing the understanding</i>
Data collection			
<i>Two-tiered</i>	<i>Two-tiered</i>	<i>No</i>	<i>Proved effective for generating relevant data</i>
<i>Longitudinal (2)</i>	<i>Longitudinal (5)</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Proved key for generating trust, which is critical given the focus on the analysis of experience</i>
Data analysis			
<i>Open and Axial Coding</i>	<i>Template Analysis</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Consistency with the focus on experience; Increased rigour</i>
<i>Using existing categories</i>	<i>Exploratory approach</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Emphasis on the unique subjective experience rather than on the routine under review</i>

3.4 The research question

Based on the findings of the pilot study and the analysis presented in Section 3.3, the preliminary research question was reformulated, taking the following final shape:

Research Question: How do meeting participants experience the ostensive aspect of the routine under review in the context of the PMR meeting?

This question was the research question that drove the design and execution of the main study. The formulation of this question was the last step in setting up the main study, and therefore, this chapter concludes Part I of the thesis.

PART II
CONDUCTING THE STUDY

Chapter 4. Philosophy and Methods

Chapter 4 opens Part II of this thesis. The aim of Part II is to present the design and the execution of the main study which is built upon the theoretical and empirical foundation discussed in Part I. Part II consists of three chapters: Chapter 4 describes the philosophical and methodological foundations of the study; Chapter 5 presents the description of the organizations where the study was carried out, the routines and the PMR meetings observed, and the discussion of my contact with the organizations; and Chapter 6 presents the findings of analysis.

The aim of Chapter 4 is to develop a philosophically and methodologically sound foundation for answering the research question crafted in Part I of this thesis. The chapter is structured in the following way. First, the research question is restated. Second, the philosophical assumptions underpinning the inquiry are discussed. Finally, the methodological choices are presented and discussed in detail.

4.1 The research question

The research question developed in Part I of the thesis is formulated as follows:

Research Question: How do meeting participants experience the ostensive aspect of the routine under review in the context of the PMR meeting?

In order for this question to be answered empirically, a full-blown research design needs to be developed. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to this task.

4.2 Philosophical considerations

In order to maintain the philosophical integrity of the research design and to ensure the fundamental validity of the results, it is necessary to make explicit the philosophical assumptions underpinning the work in this thesis. The research design and the analysis in this thesis rest on the philosophical assumptions of process philosophy in general and of the metaphysical system of Alfred North Whitehead in particular.

Process philosophy is a broad term for a number of philosophical systems that reject the substance-centred view of the world in favour of seeing the process as the basic unit of reality. Although tracing its roots to Heraclitus and having been advanced by such prominent philosophers as Leibniz and Hegel, process philosophy has been recently gaining momentum both in philosophical studies (Rescher, 1996) and in management research (Hernes, 2008; Chia and Tsoukas, 2002; Van de Ven and Poole, 2005), including management accounting (Ahrens and Chapman, 2006). Departing from the static view of reality and the resulting attention to objects, these contributions focused on organizational processes as constituent elements of organizations.

The process view of reality received its exhaustive formulation in the work of Alfred North Whitehead, culminating in his magnum opus *Process and Reality* (1929). Whitehead was a prominent mathematician, logician, and philosopher who worked in Cambridge University and Imperial College London before ending his career in Harvard University. Unlike many of his predecessors (and successors), Whitehead created a complete and a very sophisticated metaphysical system based on the principles of process philosophy. A full discussion of his system is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the paragraphs below examine a number of its basic elements and explain their relevance to and implications for the inquiry presented in this thesis.

Whitehead builds his arguments in an explicit opposition to classical physics, noting that, given its primacy of substance over process, it fails to account coherently for such concepts as motion, velocity, change, development and novelty (Leclerc, 1958). In order to resolve this problem, Whitehead turns to the category of processes, assuming that reality is fundamentally processual in nature, and it is processes that may manifest themselves as enduring objects, not vice versa. Seeking to build a comprehensive metaphysical picture of the world, Whitehead establishes a basic unit of reality – an “actual entity” (or an event) – which is the “complete fact” explained in itself, irreducible to anything more fundamental, and foundational for everything else (Whitehead, 1929). This actual entity is a process; moreover, under closer scrutiny it reveals itself to be a process of *experience*.

In Whitehead's system, as the process-based actual entity proceeds towards its aim, it necessarily draws on other processes and outcomes of other processes¹⁴. Thus, for its existence, every actual entity draws on certain objects – the data, so to speak – which become part of it. The activity of receiving and incorporating these objects into its own being constitutes the process of experience. Therefore, the actual entity – a unit of reality – is what it experiences. Quoting Whitehead,

*This principle states that the **being** of [an actual entity] is constituted by its 'becoming'. The way in which an actual entity is qualified by other actual entities is the 'experience' of the actual world enjoyed by that actual entity, as subject. The subjectivist principle is that the whole universe consists of elements disclosed in the analysis of the experiences of subjects. Process is the becoming of experience. [This philosophy] ... accepts Hume's doctrine that nothing is to be received into the philosophical system which is not discoverable as an element in subjective experience. This is the ontological principle (252-253, emphasis in the original).*

Thus, for Whitehead, reality reveals itself in the analysis of the subjective experience, and everything that we can know about reality is contained in such an experience. The subjective experience, however, is unique and therefore always partial, as in the process of experiencing, different actual entities have different aims and give immediate preference to certain entities over others (Leclerc, 1958). This in turn means that "...concrete experience can never be fully self-explanatory; it needs abstraction to be meaningful...just as abstraction needs concrete experience to be meaningful" (Hernes, 2008, pg.54). This abstraction is the process through which one makes sense of the concrete reality.

The philosophical system of Whitehead can thus be characterized by a realist ontological stance (with its assumption of the actual entities as complete facts) and a subjectivist epistemological position (with its selective attention to the totality of reality). He himself calls his position "provisional realism" (Whitehead, 1925), but its distinguishing feature is that it is *process* realism. It differs from that of critical realism

¹⁴ And also on the general principles of order and coherence

in the sense that it does not seek to posit and problematize the ontological gap between the knower and the reality, which needs to be closed with hypothesized models of causal relationships. Rather, it assumes that reality directly (although certainly not fully) discloses itself through the process of experience (Nelson, 2003).

The usefulness of Whitehead's process philosophy for this thesis is twofold. First, the centrality of the process of experience¹⁵ as the source of knowledge about the reality in Whitehead's perspective corresponds with the focus on the individual experience in the research question driving the main study. Second, the overarching aim of discovering the *mechanism* linking the PMR meeting with the ostensive aspect of the routine is consistent with Whitehead's realist stance. Thus, Whitehead's system brings together the fundamental elements of the inquiry in a coherent way and, as such, provides the philosophical foundation for the design of the study.

4.3 Research design and methods

This section discusses the decisions that pertain to the design of the main research study and the selection of particular methods. As Section 3.3 demonstrated, while a number of significant modifications were introduced into the research design after the pilot study, certain decisions remained unchanged. Nonetheless, for the sake of completeness, a full research design is presented here.

4.3.1 Methodological fit and research strategy

4.3.1.1 Methodological fit

In order to examine the methodological integrity of research, Edmondson and McManus (2007) propose what they call a "contingency framework for management field research". They argue that, in order for research design to be valid, research strategy and methods need to be compatible – to maintain a methodological fit – with the state of prior theory in the field. This state of prior theory is the key determinant for research design.

¹⁵ This includes human experience (Leclerc, 1958).

Edmondson and McManus (2007) suggest that the state of prior theory can be placed on a continuum ranging from *nascent* to *mature*. Nascent theories propose “...tentative answers to novel questions of how and why, often merely suggesting new connections among phenomena” (pg. 1158), while mature theories present “...well-developed constructs and models that have been studied over time with increasing precision...” (ibid.). The state of the theory in the field will then drive a range of methodological choices. Table 5 presents a summary of these choices.

Table 5. Methodological fit (adapted from Edmondson and McManus, 2007)

State of prior theory and research	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
Research questions	Open-ended inquiry about a phenomenon of interest	Proposed relationships between new and established constructs	Focused questions and/or hypotheses relating existing constructs
Type of data collected	Qualitative, initially open-ended data that need to be interpreted for meaning	Hybrid (both qualitative and quantitative)	Quantitative data; focused measures where extent or amount is meaningful
Illustrative methods for collecting data	Interviews; observations; obtaining documents or other material from field sites relevant to the phenomena of interest	Interviews; observations; surveys; obtaining material from field sites relevant to the phenomena of interest	Surveys; interviews or observations designed to be systematically coded and quantified; obtaining data from field sites that measure the extent or amount of salient constructs
Constructs and measures	Typically new constructs, few formal measures	Typically one or more new constructs and/or new measures	Typically relying heavily on existing constructs and measures
Goal of data analysis	Pattern identification	Preliminary or exploratory testing of new propositions and/or new constructs	Formal hypothesis testing
Data analysis methods	Thematic content analysis coding for evidence of constructs	Content analysis, exploratory statistics, and preliminary tests	Statistical inference, standard statistical analyses
Theoretical contributions	A suggestive theory, often an invitation for further work on the issue or set of issues opened up by the study	A provisional theory, often one that integrates previously separate bodies of work	A supported theory that may add specificity, new mechanisms, or new boundaries to existing theories

Although the studies examining the overarching effect of PMM on organizational performance discussed in Section 2.2.2 have often built on mature theories, such as agency theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976), the direct effects of PMM on the organizational processes is much less thoroughly theorized. For instance, most of the studies noting the organizational effects of PMM (cf. Section 2.2.3) simply observed

that PMM seemed to affect the cycles of reflection and action on the part of the people involved in organizational processes. None of the studies proposed a coherent theoretical framework for opening the “black box” that links PMM with organizational performance. On Edmondson and McManus’ (2007) continuum, this level of formalization of knowledge suggests that the state of theoretical development of the question of *direct* organizational effects of PMM is close to nascent. Therefore, in order to ensure the overarching validity of the results, the research design calls for an open-ended inquiry leaning on qualitative data and leading towards a set of initial relationships that could be called a suggestive (Edmondson and McManus, 2007) or a preliminary (Vaivio, 2008) theory.

4.3.1.2 Research strategy

The open-ended nature of the inquiry consistent with the low theoretical development of the phenomenon of interest requires a research strategy that aims to maximize the learning about the phenomenon. As it was discussed earlier¹⁶, Robson (1993) proposes three broad strategies for conducting research: experiment, survey, and case study. While the first two strategies are more appropriate for a higher level of theoretical development of the phenomenon in question, the case study strategy accommodates multiple methodological requirements of this study.

First, while case studies may be used within a wide range of philosophical approaches (Otley and Berry, 1998), none of which matches perfectly the philosophical foundations of this study, most researchers emphasize the power of case studies in maximizing the learning about the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995; Eisenhardt, 1989). Second, in the study of the issues of management control, case studies are useful for exploring new phenomena and increasing the understanding of the role of controls in organizations (Otley and Berry, 1998) and for breaking the “black box” of economics-based reasoning that disregards the complexity of individual action (Vaivio, 2008). Finally, the research question developed in Part I of this thesis is a “how” question that aims to explore the experience of the individuals and to identify preliminary patterns in the data. Reflecting these considerations and consistent with Edmondson and

¹⁶ Section 3.2.

McManus' (2007) framework discussed above, the case study strategy was chosen as the overarching research strategy for the design of the main study.

4.3.1.2.1 Rationale for the selection of cases

The main study was designed to be carried out in two organizations in the settings that were aimed to be polar opposites. This rationale for the selection of cases continued the focus on the maximization of learning. Since the research question was aimed at increasing the understanding of a phenomenon characterized by a low degree of theoretical development, improving this understanding took priority over the tasks of testing preliminary propositions or aiming for high generalization. The case selection strategy that corresponds to the aim of maximizing the understanding of the examined phenomenon is the strategy of selecting what Patton (1988) calls *extreme cases* or what Pettigrew (1990) refers to as *polar cases*¹⁷. The reasoning behind this strategy is that an examination of polar opposites yields better insight into the nature of the phenomenon under investigation than a focus on typical cases, although this may mean that typicality and generalizability will be diminished.

This strategy affects the way data are analyzed and reported. Under this strategy, the task of maximizing the insight into the phenomenon in question is fulfilled by obtaining the richest dataset (i.e., the dataset that encompasses the extremes of possibilities) rather than by the analysis of the effects of contextual factors on the phenomenon. Consequently, cross-case analysis becomes less important and less meaningful than the interrogation of the dataset with the aim of arriving at a detailed understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. As such, it is the pooling of the data from the polar cases rather than the examination of various case-specific contingencies that provides the source for the understanding of the phenomenon. In line with this strategy, the findings from both case studies are reported together, and the final model is derived from and reflects the aggregated findings. Admittedly, however, such a strategy limits the extent to which the individual cases can be described. In other words, this strategy is phenomenon-centred rather than case-centred and as such fits the aim of the study reported here.

¹⁷ It is important to note that this terminology is idiosyncratic, i.e., Pettigrew (1990) also talks about “extreme situations”, but it is different from what Patton (1988) means by “extreme cases”.

The main study reported in this thesis is built on two polar cases, whose primary distinction is that of the complexity of the routine under review and the corresponding level of the PMR meeting. These are discussed below.

The choice of the number of cases was driven by the practical considerations – the constraints on time and resources did not allow me to examine more than one pair of polar cases with the degree of depth that the research design required. The choice of the complexity of the routine and the level of the meeting, on the other hand, was driven by two considerations. First, as the discussion in Chapter 2 noted, both Nelson and Winter's (1982) original definition of the routine and Feldman and Pentland's (2003) definition adopted in this thesis encompass routines of varying complexity, yet the subjective experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the PMR meeting must differ based on the complexity of the routine, given the different scale and intensity of the review. Second, building on the previous point, as Martinez et al. (2010) hypothesize, the functions of the performance management review may differ based on the organizational level where the review is conducted. The experience of the routine under review at the PMR meeting must, therefore, differ accordingly. Reflecting these considerations, the case studies were selected based on the complexity of the routine under review and the level of the PMR meetings.

As the discussion in Chapter 5 will demonstrate, one case examined the PMR meeting on the senior management level and involved eight functions, while the other case focused on the PMR meeting on the operational level which involved two functions.

4.3.2 Theoretical influences preceding fieldwork

No fieldwork is completely theory-free, and, as Ahrens and Chapman (2006) suggest, the theoretical interests of the researcher actually shape the field. Therefore, in order to increase the transparency of the research design and to improve the theoretical positioning of the findings, it is helpful to make the theoretical presuppositions explicit (Otley and Berry, 1998).

The theoretical influences of this study on the fieldwork are already sufficiently explicit, as the formulation of the research question and the subsequent data collection are influenced by the adopted analytical lens. The use of the organizational routines perspective in general, and Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model in particular, brings with it the theoretical assumptions inherent in the study of routines. The major influence of the overall routines perspective on the design and execution of main study is the deeply ingrained assumption of the interconnectedness and mutual relatedness of organizational processes. The key assumption of Feldman and Pentland's (2003) view of routines brought into the study with their model is the central role of agency – i.e., reflection, will, and action – in maintaining stability or driving change in routines. These assumptions tacitly drove me to examine the complexity of factors affecting the experience of people in the PMR meetings and to focus on the individual experience in the search for the answer to the research question. The speculation about PMM as a process of managing people offered in Section 9.5.1 is a direct descendant of the agency-centred view of routines inherent in Feldman and Pentland's (2003) work.

However, when made explicit, these assumptions provided another justification for the choice of case study as a research strategy. As Vaivio (2008) points out, one of the benefits of qualitative research in management accounting is the ability to break through the assumed functionalism of management accounting systems and see the complexity and the indeterminacy of organizational processes. Likewise, Llewellyn (2007) notes that case studies are particularly useful for exploring the “agentic world” of conscious and reflective people.

4.3.3 Operationalization¹⁸ of the constructs

As the pilot study demonstrated, the constructs used in the formulation of the research question present certain difficulties for the task of translating the question into empirical work. However, the pilot also demonstrated that these difficulties are not insurmountable. Taking into consideration the change in the research question and the

¹⁸ As in the case of the pilot study, owing to the qualitative nature of the inquiry, operationalization here does not mean the process of identifying specific measurable proxies. Rather, it refers to the process of translating the theoretical concept into observable phenomena by defining the scope of the empirical inquiry.

modifications in the research design developed after the pilot study¹⁹, the key constructs are operationalized in the following way.

4.3.3.1 Experience

The experience is understood as comprising two aspects of the term as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (1978): “the actual observation of facts or events, considered as a source of knowledge” and “the fact of being consciously the subject of a state or condition, or of being consciously affected by an event” (pg. 430). This definition is consistent with Whitehead’s (1929) conceptualization of experience as the incorporation of outside objects into the process of experiencing. It is also broad enough to include the conscious experience of both the object and the context of experience. This definition guided the development of the interview questionnaire.

4.3.3.2 The routine and the ostensive aspect

Unlike in the case of the pilot study, the understanding of the ostensive aspect as a subjective construct and the ensuing focus of the re-formulated research question meant that empirically, the ostensive aspect of the routine needed to be defined by the interviewees – the people involved in the routine. However, the routine itself still needed to be bounded, at least in the general way. Therefore, I designed the interview questionnaire to ask the participants to think about *their understanding of the area of operations reviewed at the meeting*. Asking about *their understanding* aimed at accessing the ostensive aspect of the routine, and asking them to focus on *an area of operations* bounded the routine functionally.

The last decision was consistent both with the definition of the routine adopted in this thesis and with the context of the research – i.e., the PMR meetings I observed were specifically designed to review the performance of the operations of an area. The only element of Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) definition of the routine that needed to be verified before this approach could be adopted was the *interdependency* of action within the routine. In order to address this, I asked all interviewees to describe the pattern of interrelations with other participants in the routine. Each of them confirmed strong interdependency of action, which reflected the structural integrity of the routine required

¹⁹ See Table 4.

by the adopted definition. The complexity of the routine was judged by the number of participants representing different sub-functions within the reviewed area of operations.

4.3.3.3 The PMR meeting

In the design of the main study, no changes in the way the concept of the PMR meeting was translated into the empirical setting were made. The formal test to which the meeting was subjected in order to qualify for being used in the research was whether it was a meeting that incorporated performance review as defined in Section 2.6.1.2 of this thesis. The level of the meeting was broadly classified as strategic or operational based on the rank of the participants.

4.3.4 Data collection

4.3.4.1 Access issues

Although both the research design and the proposal for industrial partners were tested in the pilot case, gaining access to research sites proved to be exceptionally difficult. This might have been caused by the relatively high level of involvement required from the industrial collaborator (observing five consecutive meetings and conducting five sets of interviews), the general difficulty of access to study meetings (Volkema and Niederman, 1995), by the fact that the study coincided with the economic downturn, or by a combination of these and other factors. Overall, I approached as many as eleven organizations in order to gain sufficient access to the pair of polar cases that my research design required. The list of organizations that either denied or terminated collaboration is presented in Table 6.

However, after considerable work, the access to the two organizations was secured. In accordance with the agreement reached with these organizations, I cannot name them in this thesis. These two organizations are the UK subsidiary of a major energy provider, which is hereafter called The Energy Co., and a regional brewery, which is hereafter named The Brewery.

Table 6. Organizations that denied or withdrew access

First Contact	Last Contact	Company approached	Outcome
Sep-08	May-09	EDF Energy - Cust.Ops	Access fully arranged, collaboration terminated after major time delays
Oct-08	Oct-08	Forensic Science Service	Access denied
Nov-08	Feb-08	AOL UK	Access fully arranged, support withdrawn before data collection began
Nov-08	Apr-09	Autoglass UK	Access fully arranged, support withdrawn after 1 set of interviews
Dec-08	Feb-09	BskyB (Sky TV)	Access denied
Mar-09	Mar-09	iTV	Access denied
Mar-09	Mar-09	Cerulean	Access denied
Mar-09	Mar-09	STERIS	Access denied
May-09	May-09	Rexam	Access denied

4.3.4.2 The design of the data collection process

4.3.4.2.1 Two-tiered design

The results of the pilot study demonstrated that the two-tiered design of the data collection process which combined the observation of the meetings with the subsequent interviews of the participants provided adequate data for the analysis. Therefore, this design was kept in the main study. Graphically, it is represented in Figure 4.

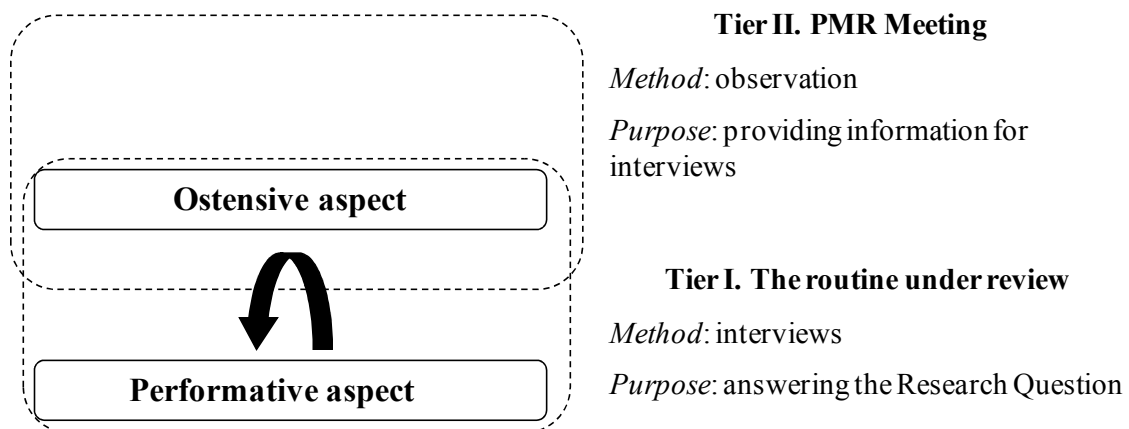


Figure 4. The design of the data collection process

Since the detailed rationale for this design was slightly modified after the pilot study, it is helpful to restate it here. Since the research question focuses on the ostensive aspect of the routine which is seen as an individual's understanding of the area of operations, the primary data are expected to come from the interviews. However, the ostensive aspect is articulated and debated in the context of the PMR meeting; therefore, in order to ask relevant questions in the interviews, it is necessary to know the details of what was discussed at the particular meetings. Hence, the design also called for the observation of the meetings (as a secondary source of data). Thus, the full design called for the observations of the meetings and the subsequent interviews with each participant.

4.3.4.2.2 Collecting data at multiple points in time

The pilot study demonstrated the key role of multiple contacts with the company for building the trust of the interviewees and their openness in the interview process. With the focus on the individual experience in the re-formulated research question, the tasks of gaining the interviewees trust and building their willingness to openly talk about various aspects of their experience became paramount. Therefore, in the design of the main study, the number of meetings observed and sets of interviews conducted was increased from two to five. Choosing five as the number of meetings attended was a judgment call which was based on the pilot data and reflected my idea of when saturation might be achieved and of the degree of access I could get (and as the discussion above demonstrated, I definitely stretched the limit!).

My intention was to conduct the interviews immediately after the meeting so as to have the participants' experiences fresh in their minds, and this is what I was able to achieve in one organization – The Brewery. In the Energy Co., however, the length of the meetings, the geographical distribution of the meeting participants and their commitments meant that I had to conduct interviews in the weeks following the meetings. However, I made every attempt to schedule the interviews as soon after the meeting as their schedule permitted.

4.3.4.3 Observations and interviews

Observations were the first step in the data collection process. Normally, I was met by the most senior person in the PMR meeting and took a place in the corner of the room so as to be out of sight of the majority of the participants. I made an attempt to have as little impact on the participants' experience as possible, thus striving to reduce my role to that of the observer-as-participant (Nason and Golding, 2004; Robson, 2002) As the meeting progressed, I took notes, which were structured both chronologically and by the participant. In the observations, I was looking for the salient points that seemed to be related to the ostensive aspect of the routine reviewed at the meeting. Observations, however, represented a supplementary source of data (Robson, 2002) as I needed them only to inform the subsequent interviews, which provided the primary data. After the meeting I would review my notes to formulate the prompts for the interviews and add them to the interview questionnaire.

As the earlier discussion demonstrates, however, the primary data (i.e., primary in the sense of importance) for answering the research question came from the interviews that were conducted after the meetings. The data collection protocol was designed to interview each participant after each meeting. The requirements of the methodological fit described earlier as well as the focus on the analysis of the individual experience led me to design the interviews as predominantly open-ended. Since my goal was to understand the individuals' experiences of the ostensive aspect in the context of the PMR meeting, I simply asked them to focus on their understanding of the area of operations reviewed at the meeting and started the interviews with very general questions about their understanding of the operations and the meeting as the context for it. As the interview went on, I supplemented the general questions with the prompts developed on the basis of my observations.

Some of the interviews were conducted over the telephone, and although these may have such advantages as minimizing the social desirability bias (Robson, 2002), they do not allow the development of the rapport that is crucial in a qualitative interview (King, 2004a). Thus, most of the telephone interviews I conducted were shorter and more structured than the face-to-face interviews. However, regardless of the mode and length

of the first several sets of interviews, the last interview with each participant in both organizations was an in depth face-to-face intensive interview (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). The detailed description of the number, length and mode of the interviews in each organization is provided in Chapter 5.

Over time, the quality of the interview data improved significantly. This was most likely a result of a number of factors. First, as I attended multiple meetings and conducted multiple interviews, my relationship with the interviewees deepened, and they had built up a sufficient level of trust in me to talk openly about their experience in greater detail. At the same time, as my knowledge of each individual grew, I could relate better to their accounts of their experience and ask more precise questions. Second, my knowledge of the operations and the industry improved over the five sets of interviews that I conducted in each organization. That in turn meant that the interviews had to be interrupted for explanations less frequently and that I could ask better questions. Finally, my interviewing skills grew significantly, and by the fifth set of interviews, I was confident that I received the data that I needed for answering the research question.

The majority of interviews were digitally recorded, although in three cases I had to take notes, which were improved and digitised immediately after the meeting.

4.3.4.4 Documents

In addition to conducting observations and interviews, I collected various documents in both organizations. Some of them contained normative information (e.g., the formal structure and purpose of the PMR meeting in The Energy Co.), most of them were support materials for the meeting – e.g., agendas, lists of actions and hard copies of Power Point presentations. Similar to the case with observations, these documents played a supplementary role, providing input into the interviews that took place after the meetings. Besides that, they were used as an additional check for the consistency of the information I was receiving, thus increasing the trustworthiness of the data used in the analysis.

4.3.5 Data analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber and checked for accuracy. It was then imported into the QSR NVivo 8.0 software package for the analysis. Unlike the analysis of the data in the pilot study, however, the data collected in the main study were analyzed using a specific method of data analysis. Considering that the research question driving the main study focused on the exploration of the individual experience, a method of data analysis that is specifically designed for that purpose would yield more detailed and more rigorous results than the generic application of open and axial coding strategies. Template Analysis was deemed to be such a method.

4.3.5.1 Template Analysis

Template Analysis is a data analysis technique developed by King (2004b). Although traces its roots to phenomenology and has the interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, 1996) as its closest relative, it is considerably more flexible. It can accommodate a variety of epistemological positions (King, 2004b) and provides a structure for data analysis that fills the gap between pure grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and highly structured analysis of qualitative data where the categories, once developed, remain relatively set (e.g., Miles and Huberman, 1994). Essentially, template analysis is a technique formalizing thematic analysis, where themes are understood to be the key features of the participants' accounts of perceptions or experiences. Having its roots in phenomenology with its focus on "lived experience" (Moran, 2000), template analysis is best suited to the analysis of particular elements in human experience (e.g., King et al., 2002) such as that examined in this thesis. However, it has also been applied to the study of subjective views and perspectives in settings ranging from health care (Gollop et al., 2004) to operations management (Smith et al., 2009).

4.3.5.1.1 The procedure of Template Analysis

Template Analysis aims to produce a hierarchical structure of themes, where broader themes incorporate one or more levels of more specific themes, thus allowing the analysis of the overall account to be done at varying degrees of granularity. Hierarchical coding is therefore the primary procedure of template analysis. The method also permits

parallel coding, where the same fragment of the data is coded into different themes (King, 2004b). For instance, the following fragment was coded both as *Personal Relevance* and as *Making Linkages*:

I guess my ears prick up if something resonates with me and I think it's important to me. So sometimes Alex used, and I think of a previous meeting that we had, he started talking about maintenance and he started talking about contractors and then I was putting 2 and 2 together and thinking, well can I use some of the approaches that he's using in his arena in to my area of operation. So very often some things just click with me more than others.

The actual method of template analysis consists of the following steps (King, 2004b):

- a) Producing the initial template based on a subset of data
- b) Modifying the template by going through the rest of the data
- c) Interpreting the results of the “final” template

These steps and their application in the study reported in this thesis are discussed below.

A template is essentially a hierarchical coding structure that reflects the research question and is used as a guide for the analysis of the data. The process of data analysis starts with the development of an initial template. King (2004b) notes that, in the case of highly structured interviews, the initial template may in fact be the structure of the interview questionnaire. In open-ended interviews, the initial structure of codes needs to be developed inductively. In either case, however, the initial template is constructed through a preliminary analysis of a subset of the interviews. In this thesis, the open-ended nature of the interviews meant that I had to create the initial template based on the preliminary coding of the data. I did it on the basis of the interviews conducted in The Energy Co. since they were longer and richer than the interviews from The Brewery, and thus allowed me to create a more comprehensive template at the outset.

After the initial template is constructed, it is used for a systematic analysis of the rest of the data. However, throughout the process of this analysis, the initial template is constantly modified through a number of specific procedures: the insertion of new themes into the structure of the template, the deletion of themes deemed unsuitable, the

change in the scope of the theme (i.e., moving it vertically across the level of the same theme) and the change in the classification of the theme (i.e., moving it horizontally across different categories of themes). This procedure is repeated through the entire dataset until the template reflects the thematic structure of the data with sufficient accuracy and meaningfulness. Although the decision to stop the process is always a judgment call, “...it is most unlikely that a template could be considered final if all the data have not been read through – and the coding scrutinized – at least twice” (King, 2004b, pg. 263).

In the analysis of the data collected in the main study, I followed the procedures described in the paragraph above, applying the template to the analysis of the interviews and developing it in accordance with the modification procedures. All transcripts were analyzed twice *in full* by using the template, after which the coding within the themes went through three of four cycles of additional analysis. The resulting template provided a hierarchical structure of the key themes in the participants’ accounts of the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. Following King’s (2004b) suggestion, in order to maintain the clarity of the discussion, the highest-order codes were called first-level themes, and the latter incorporated second- and third- level themes which reflected the corresponding constructs of lower orders.

The interpretation of the template analysis is the last step in the method. It may be done by the interviewee, by the theme, or through the interviewees’ accounts of selected themes. Since in this study, the interviewees belonged to different organizations, the presentation and the analysis of the results by the theme provides most coherence. Chapter 6 is dedicated to this task.

4.3.5.1.2 Philosophical suitability of template analysis

The fact that template analysis has its roots in phenomenology may raise questions of its suitability in a process realist study. However, template analysis as a method is compatible with the philosophical assumptions of Whitehead’s system. In fact, the close parallels between phenomenology and Whitehead’s process thought, and most notably their emphasis on the central role of “lived experience” as a window to understanding the world, led to the debates in the philosophical circles that highlighted the

fundamental compatibility of the two perspectives (Sherburne, 1983; Grier, 1976). While no definitive conclusions have been reached, even the opponents of the full integration of the two perspectives noted the indisputable commonality of aims and methods (Rice, 1989). As Rice (1989) notes, “In methods both [existential phenomenology and Whitehead’s system] are radical empiricisms that attempt to hold in abeyance traditional epistemological assumptions, taking as their common point of departure a description of lived experience” (pg. 184). Thus, the use of template analysis as a method of data analysis does not violate the fundamental philosophical assumption underpinning the argument in this thesis.

4.3.5.2 Trustworthiness of the data. The issues of validity and reliability.

The design of the main study, employing the case study strategy and relying on qualitative data, and the chosen philosophical perspective make the traditional notions of validity and reliability problematic. As Johnson et al. (2006) note, the criteria for evaluating the robustness of a research study are contingent upon the philosophical assumptions and the nature of the inquiry. They develop a criteriology framework, showing that where positivist studies make use of and rely on such notions as internal and external validity, construct validity, and reliability, the neo-empiricist research paradigm to which the present study belongs ensures the robustness of the design through internally reflexive *audit trails* and *logical inference*. Responding to this point, I took several steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and the conclusions.

At the data collection stage, the robustness of the results was supported by Ahrens and Chapman’s (2006) three tests for collecting qualitative data. The authors argue that the often used notion of triangulation is misleading in the qualitative inquiry, where the organizational reality is always in a state of flux and is objectified only through human interaction. As a more appropriate alternative to triangulation, they suggest three strategies for conducting qualitative research in the field: spending more time in the field, using multiple methods, and controlling one’s behaviour in the field. In carrying out the main study, I adhered closely to all three of these strategies.

First, I designed the study to collect data at multiple points in time, which not only allowed me to build the relationships with the interviewees and to get to deeper layers

of experience, but also to verify my initial interpretations and thus to improve the trustworthiness of the data. Second, my research design combined several methods of data collection – direct observations, open-ended interviews, and documents – which allowed me to spot and question possible inconsistencies in the sources. Finally, I took special care not to influence the participants in the meetings that I observed and the interviews that I conducted. In order to determine the extent of my influence on the phenomenon, in the last set of interviews I asked each participant whether my presence had any effect on the meetings and on his or her experience of them, and without exception they confirmed that it did not. The full adherence to these steps gave me the confidence in the sufficient level of trustworthiness of my data.

Furthermore, reflecting the argument in Section 1.2.2.1 and Johnson et al.'s (2006) criteriology requirements, I provided a full “trail of evidence” as well as an audit trail of my decisions and inferences, illustrating each construct and relationship with the data. Chapter 6 is dedicated to this task, and its size reflects the level of detail in the audit trail.

Thus, the methods of ensuring the robustness of the results are consistent with the philosophical perspective employed in this study. In accordance with this perspective, the traditional notions of triangulation, validity, and reliability were replaced by Ahrens and Chapman's (2006) three tests for data quality and by providing a full “trail of evidence” that includes the detailed data illustration as well as the audit trail of my decisions.

4.4 Conclusions

Chapter 4 discussed the decisions that were taken in order to translate the research question into a viable research design. The discussion in the chapter included the analysis of the philosophical perspective underpinning the design of the main study, presented the rationale for the choice of the broad research strategy, explained the theoretical presuppositions preceding the data collection process, and examined the reasoning behind the choice of specific methods of data collection and analysis. The following chapter presents the detailed description of the organizations where the study

was conducted, and Chapter 6 presents the finding of the study, thus concluding Part II of this thesis.

Chapter 5. Main cases.

This chapter describes the organizations in which the main part of the research was carried out. For each of the two case studies conducted, the chapter provides the narrative description of the company, describes the operations comprising the routine and the PMR meeting, presents the details of my involvement with the company, and discusses various issues with data collection.

5.1 Case I. The Energy Co.

5.1.1 The Organization

The first full case study was conducted in The Energy Co. between February and June of 2009. The Energy Co. is a wholly-owned UK subsidiary of a major European energy provider. The company provides approximately twenty percent of electricity in the UK, employs around twenty thousand people, and distributes electricity to eight million customers. The organization spans all segments of the energy market, from generation to distribution, and is organized into four business units²⁰: Existing Nuclear Generation, New Nuclear Generation, Other Generation and Supply, and Networks.

The Networks business unit is responsible for maintaining, expanding, and upgrading the Energy Co.'s power network – the largest power network in the UK. Operations performed by this business unit range from fixing faults and connecting new customers to the grid to developing a long-term strategic vision for the configuration of the power network in the future. The Networks business unit comprises three operating divisions²¹ (Customer, Connections, and Major Investments), corporate services (HR, Communications, and Finance), and a division tasked with the operations of unregulated activities (e.g., private power networks for large customers).

The case study was carried out in the Major Investments division of the Networks business unit of the Energy Co. The role of the division in the business unit is to maintain and improve the asset base of the network. The division oversees the physical

²⁰ Renamed to protect the identity of the company

²¹ Renamed to protect the identity of the company

backbone of the power network, developing the overall asset management plan for the business unit as well as maintaining, improving, replacing, and expanding the physical assets that make up the Energy Co.'s power network. In this capacity the division provides support for and interacts with the other divisions of the Networks business unit. The operations of the division (which make up the routine reviewed at the PMR meeting) consist of the following activities:

First, the asset management strategy and plans are developed. This includes both taking the “birds’ eye” and long-term view of the network with the corresponding investments and expenditures and designing specific projects for the maintenance and replacement of network assets. The strategic part of these operations comprises three specific areas: the Design Standards and Assurance area develops the standards for designing substations and network equipment to ensure that all systems fit together; the Asset Optimization and Technology area creates the overarching maintenance and replacement plan, specifies and technically approves network equipment and runs a small R&D operation to advance technological capabilities of the network; and finally, the Network Planning Policy and Network Performance area looks at the overall performance of the network, asking the strategic questions about the relation of the network configuration to network performance. On the basis of the strategic analysis, specific maintenance and replacement projects (collectively referred to as “delivery projects”) are designed and fed downstream to the delivery teams. This part of the operations is headed by a Senior Manager.

Second, once the delivery projects have been designed, they are passed on to the delivery teams, which are split into large Programme Delivery and smaller Distribution Projects. Each of these is headed by a Senior Manager. The Programme Delivery team is responsible for large network assets and customers (e.g., factories or businesses) mainly using the 33 kV – 132 kV levels. The team installs network equipment and other physical assets, and the project length can extend to several years. It sometimes repairs network faults, but only in the cases when the size of the fault is so large that it is classified as a project in itself. The work is organized into three licence areas in the UK. While the Programme Delivery team is responsible for a relatively small portfolio of

high-value projects, the Distribution Projects team is responsible for several thousand of low-value projects (e.g., individual households or street lights). Likewise, it physically delivers the projects designed by the strategic planning area and is headed by a Senior Manager. It works on low-voltage objects that require the voltage of up to 11 kV. The work includes overhead line construction and underground cabling as well as the installation and refurbishment of network equipment. A significant part of this work is customer-driven in the sense that the Distribution Projects team often responds to the customer complaints or replaces the existing network equipment with more reliable alternative to minimize interruptions in power supply.

Third, the existing network assets need to be adequately maintained. In order to accomplish this, the Major Investments division created a Maintenance and Improvement Projects team. The team is tasked with analyzing the current conditions of the network assets, developing a comprehensive maintenance manual for maintaining these assets, explicating the process of maintenance of each type of assets, analysing the resources and training required for providing adequate maintenance, ensuring the accuracy and timeliness of the data on the assets in the company's information systems, and finally, delivering the maintenance²². The overall task of the team is to create an end-to-end network asset maintenance programme, supported by adequate data and resources, in the next 2-3 years. As it is the case with the three teams described earlier, the Maintenance and Improvement Projects team is headed by a Senior Manager.

Fourth, the delivery of all projects by the Major Investment division is enabled by a Programme Support Office and Operational Properties and Consents team, which provides general project administration and front-end delivery support. The team is also headed by a Senior Manager. The operations of the team fall into two major categories: first, the team provides continuous monitoring of the flow and progress of the paperwork for each project, including authorisations, approvals, closures and project

²² Note that the actual delivery of the maintenance is performed by another division (Customers) of the Networks business unit. However, the rest of the operations fall under the remit of the Major Investments division, and the Senior Manager in charge of the Maintenance and Improvement Projects team reports to the Major Investments Director.

performance²³; second, the team supports the front-end of the delivery process by acquiring the necessary permissions for network constructions, obtaining consent, purchasing the land and getting the new cable routes. This role has been aptly summarized by the Senior Manager in charge of the team:

They [other teams in the Division - AP] do the digging and building, they do designing, and we do - in theory - the enabling, in the middle, to allow them to get on to that land. You can have a wonderful plot and say, I really want to build that over there, but if you can't get permission to get the cable from here to there then you're not going anywhere. So we do all the permissions, the consents, and we get, negotiate with customers or land owners or local authorities to get permissions and consents for us to work there (1) to build it and (2) to go back on their land over the next 70 years to do maintenance or anything like that, or fixing it.

Fifth, the Division includes the team that is responsible for four business-unit-wide areas, namely, the business change portfolio of all projects worth over £50,000; business architecture, including the business models, process architecture, and performance drivers; business improvement and information technology, and property services. Although all of these areas span the operations of the entire Networks business unit, the general coordination is provided by the Major Investments Division. The team is headed by a Senior Manager who reports to the Director of the Division.

Sixth, the division has its own business change team, which is responsible for coordinating and implementing all business change initiatives within the Division. This work is considerably more detailed than the business change management described in the preceding paragraph and involves the development of guidelines and procedures for the Division direct employees and subcontractors. The operations in this area include communicating with business change managers and teams in other division of the business unit and synchronizing changes in policy manuals and guidelines for conduct. The team is headed by a Senior Manager.

²³ Similar to the situation with the Maintenance and Improvement Projects, this particular activity is extended to other divisions of the Networks business unit; however, the Senior Manager in charge of the team reports to the Major Investments Director.

Finally, the division includes a dedicated Health & Safety team, whose role includes creating and implementing health and safety standards and procedures across all organizational levels within the Division, running preventative programmes and investigating incidents, providing relevant advice to the management team, and delivering construction design and management coordinator services, which ensure that every project has been designed to accommodate all safety considerations and is supported by the appropriate documentation. Again, the Health & Safety team is headed by a Senior Manager.

The Division is run by the Senior Management Team (SMT) which comprises the Senior Managers of the areas described above and is headed by the Division Director. The Director provides day-to-day management of the Division and sits on the Executive Board of the Networks business unit, ensuring the link between the Division and the wider business context of its operations.

5.1.2 The performance management review meeting

The SMT of the Major Projects division has a monthly Performance Meeting and a monthly Strategy Meeting. In the past, these meetings used to take place on two separate days. However, since 2009, they are held on the same day. This was done in order to save managers' time, especially travel time, as the SMT is dispersed across at least three locations in the South and South-East of England. The meetings are held in central London, usually on Thursdays. The agenda is designed so that the Performance Meeting opens the day at 09:00 and is followed by the Strategy Meeting after lunch at 14:00. The total duration of these two meetings usually adds up to eight hours, and the participants are seated around the table.

The Performance Meeting is structured to review the performance of the Division in the past month, to update the team about the current priorities of the Executive Board and to coordinate the actions for the next month in light of the performance information and the Executive update. The Strategy Meeting has a wider scope and is designed to consider more long-term issues.

The meeting is attended by the SMT, two experts from the business functions – Human Resources and Finance – and a number of visitors who are invited to report to the SMT on particular projects or initiatives. Importantly, the SMT is joined by a Business Systems Manager, whose role is to ensure that the Performance Meeting conforms to the standards of ISO 9001, 14001, 18001, and PAS 55²⁴ and that the minutes of the meeting are robust enough to withstand the scrutiny of the external audit. Thus the Business System Manager takes minutes, organizes and distributes action points, and runs the electronic equipment (e.g., the computer, projector, USB drives, and electronic copies of the documents).

5.1.3 Data collection

5.1.3.1 Preliminary contact

Before the formal part of the data collection began, I met with the Business Change Manager for the Customers Division of the Networks business unit, who explained to me the structure and operations of The Energy Co., introduced me to the key performance management and other initiatives that were being implemented by the company at the time, and guided me through some of the terminology often used in the conversations and meetings in the Networks business unit. These preliminary interviews with the Business Change Manager²⁵ gave me a general view of the company and its operations.

Table 7. Preliminary contact with The Energy Co.

Oliver	16-Dec-08	65 min
Oliver	08-Jan-09	90 min
Oliver	27-Jan-09	120 min
Total time		275 min

At the same time, I stayed in contact with the office of the Director of the Major Investments Division, who was eventually to give me full access to his SMT. As a first step towards attending the SMT meetings, the Director’s Personal Assistant provided me with the formal documentation outlining the guidelines, structure and purposes of

²⁴ Publicly Available Specifications for Asset Management

²⁵ The name was changed to maintain confidentiality

the Performance Meeting. I then briefly met the Director one-to-one to discuss the details of my research and the level of access I needed, after which I was formally introduced to his SMT. In his introduction, the Director encouraged his Senior Managers to help me with the research I was conducting.

5.1.3.2 Primary data collection activities

The amendments in the research design introduced on the basis of the pilot case study called for the observation of five consecutive PMR meetings and for one-to-one interviews with the participants after each meeting. Throughout the six months of my involvement with the company, I made every attempt to adhere to the research design as closely as possible. My actual contact time with the company is summarized in Table 8²⁶.

As it inevitably happens and as Table 8 demonstrates, the research design, crafted in the comfort of the university library, had to undergo several changes as it was translated into reality. In my case, this was exacerbated by the fact that the interviewees were senior managers, hard pressed for time and scattered around the South and South-East of England.

The following specific factors influenced the execution of the research project as it was designed:

- a) Considering that the meetings usually lasted for over eight hours and that in certain cases I had to leave at the end of the Performance Meeting while the SMT proceeded to the Strategy Meeting, interviewing the managers directly after the meeting was impossible. Instead, telephone interviews were arranged which had to fit the managers' schedules.
- b) Immediately after the February meeting, the Division Director was invited to a meeting at a senior level; this meeting clashed with the March Performance Meeting, which was subsequently moved forward, giving me only two weeks to arrange nine interviews. It turned out to be impossible to do, and hence, only three interviews were conducted.

²⁶ The names of the individuals were changed to maintain confidentiality.

Table 8. The Energy Co. – Contact time

Number	1	2	3	4	5		
Date	26-Feb-09	10-Mar-09	16-Apr-09	14-May-09	18-Jun-09	Times	Length (min)
Meeting Length (attended part only)	540	300	300	330	570	5	2040
Andrew (Chair)	Interview Date				24-Jun-09	1	
	Length (min)				59		59
Ashley	Interview Date	06-Mar-09		08-May-09	03-Jun-09	19-Jun-09	4
	Length (min)	14		13	12	55	94
Olivia	Interview Date		13-Mar-09	08-May-09	29-May-09	24-Jun-09	4
	Length (min)		10	11	11	47	79
Richard	Interview Date	04-Mar-09			01-Jun-09	19-Jun-09	3
	Length (min)	14			25	52	91
Alex	Interview Date		13-Mar-09	12-May-09	02-Jun-09	13-Jul-09	4
	Length (min)		13	13	17	50	93
Oscar	Interview Date		26-Mar-09			30-Jun-09	2
	Length (min)		13			60	73
Abby	Interview Date			08-May-09		29-Jun-09	2
	Length (min)			20		70	90
Ian	Interview Date		17-Mar-09	08-May-09	09-Jun-09	03-Jul-09	4
	Length (min)		15	11	7	68	101
Harry	Interview Date	06-Mar-09			18-May-09	29-Jun-09	3
	Length (min)	23			13	54	90
Interviews		3	4	5	6	9	27
Interview time (min)		51	51	68	85	515	770
MODE	Telephone	Telephone	Telephone	Telephone	Face to Face		

- c) Over the course of the five months that I spent with the SMT, several managers did not attend certain meetings for various professional and personal reasons. Hence, if the meeting was missed, I could not conduct the follow-up interview.
- d) In the early stages, as my relationship with the team was developing, not all managers were readily willing to give me the time that I needed, and sometimes I simply did not get through to them to arrange an interview.
- e) Despite my continuous attempts to conduct five follow-up interviews with the Director who chaired the meetings, I was able to arrange only one final in-depth face-to-face interview.

These issues explain the gaps in Table 8. Nonetheless, the design proved to be sufficiently robust to serve its purpose even with the amendments introduced by the circumstances. The factors contributing to this effect included the following:

- a) The number of the meetings that I attended and the length of time I spent with the company allowed me to interview each participant at least twice (with the exception of the Director).
- b) The number of the meetings and the duration of my involvement also allowed me to develop a relationship with the managers of the SMT, which in turn led them to be more willing to cooperate. This is reflected in the steadily increasing number of interviews after each meeting.
- c) Regardless of the number of times I interviewed the managers, the relationship that I developed with the team through my involvement with the company and participation in day-long meetings allowed me to have in-depth uninterrupted face-to-face interviews with each manager and the Director at the end of the case study.
- d) Over the course of my involvement with the company, I gained sufficient knowledge and the trust of each individual in order to explore meaningfully his or her subjective experience of the PMR meeting.

During the entire period of my involvement with The Energy Co. I collected various forms of support documentation. These included the formal description of the PMR meetings obtained from the PA of the Major Investments Division Director, hard copies of the presentations at the PMR meetings as well as agendas and lists of actions.

5.1.4 Data analysis

All data collected during this case study were recorded and analyzed according to the procedures discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

5.2 Case II. The Brewery.

5.2.1 The organization

The second case study was conducted at The Brewery. The Brewery is a company that is located in the East of England and competes in a number of segments. Its operations include beer brewing, pub and hotel management, distribution of own and imported beer as well as imported wine, and retail operations. The company employs approximately 330 people, owns two full-scale hotels, 73 pubs, and nine retail outlets. The company's proprietary operations are located primarily in the East and South-East of England, from Lincolnshire to Surrey; however, the majority of beer and wine is distributed across the country through a network of independent retailers and major supermarket chains, and the company owns a distribution centre in the Midlands. The company is a recipient of multiple awards, including, most notably, awards for corporate social responsibility, sustainable operations, and advertising.

Although the company runs a number of diverse operations, the production and distribution of beer makes up the core of its business. These two areas are closely connected, making up a continuous chain of activities from purchasing raw materials to delivering the final product to the customers. This chain of activities was chosen as the focus of analysis for the second case study. This choice was made for several reasons. First, these operations conform to the definition of the organizational routine adopted earlier. Second, in accordance with the research design, the operations examined here represent the opposite extreme of those analyzed in The Energy Co. in terms of the

organizational level of the PMR meeting and the complexity of the routine. Finally, this set of operations is reviewed periodically at a dedicated PMR meeting.

These operations are jointly overseen by the Head Brewer and the Supply Chain Manager, both of whom report to the Director of Operations. The Head Brewer manages a team of approximately sixteen people and controls all aspects of the brewing process, which comprises the following major activities. The Brewery produces the beer in batches, where each batch is approximately 200 barrels, and each barrel contains 288 pints. First, the raw materials are purchased and delivered to the brewery. Second, the computerized brewing schedule is set up according to the current production needs. Third, the raw materials enter the brewing process, going through a number of intermediate stages (such as milling, mashing, and boiling). Fourth, the output of the intermediate stage is cooled down and transferred to the fermentation vessels, at which point a set of proprietary strands of yeast is added to the substance. All these stages together take approximately eight hours. Then, the intermediate product is left to undergo the fermentation process, during which the sugar in the beer is transformed into alcohol. The process takes an additional seven days. Finally, at the end of the fermentation process, the mix is cooled down to stop fermentation, the yeast is harvested, and the beer is filtered, casked and racked.

Throughout this process, the brewery personnel perform a number of tests to determine whether the parameters of the beer conform to the standards of the process and the requirements of the recipe. Certain parameters require human judgment (or highly sophisticated and very expensive equipment) and are thus “measured” by tasting the beer and rating its colour, smell, and taste. The measures are taken during and after the time each batch is brewed and tracked continuously in order to spot current or possible deviations from the target. The casks with the finished product are transported to the distribution centre located one mile away, at which point they become the responsibility of the Supply Chain Manager.

The Supply Chain Manager runs a team of seven people and is also jointly responsible for approximately forty other employees. He oversees all aspects of supply chain and

logistics management at the company, including internal transfers of goods, shipments from overseas, and distribution of all product across the country. However, in terms of the operations discussed here, his responsibilities consist of the following activities. First, he receives the finished product from the brewery and stores it in the distribution centre. He continuously monitors the level of stock against the demand. Although the sales of beer make up approximately fifty percent of his operations, the quantity of stock is relatively low, as the turnover is quite high. Hence, monitoring the stock levels is one of the highest priorities. Second, the Supply Chain Manager runs a team of drivers who distribute the casks of beer to the customers. Besides delivering the beer, these drivers perform the crucial task of collecting customer complaints and comments, as customers often tell the drivers what they are reluctant to tell the company through the official channels. Finally, the Supply Chain Manager conducts periodic debriefs with his crew of drivers to obtain current feedback from the customers. Should the information warrant the attention of the brewery personnel, the Supply Chain Manager feeds it back to the Head Brewer, personally or at the PMR meeting (see below).

5.2.2 The performance management review meeting

The Head Brewer and the Supply Chain Manager meet weekly at the meeting which is referred to throughout the company as *Quality Control Meeting*, *Quality Review*, and *Brewery Meeting*. However, judging by my observation of these meetings, the most appropriate description of the meeting was given by the Supply Chain Manager in one of the interviews:

[It] sort of masquerades as being the quality control meeting... Probably more accurately it should be called logistics/production meeting. Because we do discuss things that are happening or affect each other outside of the quality issue.

The overall purpose of the meeting can be summed up as the review of the brewery and distribution operations that have taken place over the course of the week and the analysis of possible adjustments in these operations to maintain performance within norm in light of the new information.

These meetings have taken place for over ten years, although they acquired their current shape about two years ago, when the Supply Chain Manager started to attend brewery

lab meetings. Currently, the Head Brewer and the Supply Chain Manager are joined by the Quality Manager to make up the usual membership of the meeting. The Quality Control Brewer and the brewery engineer have an open invitation, but do not attend the meetings regularly²⁷. The meetings may be run without the Supply Chain Manager, in which case the meeting focuses only on quality control issues, which is recorded in the minutes.

The meetings take place weekly, usually on Thursdays, in the laboratory of the brewery. They start at noon and take from thirty minutes to an hour. The participants are not seated; rather, they stand around the board which displays current results of the measurement of various parameters of the brewing process. The agenda is very straightforward and does not vary: the discussion starts with the review of the indicators on the board and a brainstorm of the most likely causes of the problem and possible solutions; the input from the Supply Chain Manager is reviewed next; this is followed by the review of currently running audits and health and safety issues; and the meeting is closed with the review of any other business. The latter usually generates significant discussion, which, in terms of time, may take as long as the formal part of the meeting and which is seen as highly valuable by all members of the meeting. The meetings are usually followed by the beer tasting in the tasting room, where the staff tastes and rates the recently brewed product as well as samples of a particular brand of the beer brewed over the past twelve months (different brands of the beer are tasted on different days).

5.2.3 Data collection

5.2.3.1 Preliminary contact

Before the start of the data collection, I communicated by e-mail with the Managing Director of the company and with the Director of Operations, who gave me the initial access to the company and guided me through the structure of PMR meetings throughout the organization. After I explained that I was interested in small-scope operations whose performance is reviewed on a regular basis, we agreed that the weekly meeting at the brewery would suit these requirements best. The Director of Operations then introduced me to the Head Brewer.

²⁷ Having attended six meetings, I saw each of them only once.

Furthermore, in order to understand the overall business of the company and the way the brewery and supply chain operations are integrated with other activities of the company, we agreed that I would conduct a brief face-to-face interview with the Director of Operations and attend one high-level meeting, which she chairs and which is attended by the Heads of all business functions. Although ideally it would be most helpful to do this before the main data collection began, due to various conflicts in the diaries, I conducted this interview and attended this meeting after having attended two regular meetings at the brewery. Nonetheless, I still found this useful, as it helped me to understand the conversations at the meetings better and to make my questions more meaningful. The summary of this stage of data collection is presented in Table 9²⁸.

Table 9. Preliminary contact with The Brewery

Number				
Date		15-Apr-09	Times	Length (min)
High-Level Meeting Length		90		90
Amy	Interview Date	15-Apr-09	1	
	Length (min)	30		30
MODE		Face to Face		

5.2.3.2 Primary data collection activities

The primary data collection took place in accordance with the research design. Since the meetings took only an hour, I was able to agree with the participants to interview them directly after each meeting. This gave me the benefit of conducting all of the interviews face-to-face. Two deviations from the research design took place and deserve special mention:

- a) The Supply Chain Manager could not attend the meeting on July 2, 2009, which would have been the last meeting I observed. Therefore, on July 2 I interviewed only the Head Brewer and the Quality Manager and, to complete the set of interviews, I negotiated the possibility of attending an extra meeting on the following week and interviewed the Supply Chain Manager. Hence, the total number of meetings I attended is six, and I have five complete sets of interviews.

²⁸ The name is changed to maintain confidentiality

- b) The meetings I attended are not fully consecutive; rather, they represent three sets of two consecutive meetings. This was caused by several factors: first, some meetings were cancelled owing to audits and inspections taking place at The Brewery; second, in certain cases, one or two managers could not attend the meeting, and the meetings were cancelled altogether; third, some meetings clashed with the meetings I attended at The Energy Co. and the latter took precedence due to their low frequency; finally, in two cases, the dates of the meetings clashed with other obligations that I could not move.

Although the data collection did not take place in strict conformance with the research design, it did not have any material impact on the data or the findings for the following reasons:

- a) In terms of the first point above, the primary data in this research design came from the interviews rather than the meetings. Hence, it was more important to conduct as many interviews as possible rather than to adhere rigidly to the number of meetings specified in the design.
- b) In terms of the second point, the impact of the discontinuity of the data collection process is minimal as the purpose of the longitudinal design in this study was to establish a relationship with each person that would lead to a deeper understanding of the subjective experience rather than to track changes in a variable over a number of specific periods of equal length.

My main contact time with The Brewery is summarized in Table 10²⁹. As the table demonstrates, most of the interviews at The Brewery were very short. At first, I found it puzzling because I conducted the interviews with the same level of interest and intensity and used the same interview protocol as I did in The Energy Co. Moreover, I interviewed the participants of the meeting face-to-face, without the loss of direct contact inevitably brought about by the use of the telephone. However, I arrived at the conclusion that the scope of the meeting I attended at The Brewery led me to reach very

²⁹ The names of the individuals were changed to maintain confidentiality

quickly the limits of conscious exploration of experience on the part of the interviewees. In other words, since the meeting took place on the operational level and involved fairly routine decisions and procedures, the participants were simply not ready to engage in a deep analysis of their own thought processes. In the process of conducting the interviews, after ten of fifteen minutes of interviewing I would start to receive repetitive or monosyllabic answers, which I could not get through. This is supported by the fact that in the pairs of consecutive interviews in the set, the second interviews are always shorter than the first ones. I attribute it to the fact that, having shared with me the factual news, the interviewees exhausted the discussion material and were not willing to engage in the conscious exploration of their experience.

As it was the case with The Energy Co., I collected various forms of support documentation over the course of my involvement with The Brewery. The number of these documents was considerably smaller, however, as the only type of materials used at the meetings was a one-page agenda which also served as a list of actions for the next meeting. A copy of this document was collected at each meeting.

5.2.4 Data analysis

All data collected during this case study were recorded and analyzed according to the procedures discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

5.3 Conclusions

Chapter 5 presented the narrative description of the organizations where the main part of the study was carried out and discussed the details of my involvement with these organizations. The presentation of factual data was supplemented with the analysis and evaluation of the adjustments in the original research design that had to be made in the process of collecting data. As such, the discussion in Chapter 5 prepared the ground for the presentation of findings, which is the task of the following chapter.

Table 10. The Brewery – Contact time

Number		1	2	3	4	5	6		
Date		02-Apr-09	09-Apr-09	04-Jun-09	11-Jun-09	02-Jul-09	09-Jul-09	Times	Length (min)
Meeting Length		40	50	40	50	30	50	6	260
Ed	Interview Date Length (min)	02-Apr-09 16	09-Apr-09 9	04-Jun-09 21	11-Jun-09 10	02-Jul-09 36		5	92
Emma	Interview Date Length (min)	02-Apr-09 12	09-Apr-09 8	04-Jun-09 10	11-Jun-09 6	02-Jul-09 28		5	64
Erwin	Interview Date Length (min)	02-Apr-09 12	09-Apr-09 11	04-Jun-09 15	11-Jun-09 8		09-Jul-09 30	5	76
Interviews		3	3	3	3	2	1	15	
Interview time (min)		40	28	46	24	64	30		232
MODE		Face to Face	Face to Face	Face to Face	Face to Face	Face to Face	Face to Face		

Chapter 6. Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis of the data obtained in the main case studies. In accordance with the research design discussed earlier³⁰, the findings from both case studies are presented together. The chapter is divided into two major sections. Section 6.1 presents the results of Template Analysis and introduces a structured set of empirically derived themes which make it possible to describe the meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. Section 6.2 continues the discussion by exploring the relationships between the themes that will become the building blocks for the conceptual model developed in Chapter 7.

6.1 The results of the Template Analysis

As the discussion in Chapter 4 demonstrates, the results of Template Analysis are usually presented in the form of a set of hierarchically arranged themes that reflect the main features of the participants' accounts. The presentation of the findings in this section follows this format and organizes the discussion according to the first two levels of the thematic hierarchy. It is helpful to repeat here that, following King's (2004b) suggestion, the upper levels of the hierarchy reflect the highest-order constructs, while the first-order constructs (i.e., the constructs closest to the data) are contained on the lower levels of the hierarchy. Graphically, the structure of the findings is represented by Figure 5. The final template in this study went beyond the first- and second-level themes. However, since low-level themes often reflected minute details, I decided to discuss them as part of larger, second- or first-level, themes in order to keep the discussion meaningful and to maintain the link to the research question.

As Figure 5 demonstrates, the themes are organized into two major categories – the PMR meeting as the context of the meeting participants' experience and the process of experience itself. However, it is important to note that this separation is made only to facilitate the discussion. Both of these categories are equally necessary to answer the research question driving this study – the analysis of participants' *experience of the ostensive aspect in the context* of the PMR meeting – as the research question was crafted to examine the experience of the link between a PMM intervention in the form

³⁰ Section 4.3.1.2.1

of the PMR meeting and the processes that generate performance (i.e. organizational routines)³¹. The answer to this research question therefore is provided *jointly* by the two major categories discussed in Section 6.1 and is reflected by Figure 5 in its entirety.

Nonetheless, given the complexity of the hierarchical structure of the results of the Template Analysis, the discussion of the findings was separated into two subsections, each examining the findings within one of the major categories. However, it is worth reiterating that this separation reflects presentational needs rather than a conceptual distinction. These categories and the themes they comprise are now discussed in turn.

6.1.1 PMR meeting as the context of experience

The first category – the PMR meeting as the context of meeting participants’ experience – comprises three themes: the context, content, and structure of the PMR meeting. This structure parallels closely the structure of the PMR model suggested by Martinez et al.

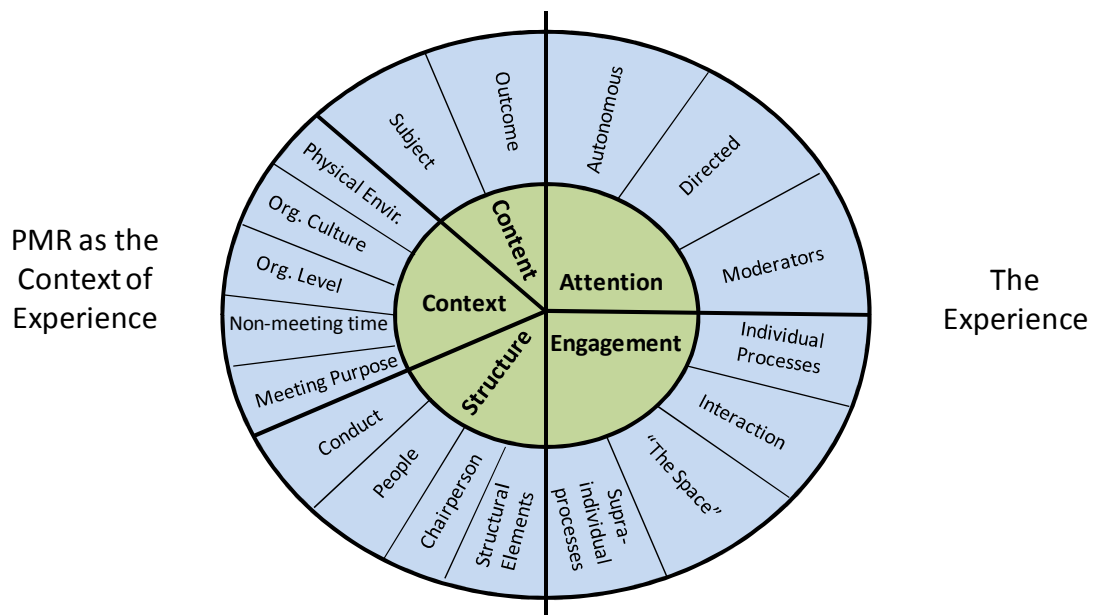


Figure 5. The experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. Template Analysis.

(2010), which is in turn based on Pettigrew et al.’s (1989) analytical framework. As one of the authors of Martinez et al.’s paper, I am certainly prone to the bias in my conceptualization of the key elements of the PMR meeting. However, in the research presented in this thesis, the themes were developed independently, following the

³¹ See Chapters 2 and 3 for the development of the research question.

procedures of the Template Analysis. The similarity to the model outlined in Martinez et al.'s paper was noted only after the themes were developed and the labels were attached to them.

6.1.1.1 Content

The content of the PMR meeting had major significance for the managers participating in the meeting. The description of this significance fell broadly into two themes: the subject of the discussion and the outcomes of the meeting.

6.1.1.1.1 The subject of the discussion

The subject of the discussion included several sub-themes, namely, *Performance Data*, *Data Quality*, *Past-Future Balance*, and *Scope*. This section presents the findings of these for sub-themes illustrated by direct quotations.

As it would be expected at a PMR meeting, performance indicators and, more broadly, *performance data* were among the key subjects of the discussion. In both organizations, the data was used primarily to indicate the deviation from the established or expected course of operations and, subsequently, suggest a possible corrective action. This was most clearly evident at the meetings in The Brewery, where one of the key objectives of the meeting was to ensure the quality of the product.

Why is it [the graph – A.P.] doing that? Can we do something about it? Do we need to do something about it? Has it trended upwards for a reason and actually the beer is okay at that level? Do we need to change the spec? And things like that... But sometimes yes, it might just be a one off. We wouldn't always action from one result. We might wait until the next week. Probably what we should have done is actually write down that it's trending upwards, we'll monitor it next week. (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery)

Well because we go through each bit - bit by bit. So we start off with alcohol and then attenuation limit, and gravity and colour and things. So you look at each one kind of individually, but if things are moving out of spec then you can't just look at that one. You need to look at another 2. So if it's the alcohol that is coming up, you can't just look at that, you have to

*look at what the original gravity was, the attenuation is, what the PG is. And then look at them in conjunction. **But if everything's in spec then you tend not to.** But once things start to move out then you need to see where the other ones have moved as well (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery, emphasis added).*

A similar approach to analyzing performance data is used by the Senior Management Team at The Energy Co.

*Well, in terms of data, in terms of exceptional data. **Because generally really all you want, you want to understand that things are okay. But you also want to understand where you need to take action.** And so the important thing is really being able to have data that's reliable and accurate but also is in a form that you rapidly see where the issues are and you can put the rest aside and drive down on the areas you need to take action (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

When further analysis of the data is necessary, the managers attending the meeting conduct it in several stages that are likewise consistent across the two cases. First, it is important for the managers to see the data all at once in order to obtain a general understanding of the *status quo*. Then the data are broken down into individual elements which are analyzed separately. Finally, these elements are linked together and probed for interdependencies, which allows the managers to arrive at the comprehensive reconstruction of the current situation. In other words, first, the broad range of indicators is presented.

*But we tend to land up doing everything in one [meeting – A.P.] and you're just weary at the end of the day rather than having maybe some open discussions... But it's good in that we do discuss performance. So the fact that we discuss what's going on with manpower, what's going on with overtime... **So in terms of getting some of those issues on the table, it's good** (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

[A.P. – Is it good to see the entire set of indicators all together?] *To see it in one go? Yes. Because otherwise we'd miss bits. We wouldn't discuss every product (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery)*

The idea is that you can see everything all at the same time, rather than looking at individual results (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

Then, as the managers need to process the information, the data are broken down into individual elements which are then linked to each other to determine the interdependencies that may reveal meaningful patterns in the data.

Well I think you just have to break it down into individual results really. Which is why it's kind of done the way it is. So you've got one beer type and then the next beer type, and the next beer type. So then within that you've got the individual results within that. I think you've got to focus on one thing at a time to start with, and then as you see - if you see there's an issue with one, then you try and tie it in to when there's an issue with other results. It's very rare that you only have - I mean the colour is an exception because that tends to be standalone really. Although it does have interplay with some other results but fairly minor interplay, whereas the alcohol and the PG [final gravity – A.P.] and the OG [original gravity – A.P.] and attenuation all have fairly strong connections really. So if you see there is a problem with one of those, then...you will look at those other 3 as well (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

Yeah, obviously having the person [the expert discussing individual Safety, HR, or Finance results – A.P.] there, the person could actually highlight any sort of risks or controls that might not be known about. Or interdependencies, or know something (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Another way in which managers describe working with data reflects the periodic nature of PMR meetings. Since certain data are reported and discussed only at the PMR meetings, managers see it periodically, rather than continuously. This in turn allows

them to see the trends that transpire during the time between the meetings. Although helpful for drawing larger conclusions about the operations, the gap between reports makes the data new to the managers and hence provokes the need to debate and interpret them. The following quote from the Head Brewer of The Brewery and two large, but very colourful quotes from the Senior Managers of The Energy Co. illustrate this point.

And you can see everything is moving in the same direction and not just that one beer but you can - or we say the trend and we tend to look at the trend on that particular beer on that type of beer, but sometimes actually you can see, you might only have one result from that beer and one result from this one and one recent from all those. But if they're all doing exactly the same thing - they're all going high - then you can see that there has been an issue that particular week because everything has gone the same way. So it's good to be able to see how the trend of one particular beer is going, but then it's also you should be able to see how the trend of everything that previous week has gone (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

*So sometimes you'll read the outcomes [of the periodically reviewed safety data – A.P.] and think: why-why-why have they ended up in that situation? You know, what's gone wrong with our process or equipment or our supervision that ... allowed that to happen? And so we need to go into detail to get to the crux of it I guess. And so sometimes we'll spend a lot of time debating over cross polarity which is a big issue for us at the moment. This is where they inadvertently swap the live and the neutral conductor at somebody's house, which potentially could lead to a fatality if, you know, if your metal sink top is 240 volts, you touch that, you could potentially be dead. So that's why we need to really get into the crux of these issues. And actually sometimes not just look at the - just, if we just spent 10 minutes and said, oh we've got 15 outstanding actions. Next item. That wouldn't help at all. **We need to understand what it, why was, is it - are those genuinely 15 outstanding actions or have they been closed and just not been updated properly? Is there a trend or an underlying issue. If 5 of them are all***

around the same issue, cross polarity again is an example, where that's come up as, we've identified in recent times that cross polarity is a real issue for some of our contractors in the way it's working. And their knowledge and experience. So as you've been able to see that out of the 15, 10 of them or 5 or them are cross polarity, you should think: Jesus, we've really - it's not just a one off, it's not something we do on a one off thing, one off event that happens once every 5 years (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).

I suppose a lot of us are perhaps more comfortable with understanding what we've got to spend and perhaps being able to talk about why we haven't been able to spend it [i.e., the continuously tracked project values – A.P.]. I guess for some of us, perhaps all of us, some of the HR issues and certainly the [safety initiative numbers] [numbers that are reported only at the meetings – A.P.] aren't so easy to either discuss or resolve. HR is a continual – I wouldn't say a problem but it, sometimes the communications which emanate from HR aren't as clear, and it's not as easy to use the human resource facility as me as an individual would like. So perhaps, I don't know, perhaps it just generates a bit more heat than the actually project values that, I wouldn't say we're comfortable with, but at least we're more familiar with (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Another sub-theme in the way managers talked about performance data was the ownership of the data presented at the PMR meetings. This was less of an issue in The Brewery, where the scope of operations was relatively small and where the Quality Manager who took part in the meeting actually generated most of the data for the discussion. The managers at The Energy Co., however, had severe difficulties with tracking the owner of the data, which in turn hampered their ability to understand the current situation in the business and proceed to the decision-making stage. Whenever the data were presented personally by the outside experts who created the report, the reaction of the managers was overwhelmingly positive.

*Who's the manager? And I think all of us struggle to understand who is the manager responsible for [the IT system for reporting safety data]. Now I'm not even sure that [the IT manager] is the manager responsible for it. I think that [he] is a person that has had some involvement in [the system] and he is probably well placed to be able to talk about how the process works. **But I'm a bit mystified myself who is the actual system owner. And I am sure you would have picked that up that there was silence when [the Chair] said, who owns it?** (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co. emphasis added).*

Because we also, any queries we've got they can take away, so that we have comfort of really making sure that they [the experts presenting the data – A.P.] the owners of the query. Yes. So I think that is definitely a lot better than not having them there. I think it... we aren't floundering in sort of trying to second guess what information we're being given. And I think it doesn't then rely on somebody in the team picking up a responsibility for an area that actually isn't their core business. So I think it's helpful from that point of view that it does leave very much the senior team more focused on their part of the business and their targets (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Closely related to the issue of data ownership is that of the *quality of the data*. Again, none of the managers at The Brewery referred to this issue in their discussion the content of the PMR meeting. Although my final template had a large sub-theme dedicated to data quality, no quotations came from the management team at The Brewery. The Senior Management Team at The Energy Co., however, talked about data quality with frustration, impatience, and sometimes resignation.

I was incredibly frustrated on that meeting though, because what it really, in that element of the meeting, because it demonstrated [that] poor quality data, time and time again, causes huge diversion of effort. It was almost like, well we just don't believe the information we're getting. And it's a symptom throughout the business actually that because the data quality

issues are, wherever you look we've got data quality issues, an awful lot of time and energy is expended, chasing down trying to collect it, trying to get the data quality right before we're in a position to make decisions. ... And this, this is one of the challenges for the business actually is really to sort of say look, if we really want to improve performance and improve accountability, we've got to make sure we're getting our data right (Ashley – Director, The Energy Co.).

...our data is generally not very good. It does make the meetings more difficult to do. Because we're cleansing the data whilst we're having the meeting. And so actually the meeting is not about trying to sort performance, it's actually about starting from gaining a credible set of, a credible amount of information on which to be able to make a decision. And a lot of the discussion I think goes around, it doesn't look right, or that doesn't look right. And so that would be my view of it. And it's about getting - and it's quite difficult because actually what we're trying to do is cover quite a big area there. And I think it would be useful probably to value that and say well what value is that part of the agenda producing? Is it really valuable in terms of changing this performance? Or is it actually just sorting out some issues? And is there a better way of doing that than having what has now grown to about 10 people around the table? (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Oh massive data quality [issues], you would have heard from the meetings, the data quality issues is one of our biggest headaches in this business... You know maintenance data is very poor. Financial data is very poor. So there's whole, the whole business is built on to pretty poor data quality which doesn't help. It's embarrassing that we don't even know the people. You know, on paper we haven't even got our people nailed down. It's just, we just don't use the system. We don't have the disciplines that go in (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Another way in which managers talked about the subject of PMR meetings was the balance between forward- and backward-looking discussion of performance management efforts. In my final template, this was coded under the sub-theme “*Past-Future Balance*”. Both the team in The Brewery and the Senior Managers in The Energy Co. recognized the trade-offs and difficulties associated with changing the temporal orientation of their attention. The team in The Brewery, however, viewed these difficulties as normal part of operations, which was sometimes even driven by compliance procedures. The Senior Managers in the Energy Co., on the other hand, stressed the necessity of redrawing the balance towards forward-looking performance indicators.

...you've got to come and see the trend of it. And we have to, again we have to show that we're trying to control that alcohol. So if we don't have a formal discussion about it and we leave the alcohol to go high and then go low. [A.P. - So it's more about how the beer behaves over time than about let's say having you and Emma together?] Yeah, yeah. But it's also, and there's a time-lapse between when we make the change to when we see the result of that change. So we need to give a time and know what changes you've made 2 weeks ago, to make that change now. [And if we make this change now,] we won't see the result on the ABV [Alcohol by volume – A.P.] for another 2 weeks. Well, sorry, if we lower it today, it depends when we actually brew the next one. Because we don't brew this beer every week. So it depends when we brew the next one. But 2 weeks after we brew the next one is when we see the result (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

But also looking ahead you know, when I think - I think the thing is a lot of it is, literally is - okay they are performance reviews but they are, they are almost exclusively looking at what we can't manage. In other words what we've just achieved. There's very little. And you need to do that obviously to get an insight as to what you may do in the future. But there is very little time in comparison, spent on looking forward as to what you've got to do to generate the performance levels you want in the future. It's always a problem with indicators, because obviously it's easier to measure things

that have happened. It's more difficult to generate lead indicators. But you know, we are looking I think exclusively at lag indicators there (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Finally, the managers discussed the subject of the PMR meeting in terms of the *Scope*. This sub-theme included the range of the issues discussed at the meeting, their coherence and relevance to the perceived purpose of the meeting, as well as the strategic and cross-functional scope of the issues discussed. The managers at The Energy Co. were mostly concerned with the balance between strategic and tactical issues discussed at the meeting.

I think, for me I think it's about - we probably need to dwell less on the sort of tactical stuff. You know, we go through the safety stuff and some of the - we go through the HR slides and things like that. And we seem to spend an awful lot of time on that. And maybe we should look at the strategic, maybe do the strategic issues that we need to pick up for. Overview of what each of us are up to. Right, what are the strategic big burners that we need to pick out of that. And then add the tag on the end of it, is the tactical stuff. So if we don't get time then Barry can simply say, well look, look through the HR pack, and deal with stuff that you think is important (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

The fact that on the formal agenda the Strategy Meeting is a separate meeting that follows the formal PMR meeting does not seem to have any significant effect on the clarity of the scope.

*Yeah, you're talking about performance meeting. But what you'd want to do is finish that in the morning and then have your lunch and then start on the strategy issues. **But it never quite works out that way, and it used to be that they were different meetings, but it's all merged into one long mesh.** And where you then had a smaller, tighter team for strategy, because everybody stays for everything, it's not the same debate that it used to be. I wish that we could put more into the strategy bit. But we tend to land up seeing everybody, because we only meet once a month we get lots of people that want to meet you. And sell their message. And that's okay, but it's not*

strategy then, it's just message getting (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).

The strategic scope of the PMR meeting at The Brewery, on the other hand, is considerably tighter, and issues such as the ones in the above quotations do not normally come up. However, the managers at The Brewery discuss the scope issues in different terms.

[The PMR meeting] often acts as a forum just to speak about several other things as well. There's a point that the 2 departments actually get together, whereas without that they probably wouldn't. So I think [these meetings] prompt thought between all of us as to what else might be going on that might affect the others... It's more of a conversation than a meeting I think. It's not like a formal meeting that we'll have in here and we sit down and discuss things. It's just a loose forum really (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

It is interesting to note that the uncertain scope of the meeting presents far less frustration to the managers at The Brewery than to the Senior Management Team at The Energy Co. While the former spoke about the loosely defined scope of the PMR meeting with the calmness of merely stating the fact, the latter took an active stance towards the issue, as the quotes above demonstrate.

6.1.1.1.2 The outcomes of the meeting

The other second-level theme in the description of the content of the PMR meeting included various outcomes of the meeting. This theme in turn comprised several sub-themes, which included tangible outcomes, such as *Actions* and *Minutes*, as well as intangible ones, such as *Forewarning* and *Reassurance*. These sub-themes are now discussed in detail.

Actions and minutes are the traditional outcomes of management meetings, and the PMR meetings I observed were no exception. In both cases, minutes taken were minutes of actions rather than discussion minutes. The Energy Co. had a dedicated manager with a background in compliance and systems engineering, whose task was to record actions

and produce minutes that would conform to the required quality standards. This was deemed necessary when the quality of minutes produced by others was found to be below the required standards. This manager volunteered to perform this task and took the responsibility very seriously, ensuring that all actions were correctly recorded and followed, and that minutes were circulated.

I have a desire to make sure that the minutes are robust and up to external scrutiny. That they meet the requirements against those standards. And when other people are taking the minutes, they prove not to actually be up to the level required (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

In The Brewery, on the other hand, the minutes were taken by the Quality Manager and, being the minutes of actions, were simply handwritten on the agenda sheet.

The main characteristic of minutes that was noted by the managers involved in the PMR was their formality, which could be perceived both positively and negatively.

[In the meeting], there's minutes taken. It's a lot more formal, and there's a wider audience than you would normally have just on the end of the telephone or a short talk ... And I think it generates a bit more ownership and it makes people feel more accountable I think (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

And there's also other things in there, the duty, we have to look at. And we have to show that we're monitoring as a part of I suppose our duty of care to paying the right amount of tax to the Government. So as the alcohol changes, we have to show that we're actually trying to do something about making sure it's controlled within a certain parameter. If we don't show that, then they've got no way of knowing that we're trying to control it. So we have to minute the fact that if something goes up, goes too high and it's creating too much alcohol for what we pay, we have to minute the fact that we're trying to bring it back down (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

...you don't have the same debate in the strategy discussions with different people in the room, you know? No offence to Ashley but Ashley's there for the performance meeting. If he's there all afternoon, then people are watching what they say. Because you'd have a banter in a way that you wouldn't if you know it's being recorded (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

As far as the formal list of actions is concerned, this was perceived as the general guideline for the work in the period between the meetings. It was, however, freely amended or supplemented by actions taken privately during the meeting.

...during the meeting I will be taking a note of any personal action that I've got. And I will then, outside of the meeting I will then follow those through as to whether I need to take. Secondly once the formal minutes come out, hopefully they tie up with the actions that I've taken away and we make sure that, confirm that those formal action minutes confirm the actions that I think I've already captured (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Nonetheless, the power of formal actions to directly prescribe tasks and assign personal accountability was also clearly recognized.

Now the thing is, if we say, okay, we've discussed at the meeting and we've got an action there, unfortunately we've compressed the amount of time where we spend looking at actions. That's the next area I want to be pushing on. Just to say, it's getting my PA to be pushing everybody to have responses to their actions before the meeting, so that we see that there is that follow up (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.).

Yeah, we've all got a few [actions], I'll put together the minutes and action them and email it out. And then they [other participants – A.P.] will read that and hopefully get it done for next week. And we obviously look at it next week and see if they've been done (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

However, formal minutes and actions were not the only outcomes of the PMR meeting I observed. The managers participating in these meetings often left with less tangible yet no less important outcomes. Over the course of five interviews, The Supply Chain Manager at The Brewery repeatedly brought up “forewarning” as the main outcome he was looking for in the weekly PMR meeting.

It's forewarning really. Because if, it's essentially about quality of the product. So if there are any issues arising because the production of the beer is basically a week's process. Now if Emma or Ed have identified a possible problem on quality, that forewarns me that 3 or 4, 5, 6 days down the line I may have a supply issue.

The managers at The Energy Co. also talked about “reassurance” as an outcome of the meeting. Reassurance came from understanding that one is in the same position as the rest of the team.

How does the other discussion help me? I guess the ideas that come forward. And also sometimes you also learn that you're not the only one with some difficulties. Other people are facing problems as well ... Personally - I mean there was a personal discussion between me and one of the other guys and he was saying, I've got real problems and I'm really frustrated on this, this and this. And it's causing me some sleepless nights. And although you don't want your colleague to be having such a difficult time, I think you do get a sense of comfort in as much as it's not just me. I'm not the only one that is suffering these problems as well. Others are getting stressed out. And I suppose you collectively feel a little bit more comfortable because as I say, you're not the only one. Does that make sense? (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

So our roles are by the nature of what we are doing, you're off at meetings seeing people, you probably don't spend a lot of time with your teams, and my teams are spread to the four winds anyway. So are theirs. So the fact that Ian's over in Essex or Richard's in West Sussex, his teams are all over the footprint. So our jobs are probably - you're on your own a lot. Even

though you're working with teams and getting them to work with you, or do stuff for you. So it's probably good for us as a sanity check just to spend time with peer group in some way, shape or form (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

The findings of the two case studies demonstrate that managers talk about the outcomes of PMR meetings in multiple ways, all of which contribute to the overall experience of the content of the PMR meeting.

6.1.1.2 Context

While the previous section presented the content components of the experiential description of the PMR meeting, this section focuses on the contextual factors of the meeting that were perceived as salient by the participating managers. Broadly, the context of the PMR meeting refers to the environment (e.g., organizational, cultural, procedural), in which the meeting is situated (cf. Martinez et al., 2010). In my analysis of the PMR meetings in The Brewery and in The Energy Co. the description of the context of the meeting fell into five second-level themes. These themes are discussed below.

6.1.1.2.1 Organizational culture

The discussion of organizational culture as a contextual factor in the PMR meeting was surprisingly scarce. Where the managers did bring it up, it was always in relation to the content component of the meeting. For instance, culture was seen as one of the factors driving the overly detailed discussion of various performance indicators at the PMR meeting. A terse, but very characteristic reply to my enquiry about the reasons for the several-hour long discussion of safety and HR indicators was given by Ian, a Senior Manager at the Energy Co.:

Probably because we are engineers!

This point was later elaborated by another manager:

Because that's the culture of the company. It's very frustrating but we seem to have got ourselves into a situation where we spend an awful lot of time managing those sorts of indicators and also a lot of the softer type of things,

and you know understanding whether people going in teams have an awareness of corporate ambitions and all this sort of thing. Those sorts of - you know, and monitoring whether people have returned employee opinion surveys and so on. A lot of that sort of corporate directed measures, which actually are not moving the business forward generally, although they will obviously move some of it. But they're not actually the key measures that are going to drive the business forward. There's a lot of emphasis being, and that is a cultural problem I think with the company. And it just creates a big management overhead and that management overhead it gets reflected in the performance of those meetings (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Moreover, heavy reliance on meetings as the tool for managing performance was itself sometimes noted as a cultural trait of the organization.

I spend at the moment probably, normally 70% of my time in meetings, 30% of my time working. And that really is a little bit of The Energy Co.'s culture because the predecessor company I came from, it would be the other way round. It was still within the group but actually it would have been the other way round. It would have been nearer 30% in meetings (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Nonetheless, speaking about contextual components of the PMR meeting, the managers in my two cases very rarely discussed culture as a key factor.

6.1.1.2.2 Physical Environment

As it might have been expected, for the managers participating in the meeting, physical environment was one of the key elements in the context of the PMR meeting and had a direct bearing on a number of other factors. As I mentioned earlier, the meetings at The Brewery were conducted in the laboratory, without chairs and with participants standing around the board with performance indicators. All managers agreed that this was an excellent solution for maintaining the focus of the conversation and the timing of the meeting.

I think there's also something about the fact that you're not sitting around a table, tends to concentrate the mind. If you're sitting there comfortable then you'd probably, it would probably be longer than it is actually standing and looking at the information. Quick discussion and it's finished (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

The meetings at The Energy Co., on the other hand, lasted for approximately nine hours, and thus standing up was not a viable option. Moreover, with such long meetings, the impact of factors in the physical environment was greatly amplified. Closed windows, uncomfortable chairs, and an inconvenient set up of electronic equipment made themselves felt by the end of a nine-hour-long meeting and could not but affect the work of the Senior Manager Team. Virtually every manager emphasized the importance of the physical environment as a factor in the context of the PMR meeting. Answering a question of what helps or hinders attention focusing during the meeting, Richard, a Senior Manager in The Energy Co. said,

Yeah, the open window. I mean that week, that month before [when the window was locked – A.P.], the month before I was up till 3 o'clock in the morning trying to get information so that I could do the presentation. So I had about 2 hours sleep, and I felt ill. I just felt terrible. It was horrendous. You know, it was such an easy solution, I don't know why none of us collectively came up with [let's get?] a key. It's just everyone assumed that you couldn't do anything about it ... What hinders? I don't think the room is a very good room. Because there's quite a few of us in it. Those long tables aren't good. It would be better if we had a round table, more of a round table.

In addition to the unpleasant physical conditions in the meeting room, The Senior Manager in charge of the electronic equipment discussed the additional difficulty of working with an unsuitable equipment arrangement.

The actual set up of the room is very poor ergonomically. I had to use an IT machine which was a desktop, I couldn't plug in my laptop to the bigger screen. And the ergonomic design of where I had to work and then kept on

having to swivel round was very, very poor. And it's a very poor venue (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the effect of the physical environment on the experience of the meeting was the immediate answer that Alex, a Senior Manager at The Energy Co., gave to a very general question of what he found to be most salient about the recent PMR meeting:

I think the thing that struck me is how bloody hot it was in there, that's for sure!

6.1.1.2.3 Organizational level of the meeting

The organizational level of the PMR meeting as well as its position relative to other PMR meetings in the organization was distinguished by the managers as one of the key contextual features of the meetings I studied. The ways in which the significance of the organizational level of the meeting was discussed fell into three sub-themes in my final template – the issues of *Cascading* (reflecting the vertical position of the meeting), *Inter-departmental links* (horizontal connections with other departments), and those associated with the *Prestige* of the meeting. Overall, the position of the meeting on the hierarchical ladder of the organization as well as within the network of similar meetings in other departments was an important feature of the meeting's context. The findings presented in this section are organized into the aforementioned sub-themes.

In both of the cases I studied, PMR meetings form a part of the vertical communication channel, where the information is cascaded down and (more rarely) escalated upwards. The issue of cascading information in relation to the hierarchical position of the PMR meeting was often discussed in terms of the trade-off between the power of the meeting to prescribe action and the hierarchical distance from this action. In other words, on one hand, the higher the meeting was located on the hierarchical ladder, the greater its influence was; on the other hand, a high organizational position also meant that to get to the action point, decisions needed to be cascaded through a greater number of organizational levels.

The PMR meeting at The Brewery was positioned at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy, and the decisions taken at the meeting would be translated directly into actions either by the managers themselves or by their direct reports.

We usually, we will action ourselves. You'd never really action anyone who wasn't in the meeting and then it's up to us, yeah, get the relevant person to make the change (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

What came out this morning is they've got a problem with this - it's not a problem as such, but an issue with the [one of the brands of our] beer, which is a one off brew which isn't dropping off as quickly as it normally would. What I'll do today is I'll feed that information to all the dray crews. So when they're visiting pubs over the next few days, they will be made aware that if someone starts saying, well this stuff isn't clear, where well if you leave it another day, it will. Now that saves a lot of aggravation because at the end of the day, what people tend to do, is they don't bother to get in touch, they'll just take it off and next week our dray crew's got to pick it up, bring it back, and then there's all the aggravation that goes with returning product (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

In other words, cascading per se in this case is minimal; moreover, it is sometimes replaced by direct action with the full control of the latter. The meeting at The Energy Co., however, was situated on the high level of the organization. On one hand, this position allowed for powerful sweeping actions.

*It's raising the profile too, that when we're looking at things like, as leaders that they [Senior Managers around the table – A.P.] are engaging with their teams and making sure that, whilst we talk about performance at that level they are talking about performance of their teams and that they're making sure things like the [performance appraisal] processes are conducted. And that the team meetings are occurring and [monthly communication briefs] are being delivered. Because those are sort of 2 key mechanisms while which I think everybody within the directorate engaged. **So it's shaking the performance appraisal process, you know, it's 3 discussions in a year.***

*Look at the stats. We're coming to the end of June and we've just about got 80% people completed. That's not good enough... **So in terms of next steps it's making sure that we've completed the [performance appraisal] process really by the end of July. Well there's a requirement, so it's covered in the [monthly communication brief] so it will be interesting to see the level of compliance with that** (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

On the other hand, the managers recognized that the decisions made at the PMR meeting need to be cascaded through team meetings on multiple organizational levels before they reach every individual, and the control over this process as well consistent relevance of the decisions are often elusive.

[My direct reports] then take that message and talk to their direct reports, and then it just cascades down. Long as the main messages stay right, you're okay. But I reckon if you sat some people from the sharp end at our meeting they would think that's chaos wouldn't they? They wouldn't understand what the hell you're on about. They couldn't see how, what we were talking about and if it impacts on their job at all I wouldn't have thought (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

The position of the PMR meeting in the organizational hierarchy is thus a key contextual factor of the meeting because it determines the extent to which cascading of information is required and, therefore, reflects the trade-off between the power of the meeting and the control over the implementation and relevance of the key decisions.

While “cascading” was the predominant lens through which managers viewed the importance of the hierarchical position of the PMR meeting, they were equally vocal about the “horizontal” position of the meeting, i.e., the links that the meeting had with other departments. Inter-departmental links ensured that the meeting was part of a dense organizational network and thus reflected another component of the organizational position as a key contextual factor of the PMR meeting.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the most common way to ensure the link between the PMR meeting and other departments was to invite external representatives – from other departments as well as from central services – to present at the meeting. This was done both in The Brewery and in The Energy Co., and Andrew, the Division Director at The Energy Co. has summed it up very succinctly:

We have the finance and HR people come along to a meeting and I know there's tensions between the finance team and Abby's team in terms of roles and responsibilities. So it's just making sure that those tensions don't get out of hand if you like, in terms of making sure that the linkages outside the division are as important as the linkages within the division. Because what we don't want to do is have a team that seem to be totally introspective and is not caring what's going on.

This was echoed by virtually all managers in both organizations I studied, as they noted the importance of making outside connections.

[We had a conversation with the representative from marketing] when we were in the sample room talking about the new bottled product. Now, I've had conversations with him about that. Ed has had conversations with him about that. I've had conversations with Ed about it. But that's the first time we've all been there, actually had a discussion about it ... and ... well I think you hear all sides of it at the same time then. Because obviously [the marketing representative] has got a requirement from the product (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

[The team is so diverse that] the business needs Andrew's team to have several performance meetings, on selected parts of what Andrew's team deals with, with other parts of the business. And that's how you get the performance working. ... We don't, we can't resolve issues, because we actually don't have all the players there (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

A few managers, although fully acknowledging the value of external presentations, expressed concerns about the impact these presentations have on the main focus of the meeting.

I like the idea of it but I think what we tend to do is have too many, and yet again we didn't get to the end of the agenda (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

The only other thing I would mention is that I'm not too sure how much clarity is actually sought of how long external presentations will actually be. And there seems to be no communication to the people when they actually join the meeting as to how long a time spot had been allocated to them. And maybe if [the Chair] was clear and actually said [it's] a 20 minute slot, it might help to keep the meeting to schedule (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Inter-departmental links are also created in a less formal way, as managers share their knowledge of other parts of the business during *ad hoc* discussions.

We talked about job family modelling last time ... I know we brought that up because I'm part of that from a business point of view. So some of the things we need to inject into our slides is if we're doing something for the business we need to say on [Major Investments Division] behalf we have done this. And that's, I think that's how the job family modelling thing came up (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Finally, managers in The Energy Co. spoke about the organizational position of the meeting in terms of its prestige. In other words, participating in or presenting at the PMR meeting conferred certain status-related benefits, even if the effectiveness of that participation or presentation actually suffered.

...they're probably even coming in at the wrong level, a lot of the time. A lot of the time people come in that level because hierarchically that's a nice level to go in at. But actually in terms of the, if you look at, listen to some of the presentations that we've had in the afternoon and so on, you look at

them and say, really, this is just a communication exercise and I've got to cascade this all down again. You'd be far better off coming in at least at my team meeting or even the levels below that to be honest, and present that information there (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the organizational position of the meeting is a complex and important contextual factor in the experience of the PMR meeting.

6.1.1.2.4 Non-meeting time

Meetings, even nine-hour-long ones, are but a small part of managers' work. It is therefore not surprising that certain issues come up that need to be discussed and resolved outside of the formal environment of the meeting. All managers in my cases sometimes talked about dealing with meeting-related issues during the time other than in the meeting. This time – the Non-meeting time – is another important contextual element of the PMR meeting.

The managers suggested that the main reasons for discussing certain issues outside of the meeting itself were those of efficiency and confidentiality.

[The problem with yeast count] is quite a major problem. So we've been discussing it all week. We haven't waited until the meeting. Although it comes up, but it's been talked about all week (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

I won't wait until the end of the meeting and I may take a note about speaking to somebody after the meeting about something that's really irrelevant to the rest of the meeting. I will have a conversation offline about that, because actually I don't want to either air the bad news or dirty washing in the meeting. Because a longer conversation needs to be had. So if I need to spend half an hour debating this particular issue then I'll take that offline. I won't hold up the meeting any further (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

However, there are certain consequences of taking a decision outside of the meeting. For instance, issues not raised at the meeting may be perceived as less important.

Well some of [the un-discussed issues] tend to end up in my account then to follow up more on an individual basis. So they don't then necessarily have the same credence as they would have been having raised at credence in terms of importance, as if they were raised on that platform I don't think. So I'm trying to play catch up very often (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Furthermore, it may be more difficult to be convincing when issues are discussed on the one-to-one basis rather than in a team meeting. Responding to the question of whether the items that were not discussed collectively need to be raised individually with the Chair, Ian – a Senior Manager at The Energy Co. – said:

That's right, yeah. And then you don't get to... buy into what you are talking about.

Regardless of the specific purpose or impact of taking a discussion or a decision outside the formal meeting, the “non-meeting time” is a very important element in the context of the PMR meeting.

6.1.1.2.5 Purpose of the Meeting

The last second-level theme in the analysis of the context of the PMR meeting was the purpose of the meeting. The purpose, whether it's a formally stated official purpose or a personal aim, is one of the constraints imposed on the meeting itself. As such, it is one of the critical factors in the context of the meeting. In my analysis of the PMR meeting in The Brewery and in The Energy Co., this theme was subdivided into seven sub-themes, each of which contained the description of the purpose of the meeting as perceived by the participating managers. These were *Communication, Compliance, Consistency, People Management, Team Identity, Facilitating Immediate Decision Making, and Confused Purpose*. These sub-themes are now discussed in turn.

As it might be expected, communication was the most frequently identified purpose of the meeting. In the managers' descriptions of the meeting, communication did not seem to mean more than simply exchange of information among themselves and across organizational levels.

Yeah, I mean lots of times something will have happened that I don't know, or Erwin doesn't know or Emma doesn't know, that someone else will do. And they'll - I suppose it's as much about communicating what has happened that you don't know about than anything else (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

In the past I used to report to the Senior, I used to report to Abby. And Abby would have a team direct report meeting. So that would get cascaded down to us, then I would have a meeting with my direct reports, and then I would cascade things to them. And then they would have a meeting with their team. So all the time it was cascading down, and it's really - so there's a lot of commitment to having these meetings as part of, sort of our communication plan (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Ensuring compliance was the other most frequently cited purpose of the meeting. Both of the organizations I studied were certified by ISO and other industry-specific certification standards. As part of the process required by the certification, they needed to demonstrate that critical issues are periodically reviewed and that actions are taken if necessary.

So...some compliance, that we have to do anyway, and we have to record that we're doing that. So it's not a question of we can just come in and say, we're controlling it. We've got to record what we're doing and why we've changed things and how we're - if things move out, we've got to record how we bring it back in. So we have to do that bit anyway (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

I need to ensure that the meeting covers the requirements of the management review of 9, 14, 18 and PAS 55. And I take away information

around opportunities for continued improvement to incorporate into those ... systems (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Another purpose of the PMR meeting as perceived by the managers is to ensure consistency in the understanding and actions of those involved. It was expressed most eloquently by Alex – a Senior Manager at The Energy Co.:

I think for me it's - what they [PMR meetings – A.P.] should be doing, I think, is to ensure that all of the SMT [Senior Management Team – A.P.] in Andrew's team are working to a consistent set of rules and understanding. So we know, each of us know what the other teams are doing. All their problems, what their risks, what their issues are. And some of their deliverables. What's going well. So that we can understand what can we do for each other to try and help the overall, Andrew's overall portfolio. So I think that's important that - are there things that each of us can do that can help the overall. Are there things that we're doing that may be being counter to that, if you like. There might be behaviours or there might be activity that's going on that actually might be hindering other people from delivering their areas, possibly.

Meetings were also seen as appropriate occasions for recognizing and developing people. People management was one of the less frequently mentioned yet sufficiently salient purposes of PMR meetings.

So part of my role is to make sure that that team is developing and is confident enough to be able to make some of the decisions that need to be made as a team in my absence ... And if you can pick [the non-verbal behaviour] up, I think you can help that team, help those individuals. If you like, get back on track, or just being able to recognise when we've done something well. And I think people do respond to being recognised in a group, no matter how small or large it is, and just the fact that we know the problems that have been going in Oscar's area, but Oscar's team have done a fantastic job in getting all the investment plans prepared in the way they have for [regulatory review]. The fact that we've got some really positive

feedback from the regulator. Wow, third party recognition, that's hugely important, we should celebrate that. We had a couple of key dates that we met last week in terms of energisation. Let's just share that around. And Ian's team have done well on that. So there's that opportunity to give some positive strokes as well (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.).

One of the key purposes of the meeting mentioned by virtually all managers was the creation and maintenance of certain camaraderie, a team spirit that helped the individuals bond. In my final template, I coded all references to this under the label “Team Identity”, taking it directly from one of the interviewees.

*Could we stop the need to, could we do away with the meeting? And I sort of said yes, in some respects yes. I could just rely on the reports they produce and stick with the one to one format. **But what I feel - you would lose the sense of team identity that there is. And what we would need to do is one of my roles is to build a team. A team that can support itself and each other within that team.** Such that, if I move off and someone else comes in, the thing doesn't fall apart. We need to have a self-sustaining team there (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

We're all busy, we're all doing diaries all the time and it's very difficult for us to spend time together so I think if you're a team with a shared goal and shared deliverables, it's nice for us to sit in a room and just check we're on the same page really. [A.P.: Right, in terms of understanding?] Yeah, but understanding and a commonality somehow that you're part of a team and part of a bigger picture (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Another purpose of the PMR meeting was to facilitate immediate decision making at the meeting. This was accomplished by collecting all factors (e.g., people and information) necessary for making a decision and isolating them from the flow of day-to-day operations in order to arrive at a decision.

It's discussing the right things at the right time... The quality, the specs that we should be sticking to. It's the beer as it should be. If not, why not? You

probably heard, we are adding more hops to one of the brews. You notice it's happening during the week, but you don't necessarily find the time to actually fix it there and then. You - say your business is low. You find that out on Tuesday, but it's then, it's actually sitting down at the meeting that you review it all and then do something about it and write it down and get it done (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

*[The meeting is about]... communication, information. Yeah. **And where we have to make some decisions between balancing resources.** So in some cases, like trying to enable things like the maintenance improvement project. We've had to take some decisions about where, how we've put some resources in to that and how we've structured some of Oscar's team to enable to support that. So it's where, if we find, look there's things we're tasked with doing, but we're, individually they're struggling to actually get either the traction or the resolution of the issue they need. **And that will come to that meeting, and we'll debate it and then we'll decide** (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

Although very powerful, immediate decision making at the meeting can be a hindrance if applied to the wrong questions. Many managers expressed frustration with having to debate and collectively decide on something that could be done outside of the meeting in a more efficient and less costly way.

*I think Andrew occasionally gets delved into the detail. **So probably the trip up there is that we don't need to try and solve the problems at the meeting.** We just need to take some... an action, you know, one of us or a group of us need just take actions arising from those discussions and make sure that they're dealt with, probably outside the meeting. Because one of the bad things we do is we do tend to delve into the detail and that tends to throw us off course in terms of time keeping (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

Finally, several managers expressed their confusion as to what the purpose of the meeting actually was. Interestingly, this was the only time that they talked about *performance management* as one of the possible purposes of the meeting. In other words, managing performance was discussed only in terms of what the meeting is *not* about, and when that happened, the confusion about the true purpose of the meeting came through clearly.

So anybody who actually reports in to Andrew is there at that table, and I just don't understand that from performance point of view really. It might be right, but it becomes more like a team meeting than a performance meeting. Is it actually about performance or is it a team communication meeting? If it was a team communication meeting then actually having all the direct reports there is probably absolutely fine. But what are we trying to do? Is this a collegiate thing? What is it? What are the dynamics and the accountabilities in this meeting? Is it that we're trying to use all of the talent to get the best decision? Or why are we holding individuals to account? Or what is it? (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

I'm not sure performance and strategy are the right headings anyway. I think it tends, I don't think those things are necessarily strategy. I think it's just a, it's a monthly meeting. I'm not sure it is performance or strategy. Performance forms part of it, strategy forms part of it, so do a whole load of other things (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Overall, the purpose of the meeting, whether clear or confused, was one of the most important contextual factors of the PMR meeting as experienced by the participating managers.

6.1.1.3 Structure

The final first-level theme in the description of the PMR meeting was the structure of the meeting. It included the elements pertaining to the actual practice of the meeting, as opposed to its attributes, such as context and content, which were discussed above. As such, this theme closely parallels the “Process” category of Martinez et al.’s (2010) model. However, as the theme was developed inductively through the process of

Template Analysis, I have kept the original label, simply noting the similarity to Martinez et al.'s work.

The second-level themes grouped under the Structure label described the parts of the meeting that the participating managers saw as salient. In my analysis of the data, I identified four such themes – *Conduct, People, Chairperson, and Formal Structure*. The findings in each of them are presented in separate sections below.

6.1.1.3.1 The conduct of the meeting

The data grouped under this theme describe managers' observations of the way the meeting was conducted – the actual flow or process of the meeting. In The Brewery, the flow of the meeting was relatively constant, and there were few disruptions. As described in Chapter 5, the meeting always went through the formal part driven by the agenda, which was followed by a brief informal conversation. The agenda was sufficiently simple and at the same time sufficiently structured to maintain the consistency in the conduct of the meeting.

[The agendas] are on the report that Emma fills in every week. That is the agenda basically. So we go through the ABVs, half of the ABVs, we go through the general results, then we go through the customer feedback from trade. Then we go through health and safety, if there's been anything. Audits in general. So if Emma's done audits, or done some stuff that week, that she's got some other actions to do. Or if she's got actions for us to do then she'll go through that as well (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

The PMR meetings in The Energy Co., however, were longer and considerably more complex, which introduced a lot variation into the conduct of the meeting.

I think we consistently fail to get through the agenda that's set. And we do have a lot of people come in, which is - because obviously then they have a time slot scheduled which means if we overrun on certain sections then it's crashing in to their time and very often it's our own business stuff that suffers as a result (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

I'm sure, I'm positive if we could get through the business in a day, you know? The state of the agenda. It's just we allow in my view poor performance just to meander through the agenda (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

These problems are caused not only by the way the agenda is designed, but also by the way the actual flow of the meeting is conducted through the items in the agenda.

And Andrew appears to think it more beneficial to actually establish an agenda for some level of structure. But then he appears to actually rejig the priority list based on what is the biggest priority on the day, as well as flexing it because of maybe his, or anybody else's time constraints on the day (Ashley – Senior Manager, the Energy Co).

Finally, the conduct of the meeting is constrained by the management of the electronic equipment. Given that the Senior Manager in charge of the equipment is also tasked with keeping a record of the minutes of the meeting, he is sometimes overwhelmed with tasks that need to be performed simultaneously, which in turn has an impact on the flow of the meeting.

So my primary thing that I actually do during the meeting is to make sure I identify if an action has been raised, and then record that. So if an action has been raised and someone's moved on and they want the IT to move on, they just have to wait until I've fully recorded the action, so I don't lose it. And then I'll drive the IT (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

It needs be mentioned that one of the most significant effects on the conduct of the meeting is produced by the actions of the chairperson. However, this effect will be discussed later, in the section devoted to the description of the role of the chairperson.

6.1.1.3.2 People

The people participating in the PMR meeting shape it into its form and are thus the critical constituents of the meeting. In the two organizations that I studied, managers talked about the people in the meeting in terms of *Confidentiality*, *Diversity*, *Personal Contact*, and *Relationship Building*. Each of these sub-themes is discussed below.

The issues of confidentiality came up repeatedly in the discussion of the PMR meetings at The Energy Co. While the managers welcomed external visitors, they were often concerned about maintaining the audience that is appropriate for certain types of conversations. The following quotation is a typical passage that reflects this concern:

I do raise my eyebrows sometimes what we talk about what the audience is in the room. Some of the stuff perhaps is a little bit more confidential than we debate in front of a too wider audience perhaps. It can be - sometimes make my eyebrows raise (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

At the same time, diversity was commonly noted as a key positive aspect of the meeting. Diversity referred to the functional diversity of people around the table and was commented on by virtually every manager I interviewed. The participants of the PMR meetings saw the importance of diversity in several ways. First, it brought multiple viewpoints on a specific issue that was debated, thus ensuring that the issue is fully analyzed.

I think it's the fact that the people who were at the meeting are looking at it from different perspectives. I'm looking at it from a logistics and warehousing perspective, which is further down the line. And these guys are actually, need to implement it, because they're the guys who are actually running the line (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

Second, besides simply facilitating the analysis of a problem from multiple angles, diversity ensured that a decision took into consideration the inputs and interests of multiple business areas.

We certainly have every area of the business covered off, when we've got a full team there. Because that does get diluted if you've got people missing, on occasions. Because it could be another month before they contribute to that discussion. Or they may be excluded, not purposely, but they may just by not being around, be - not having their contribution recognised (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Nonetheless, managers sometimes noted that diversity in the PMR meetings extended so far as to make the meetings too general to be helpful.

And I think we do suffer sometimes for that. My problems are nobody else's problems if you see what I mean (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Personal contact was another sub-theme that fell under the “People” theme and reflected a key feature of the managers’ accounts of the meeting. The importance of personal contact was noted in several ways. First, it simply made work more personal and thus, more comfortable.

It just makes it easier when you see people each week instead of each time you're phoning up because you want something. You know? Seeing them face to face you can have a bit of a laugh and a joke or whatever. And slightly more relaxed (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

Second, seeing people face-to-face allows the managers to go beyond the discussion of specific problems and have a general conversation about current issues.

I think there's also something about just having that face to face catch up once a week really. Because you wouldn't just pick up the phone and have a general conversation. You'd pick up the phone if you've got an issue you want to discuss. But the face to face once a week, that's not to say I don't see either of them at other points in the week, but at least at one point during the week you are, come together and you are actually talking about the product (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

It is good to grab him [the Chairperson – A.P.] for 5 or 10 minutes as part of sort of getting together and perhaps another member of the team, that's impacted by something. Just have a quick, you know, use it as an opportunity to talk about other stuff (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Seeing others in person also allowed the managers to maintain a complete picture of the department and to ensure that they do not inadvertently exclude anyone's interests in their day-to-day operations.

Being the distance we are apart, we don't see each other. I don't see Oscar. I might only actually ever see him sometimes at that meeting at the month. I have seen him a few times this month. But it could be a whole month before I see him. And that means that could be two months before I see him, or even three. And then you'd start excluding that bit of the business from the way you work, wouldn't you? Inadvertently. Because you don't see them (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Finally, seeing people face-to-face allows managers not only to receive an immediate reaction to their words, but also – and perhaps most importantly – to understand the sincerity of the response.

I think you get something that's instant, something that's probably more sincere, and something that gives you the comfort level that it is genuine of a response (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

I like to be in a room, so that if you're talking to someone you can see how they react (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Relationship building was a theme related to personal contact. However, it seemed so important to the managers that in the Template Analysis, I dedicated a separate sub-theme to it. On the other hand, this was a simple sub-theme because all managers talked about relationship building in the same way – they viewed relationships as an essential element in doing their work, and PMR meetings as a useful environment for building these relationships.

If there was no mechanism to get people together ... would the relationships be there as strong as they are? Would there be the understanding in those relationships? Would there be the effectiveness in getting some of these issues resolved? So there's a bit that sort of says, look, now having the meeting forces people together to a degree, but it helps reinforce the

relationships that have been built, enables I would say a more effective resolution of some of the problems. Because people are continually building, building their relationships up (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co).

Overall, the issues of diversity, personal contact, and relationship building reflected the key themes in which the managers participating in PMR meetings described the role of people in the meetings.

6.1.1.3.3 Chairperson

The discussion of the role of the chairperson was very different in the two cases that I studied. As I will show later in this section, in The Brewery, the question the responsibility of the chair was never an issue, and the PMR meeting was not even formally chaired – it was simply conducted in a structured and collegiate way. In The Energy Co., however, the discussion of the chairperson's role was so complex and so important that in the process of Template Analysis it was made into a separate second-level theme. The key elements of this theme will be discussed in this section.

As far as the managers at The Brewery were concerned, the PMR meeting I attended was not formally chaired by anyone. It was conducted by the Quality Manager, although the final decision was always made by the Head Brewer. Responding to my question of whether he chairs the meeting, he replied:

I suppose officially yeah. Well I don't know. Trying to think if we do. We don't tend, it's not really that formal. But yeah... Yeah, well I suppose - because Emma obviously pulls all the results together and she starts it off and takes us through the results. So you could say I suppose Emma is chairing it (Ed – Head Brewer, The Energy Co.)

This lack of clarity regarding the role of the chairperson did not seem to affect the conduct of the meeting or to trouble the participating managers. In fact, with the exception of the quotation above, in the five sets of interviews that I conducted, none of the managers discussed anything related to the process of chairing the meeting.

The situation in The Energy Co., however, was very different. Not only were the questions of the roles and responsibilities of the chairperson brought up constantly, but the opinions expressed were often infused with judgment and emotion. Based on these data, in my final template, the discussion of the role of chairperson was broken down into several key sub-themes. These are now discussed in turn.

The chairperson himself considered team building as one of his primary roles in the meeting. His understanding of what this entails went beyond mere maintenance of good working relationships and extended to the idea of the team as a self-sustaining decision-making unit.

...one of my roles is to build a team. A team that can support itself and each other within that team. Such that, if I move off and someone else comes in, the thing doesn't fall apart. We need to have a self-sustaining team there. So part of my role is to make sure that that team is developing and is confident enough to be able to make some of the decisions that need to be made as a team in my absence (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co).

At the same time, the chairperson's personal style made an inevitable impact on the character of the meeting.

Well ... it's Andrew's meeting. Because you could see that. Well, that - it's, a lot of it is about Andrew telling us things and us telling things back to Andrew in a plenary session. It's almost like a feedback session. A lot of it (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

And I think the - I get a bit annoyed sometimes as we spend too much time debating in my view, trivial performance things, when there's greater strategic things we could be dealing with. That's probably just Andrew is a detail man. Andrew likes numbers and detail (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Thus, the character of the meeting in the most general sense was heavily influenced by the chairperson's personal style. More specifically, however, the chairperson

determined the discipline and flow of the meeting and affected the motivation of the participants. Part of it refers to the general process of managing the meeting.

...obviously Andrew is the chair of the meeting and he can decide where he thinks the emphasis needs to be placed. And he steers the flow and the duration of time that's spent on every agenda item. So in simple terms it depends on what Andrew wishes to focus on and how long he wishes to focus on each area (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

More importantly, however, the mere absence of the chairperson from the room has substantial effects on the discipline in the room and the flow of the meeting. Every manager I interviewed commented on this extensively.

I think that's the same with anything isn't it you know? You imagine the mayhem in a court if a judge weren't there. You imagine the mayhem on a football pitch if the captain, if there weren't anybody fulfilling the captain's role. And things like that. You'll start, because they're all different individuals round the table have all got different management styles, all do their own, well they've got their own personalities. The only guy who actually is the chairman, and if he decides to go, for a couple of hours, there's just going to be a little bit of chaos. (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

...the most senior person leaves so everyone's starts playing around like school children. And then they come back in and it's like the teacher's come back in the room (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

The quotation above also reflects the effect of the chairperson on motivation, which, in his own words, is one of his key priorities at the meeting.

I felt at, I think it was the March meeting when we had it, that it's all me, push, push, push. And what happens if I step away? ... I want people to sort of be coming forward a bit more, and in some respects you think well actually am I containing people too much. So let's get them to come to the fore a bit more. (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.)

Yet the chairperson's absence has profound effects on managers' motivation.

I got a bit frustrated because he left again, and that - I wouldn't say that annoyed me - but that does make me frustrated that you make all the effort to get there. And the sort of head honcho decides that the meeting probably isn't that important and he'll go somewhere else (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Thus, the data seem to suggest not only that maintaining discipline and motivation is a key role of the chairperson, but also that his presence is a necessary requirement for performing this role.

Finally, providing the overall direction was another key role of the chairperson identified by the managers. What this meant was that the managers were happy to debate an issue and generate alternatives, but they needed the chairperson to frame the constraints and the goals of this discussion. Otherwise, the discussion could be described as energy without a vector.

*I think, for me, Andrew will - if we've got a number of things on the agenda that comes through, we'd have had prior discussion or documentation or support in information about what that's around. And we need to, if we're unsure we need to clarify exactly what is the issue, what do we need to do, how we're going to tackle it and so it's a bit of everything really, Andrew, really. I think it is that clarification about, **well what is it Andrew you're really after? What does that mean?** We then have the debate (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

However, in order to frame the discussion and provide direction, the chairperson needs to receive the inputs from the members of the team. This was singled out by the managers as an important component of the chairperson's function of providing direction.

Last time he had a couple of occasions where he needed to go out and at that point, that's where it tends to - if you're not careful you can lose a bit

of focus because you know, clearly all of the areas we're discussing at the meeting, it's really important that Barry's there. But when he isn't you've then got to try and follow up afterwards, or he's got to pick up the meeting notes (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Overall, the chairperson or, more specifically, the roles performed by the chairperson seem to be a very important structural component of PMR meetings. The data from The Energy Co. made it possible to distinguish several sub-themes that make up the role of the chairperson as perceived by the chairperson himself as well as by the managers attending the meeting.

6.1.1.3.4 Structural elements

Structural elements is the last second-level theme within the first-level theme of *Structure* and is fairly self-explanatory. It refers to such features of the meeting as the structure of the agenda, the time allocated to the discussion of particular issues as well as to the informal parts of the meeting. More specifically, the discussion of *Structural elements* in my interviews was broken down into three sub-themes: *Formal Structure*, *Side Conversations*, and *Timing Issues*. This section presents the discussion of each of these sub-themes.

The managers in the PMR meetings I studied spoke about the formal structure of the meeting in several ways. First, an agenda where the structure was recorded was an important item. However, managers differed in their view of the use of the agenda as well as of its role in the meeting. Some managers saw a rigid agenda as an unnecessary constraint on the discussion.

You know, if we went in there with a strict agenda, only those items would be dealt with and other things that may crop up would, could quite easily get left out of the equation (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

Others, on the other hand, noted that including all discussion items in the agenda in advance allowed them to avoid unnecessary surprises.

Whilst we have a lot of opportunity to, we always have opportunity to raise other issues, there never is anything, because it's always actually brought,

it's put on the agenda first, so people have time to either read about it or to think about it before they get there. So I think from that point of view it's useful because there is nothing that normally catches people off guard either. So if you see something on the agenda, if you don't know about it and you need to know about it, then you've got the time to do a bit of research (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

The structure of the agenda, however, might have been tied to the purpose of the meeting. In fact, the link between the purpose of the meeting and its formal structure as reflected in the agenda was highlighted as one of the key issues in the design of the meeting.

I think we've got to think through what the structure is and be very clear about what it is ... And what it actually is. Is it trying to produce some hard performance or to articulate performance against some hard metrics or whatever? If that is, then a lot of those metrics will be common, some will not, but some will be common to various areas. So are you going to repeat the exercise again, so why don't you just pull that bit out and look at it as one piece? Or is it just about trying to inform? (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

The formal structure at The Energy Co. seemed to have been designed to accommodate the loose conduct of the meeting³². For instance, knowing that the agenda items are often shifted around and that the timing of the discussions is not strict, the managers designed the meeting so that all external presentations took place in the morning, after which visitors were let go, and the usual conversation took place.

And it appears, what happens now is that because I think Andrew's PA and Andrew are aware that there are not strict compliance to the actual schedule or the agenda, from a timing point of view, I think what they tended to do is actually what we'll do is we'll slot these people in first, so they aren't inconvenienced and that can be done. And then there's more

³² See Section 6.1.1.3.1 above

flexibility because the other people will live in the room for [A.P. - For the entire day!] – Yeah (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Finally, the formal structure of the meeting was undergoing constant change. The PMR and the Strategy Meeting were combined into a one-day meeting with two parts directly before my research started, and, while I was conducting the research, the structure changed from general discussion to individual presentations by the managers. Conducting both the PMR meeting and the Strategy meeting on the same day was viewed favourably by most managers, mainly owing to the time saving effect. The benefit of the new structure, however, was perceived as subject to the same constraints as the entire meeting – the clarity of the purpose and structure of individual presentations.

I think it was a positive move to alter the agenda. And actually having presentations by each section. My overall thoughts is that there hadn't been enough thought as to what standard structure should be used for that. And people didn't have a clear or standard structure so you could see comparison between the different presentations. And also there was varying lengths of detail (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

However, at the same time, the new structure was welcomed as a structure that enabled better insight into the overall functioning of the department as well as better understanding of each manager's own part of operations.

I do find that the - if it was working properly – I think that's a useful way of getting a quick insight (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

I think it's important that we do do those presentations, even though it's very uncomfortable, certainly it is for me at present, I need time, because it does focus your mind on what has been going on and even though it has been uncomfortable it has been useful for me to catch up on what's been going on. So I think the bottom line is, it's important, it's useful to do it (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Thus, managers perceived the formal structure is an important element of the meeting, which had the power to influence their experience of the meeting. Side conversations, however, were an informal element of the meeting, which nevertheless was perceived by managers as extremely significant.

Although never the sole reason for the meeting, side conversations were viewed as very useful and were discussed in a number of ways. First, side conversations brought to the discussion the issues that “slipped through the net” otherwise, either because they were forgotten, postponed, or not explicitly put on the agenda.

I suppose it means at least once a week we know we’re going to talk about some stuff that we might have been, we might have forgotten to talk about already, or wanted the time to do it (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

It’s something else that probably would have been pushed back with the intention of discussing it at some point and if you’re not actually there, you’re trying to make a phone call, someone may not be there and then it just gets left, and then all of a sudden someone says, ah, by the way, we haven’t got any of this, or we haven’t got any of that (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

Sometimes side conversations were useful for getting a deeper understanding of specific issues or, perhaps, solving an issue on the spot.

It’s once again about understanding that people will say things as part of the formal presentation but then there’s other pieces. It’s nice to know what other pressures people are under outside of the bit they formally declare (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

[In teleconferences] you just don’t get those opportunities from side conversations. And that’s a key part. Key part of that meeting that people do have that individual interaction to take one or 2 issues they may want to get solved, just by meeting (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.)

Finally, managers emphasized the crucial role of side conversations and lamented the fact that the formal part of the meeting often does not allow sufficient time for such conversations.

Just having the time to actually pull someone to one side and have a chat, actually is really important. And it's a soft side of making things work, but actually it is very important (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Yeah, I find it extremely valuable. It's probably one of the - it is just that opportunity. And I think the frustration for me is that because the meeting goes on so long, you don't get that opportunity, you just don't get the break times, you don't get the - I get a little bit of time beforehand, but at the end, invariably it's half 6 time (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

The quotation above leads directly into the final sub-theme in the discussion of formal structure – the timing issues. It is necessary to say, however, that, since this discussion belongs to the Structure theme, it is concerned with things such as the *a priori* allocation of time to various agenda items and the role of time as a resource, rather than with the actual time spent on discussing specific issues. The latter is closer to the process of running the meeting than to its structure and would thus be discussed under the Conduct theme.

Similar to the discussion of side conversations, timing issues were discussed in a number of ways. All managers commented on the time allocated to the meeting itself. The managers in The Brewery were generally positive about the length of the meeting and suggested that it contributed to efficiency of the meeting.

I mean it's probably one of the more informal meetings there I think. We can probably get through it in about 15/20 minutes. It's very quick. And the rest of it is just about anything else that we need to talk about very quickly ... I think it's better - yeah I prefer to have it much shorter. Than have a long meeting where everything gets dragged out (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

If it was a meeting that dragged on every week for 2 or 3 hours then that would be a different kettle of fish. I would be questioning whether it was a good use of time (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

The lower frequency of the meetings and the scope of the concern of the PMR meetings in The Energy Co. made short meetings implausible. Formally, therefore, the meetings were designed to take up one full day. However, they always overran, often taking eight or nine continuous hours. It is difficult to say whether this was caused by poor management of the meeting (i.e., the conduct) or by the fact that the time allocated to the meeting was simply not sufficient (i.e., the structural problem). The data suggested that either (or both!) might be the case.

I'm sure, I'm positive if we could get through the business in a day, you know? The state of the agenda. It's just we allow in my view poor performance just to meander through the agenda (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

That's too long an agenda. There's tons isn't there? But that's him, he tries to get it to time. Now to go through our business, which is a massive business with loads of people all over the place by lunchtime, have completed the performance bit, is tough going. And then in the afternoon we do the strategic bit and we never ever do it all, ever (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

The timing pressure also came from the necessity to maintain the balance between the volume of the information that needed to be covered and the length of the debate that was necessary.

[The new one-day structure] has added to the pressures on that meeting in terms of the volume of material to try and cover, but also to provide to the type of people to be able to express their view. So it is always incredibly busy, probably too busy in some respects to be able to try and cover areas of performance and areas of strategy the team need to consider. But that's where we are at this point in time (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co).

The overwhelming consensus, however, was that this balance was rarely, if ever, achieved. In other words, the allocation of time to individual items as well as to the presentations by the managers and the invited speakers was seen as inadequate.

The only other thing I would mention is that I'm not too sure how much clarity is actually sought of how long external presentations will actually be. And there seems to be no communication to the people when they actually join the meeting as to how long a time spot had been allocated to them (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

I think the.., as always with those things that there's a lot of emphasis on the standing items on the agenda in terms of safety and those sort of things. And probably a little bit less on strategically what we're going to do going forward in terms of managing Andrew's part of the business. So that's sort of my view if you like, the outcome of that is that we can get stuck for some time on fairly sort of mundane issues (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

[Talking about individual presentations – A.P.] And I know some of them presentations had 20 slides, or getting on for 20 slides. Well, you're never going to be able to deliver 20 slides in 15 minutes. And I think that's a bit frustrating. We're all very, very busy. And I think if we agree that it's half an hour then fine (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Allocation of time to the meeting itself as well as to the specific elements within it is thus a critical factor in the structure of the PMR meeting. The data suggest that timing issues described in this section have significant implications on the way the meeting is experienced by the managers.

The discussion of *Structural elements* concludes the presentation of the findings in the first major category of the analysis – the analysis of PMR meeting itself as the context of meeting participants' experience. This category comprised three first-level themes –

the content, the context and the structure of the PMR meeting – and a number of second-level themes. As the discussion above demonstrated, the findings presented in this section provided some very powerful insights into the ways in which the managers in the organizations that I studied view the PMR meeting and its constituent elements. However, the key question of what actually comprises the process of experience for the managers remains open. Providing the answer to this question is the aim of the next section.

6.1.2 The Experience

While the previous section described in detail the elements that make up the PMR meeting as the context for meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine, this section turns to the analysis of the experience itself. This section is slightly shorter and includes two first-level themes – *Attention* and *Engagement*. In accordance with the format of Template Analysis, these themes are broken down into a number of second-level themes and, subsequently, a number of sub-themes. The presentation of the findings reflects this structure.

6.1.2.1 Attention

Attention was found to be a key component of the process of experience within the context of the PMR meeting. In the final template, the discussion of attention was split into three first-level themes – *Autonomous Attention*, *Directed Attention*, and *Moderators*. These are now discussed in turn.

6.1.2.1.1 Autonomous attention

The theme labelled “Autonomous Attention” included the managers' description of using attention at their own discretion. In other words, when managers spoke about using attention or paying attention to certain objects without being directly prompted to do so, their accounts were coded into this theme. In this way, autonomous attention was discussed in several terms.

First, managers spoke about attention as a certain resource, which was seen as limited and, therefore, valuable. In this sense, virtually all managers talked about the ability to sustain concentration necessary to perform the tasks required at the meeting. In The

Brewery, where the PMR meetings were relatively short, the managers commented on the positive effect of the length of the meeting on their ability to concentrate.

I think there's also something about the fact that you're not sitting around a table, tends to concentrate the mind. If you're sitting there comfortable then you'd probably, it would probably be longer than it is actually standing and looking at the information. Quick discussion and it's finished (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

In The Energy Co., on the other hand, the meetings were very long, and managers talked at length about the limits on their ability to concentrate and pay attention.

They [the meetings – A.P.] are a little bit of a war of attrition in being able to stay with it because of the length of time (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

You do get a bit battle weary come half past 4 in the afternoon. So I think we do need to be careful about what we try and cram into the meeting. We need to make sure that we don't try and solve our problems in the meeting. And just keep focused to the end ... To be honest with you, once you get beyond to 5 o'clock, people are just all day in that environment - you just lose concentration I think (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Attention or, more specifically, discretionary autonomous attention was thus seen as a finite resource, which was gradually depleted over the course of the meeting. The other viewpoint from which the managers talked about attention was the description of the ways, in which they channelled it during the meeting. These broadly fell into two categories – the sequential and the parallel attention to the subject discussed at the meeting. In some cases, particularly when performance data were interrogated, managers paid attention to one indicator at a time. An excellent description of this process was given by Ed, the Head Brewer at The Brewery.

So you say right, you start off on [one brand of beer] and you start off on the two-week alcohol and you have a look across the line and where that trend is going, whether it's going above the line or going below or where,

what it's doing. And if you see it's trending low then you think: right, that's two-week alcohol is trending low, does that mean the OG for those results will be high? So you have a quick look at the OG results. And if that's - then you have a quick look at the PG results and see whether they are high. Because if they are high - if the alcohol is low it's because the PG is high or the OG is low. So there's that interplay. And then you have a look at the attenuation because you think right, because the PG is high, is that because the attenuation was too high? So you look at those bits then.

However, during general discussion, paying attention to various items sequentially is impossible, and managers are forced to split their attention between different levels. The data suggest that there are three main levels on which managers follow the discussion: listening to the conversation and scanning the discussion for relevant issues; linking the discussion to their understanding of the work process and their own area of operations; and finally, looking for opportunities to get specific issues clarified and specific questions answered. The most complete description of this process was given by Alex, a Senior Manager at The Energy Co.

I think what I'm thinking of, is I'm trying to pick up the key points of what the guys or girls are trying to get across. So it's about what are the messages. I'm then thinking to myself, well what's the impact on the area that I work in. And then it's then about work. If you've then got questions or challenges or misunderstandings, then it's about finding the appropriate time to try and get that understanding. Either there, or it might even be to follow up afterwards. Because it sometimes is something that you might want to challenge and debate with the whole team. Other times you might think, right okay, I might need to follow up afterwards and ask him about that bit. And you may not want to broach in the whole area. So that's the sort of thought process that goes through my mind really, to understand what we're trying to get across, how to impact with what I do, and any clarification or challenges.

Although the quotation above gives the most comprehensive description of the parallel use of attention, virtually all managers across both companies I studied described this process in similar terms (although sometimes only partially).

I think it's probably in two dimensions really. One is I'm listening to what they have to say. So getting myself up to date with the current position on things. Becoming aware. And I'm also making notes in terms of how it impacts on me particularly, and my team... What is the impact of all they're doing on my team, me and my team. And what do I need to do to actually support what they're doing. Is it that I need to have a conversation with Ian about some course that he's got in his mind that he'd like to roll out. So I'd make myself a note to call Ian and have a conversation with him (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Yeah. You know [in the discussion] they're looking at the technical aspect of what they need to do to avoid something happening again, or to rectify a possible issue. Whereas I'm looking at how is this going to leave me with stock in 2 days time. Or if this recurs am I going to have a supply issue? And is that going to have a knock on effect that we're going to have to do a load of redeliveries (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

Thus, autonomous attention is seen by the managers as a finite resource, which they use in different ways during the meeting. This use can be either sequential, when the objects of attention are attended to one by one, or parallel, when attention takes place simultaneously on three levels. This view of attention as a key resource that is both valuable and limited was best summed up by Abby, a Senior Manager at The Energy Co.

I wish that we could put more into the strategy bit. But we tend to land up seeing everybody, because we only meet once a month we get lots of people that want to meet you. And sell their message. So we had the taskforce update, which is fine but then you've got zero harm update, and they didn't really have much to say really. And there's lots of other things that people want to get their bits in and it tends to be everybody trying to get your

attention as a team to sell their message. And that's okay, but it's not strategy then, it's just message getting.

6.1.2.1.2 Directed Attention

While attention can certainly be used at the managers' own discretion, it could also be influenced by external direction. In the final template, the description of this process fell under the second-level theme labelled "Directed Attention". This section presents the findings grouped into this theme.

Based on the accounts of the managers participating in the PMR meetings, their attention could be directed in several ways. First, performance targets, whether external or internal, often influenced the object of managers' attention.

Um, all of them [the indicators – A.P.] should be important. But there are others for various reasons like the alcohol, is much more important at the moment, because of Customs & Excise (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

Answering the question of why safety indicators were given a disproportionate amount of attention at the meeting, Alex, a Senior Manager at The Energy Co., replied:

... we had a number of fatalities in the business and therefore the focus on safety use is very strong. ... [Safety indicators] will form a very, they're actually part of all of our objectives. So senior managers and cascaded to managers and people below and you know actions that form part of the whole plan you know are part and parcel of all of our daily lives in that we have objectives to achieve based on the plan. ... So we've got things like, you'd be charged with doing so many safety inspections, will be charged with undertaking so many audits and I think anything else that comes from the actual plan, or specific items coming from zero harm plan. You know, we will be charged with delivering them.

Second, attention is immediately drawn to problems and problem areas.

Yes, attention on any problem areas really. We wouldn't spend a load of time on something going right. Like you don't. Any problem areas (Emma – Quality Manager, The Energy Co).

Third, unsurprisingly, attention was directed by the person chairing the meeting. Sometimes, the attention-directing effect was very obvious, as in the case of the chair's posing questions to the people in the meeting.

[The new structure] has shifted if you like the focus of the meeting over the last two to three meetings to try and get a greater degree of ownership of the performance issues by the individual senior managers. To get them to present and give assessment of their own performance. Rather than me trying to drive it all the time. Partly to say look you know, okay guys, I want to see that. Step up to the plate here and demonstrate ownership of the issues, and see how honest people are being in their assessment of their own performance. [The structure] helps to do that, and particularly forcing the question at the end. Well how would you rate that performance? Are we meeting expectations? Are we below expectations? Are we above it? (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.).

And let's take an example. Closing actions down. I'm currently, when we first started to do the slides, I am currently sitting about 38% of where I should be. If I remember the numbers. Which means I'm 12% behind target. There was no debate about how long will I get that 12% back. It was more, okay Ian, you know? I'll leave that to you (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Echoing earlier discussion³³, sometimes the mere presence of the chairperson has an effect on the attention of the participants.

There's also a marked difference in attention and participation. In when he's there and when he ain't there. Andrew. I think I find that a bit annoying. It - and the fact that Andrew's not there, shouldn't really at that level make any difference about what you're doing. But it seems to there for

³³ Cf. Section 6.1.1.3.3

some reason or other. People just lose the will to live! And I lot of people I think switch off because he's not there (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

I think when Andrew leaves the room, people take their foot off the gas a little bit, if you like, and perhaps we don't get as much done as we would have done with Andrew in the room. ... you know so I would say when we've got his undivided attention and to get to the business, I think we get a better quality output when Andrew is in the room (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

The chairperson also directs the flow of the meeting, decided which items are to be discussed, thus influencing the object of attention of the meeting participants.

Obviously, Andrew is the chair of the meeting and he can decide where he thinks the emphasis needs to be placed. And he steers the flow and the duration of time that's spent on every agenda item. So in simple terms it depends on what Barry wishes to focus on and how long he wishes to focus on each area (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Andrew is a bugger for detail. Instead of saying with them vacancies, look go away and sort it out and come back to me middle of next week, he tries to cure it there and then. Well that takes bloody ages! (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Finally, the chairperson determines the general priorities for the next period and thus directs the attention of the managers not only in the meeting itself, but also in broader terms – by outlining the “playing field” for the near future.

I don't always get an opportunity to meet up with Andrew and so I am still trying to sort of absorb what needs to be done. To sort of double check that I am going in the right direction. Understand really what kind of priorities he has (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Interestingly, at The Energy Co., besides the targets, problem areas, and the priorities of the chairperson, the attention of the managers was often influenced by the person tasked with taking minutes and keeping a list of actions. In a subtle way, he steered the attention of other people around the table and thus helped to shape the discussion as it was unfolding.

It isn't clear to me if there is either a specific action or, as is quite often the case, people agree there should be a reaction, but no-one actually volunteers to actually own it. So 3 or 4 times yesterday I probably either clarified, sorry I wasn't too sure whether that's a specific action or just a discussion. And if it is an action, who is the owner? I know there was one point which was quite - I can't remember what the actual item was - and I wanted to pin down exactly who the owner was... Eventually they turned round and said actually we all have to be the owner ... for the capex expenditure within our sections (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Ashley is very good at keeping us on the straight and narrow I think, particularly around the actions and the observations that he makes during a meeting. And that is very useful to someone in the room to, whilst we're sort of wittering on about stuff, just to ask us a direct question. Do you want me to take an action? And is that an action? What would you like me to capture? That sort of thing which I think is very useful because you know people get - if you're not careful it can run and run (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Most of the discussion that fell under the “Directed Attention” theme was concerned with the top-down view of the process, i.e. external stimuli affecting the otherwise autonomous attention of the managers. However, the data provided some evidence that this process can also be initiated by the managers themselves. In other words, managers actively brought up specific issues during the discussion in order to receive direction for the future.

What's the role of the discussion? Well I think it is to raise awareness. I think it gives us the opportunity to say, well actually I've got similar issues, or that causes me problems (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

An example would have been I think, conversations I've had with Oscar in that one or previous meeting around some mood in the people. So a chance to speak to Andrew and Ian to get a steer and then flip that over to my team to progress that within the team (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

In order to make this process possible, however, the structure of the meeting needs to allow for the problems to be brought up, and that is not always available.

Barry's meeting doesn't have, you know I have my own team meetings. And there isn't really, we don't really escalate things, because we don't have a set, we don't have a structured agenda (Oscar – Senior Manager).

Overall, the discussion of directed attention forms a substantial part of the findings related to the issue of managers' attention during the meeting. This discussion complements the findings presented in the previous section and highlights such issues as the use of performance targets, the presence and actions of the chairperson and the minute-taker as well as the different processes for obtaining and communicating direction during the meeting.

6.1.2.1.3 Moderators

The final second-level theme within the “Attention” theme was labelled “Moderators” and included various factors that seemed to affect the attention of the managers in the PMR meeting. The findings presented in this section are fairly straightforward, as they simply list the moderators of attention that the data suggested.

Having relevant background and experience allows managers to stay focused on the discussion and continue paying attention to the items that are being debated. The lack of

such experience, on the other side, makes following the discussion closely very difficult³⁴.

Yeah, I mean because I have experience in the areas that they're covering. If I was only from an external perspective and I just sat there, only knew about property and IT, and business architecture [his current remit – A.P.], I think it would all go over my head. Absolutely. But because I have been here 23 years, understand the engineering issues, I understand when they talk about a safety issue, I can understand and visualise how that accident might have happened. You know, quite easily. So in terms of a meeting I find it very interesting. I'm not bored at all. ... I can see what they're talking about, I can visualise it, I can understand what they're talking about (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

If it's general stuff, definitely interested. If you're into the nth degree of a widget inside a transformer, then I'm generally interested if it's a safety issue and I'm trying to understand the nuances of how that happened, because that's when we tend to get into it, when it's a safety issue, and they start describing that, if you did this, this order or that order, and you think - and it's not my comfort zone, so I have to listen extra hard to try and understand it. But then if they go the step beyond, which is just engineering-ese for the sake of it, because they love talking it... So how I follow it I suppose depends on the subject (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Preparation was another factor that influenced the attention of the managers. Preparing in advance allowed the participants of the PMR meeting to focus attention on the meeting, while the lack of preparation often meant that some work needed to be done directly at the meeting.

I find that [splitting attention between multiple tasks – A.P.] very difficult actually. Because then what I'm doing is I'm potentially driving the IT, presenting and taking the minutes. So what I actually do, is I actually write

³⁴ Having little experience in electrical engineering and no background in brewing, I fully felt the impact of this moderator on my attention in the PMR meetings I attended.

out my preparation notes to be exactly what I want it to be recorded in the minutes, and normally there's no deviance from how I envisage the items to be recorded in the minutes, than the actual discussions held. ... So I try to structure my notes in a way that I have to take few additional notes for any action (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

...if you don't get the meetings right then the other thing that happens is people don't have time to prepare for meetings. And you can see that with the, even the 15 minute presentations. That [another manager] was writing his as we were doing the meeting ... Because he'd just been up against it. I'd done mine the day before (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Moreover, in the meeting with a loose structure, preparation, even minimal, may determine what points will be discussed. Asked about what determines the objects of people's attention at the meeting, Erwin, the Supply Chain Manager at The Brewery, replied:

I don't know. I suppose the individual - during the meeting I think each individual is trying to think. Because I tend, well I think we're all obviously involved, none of us actually make notes before we get there. None of us turn up with an agenda. So it's loosely picking things out of your brain really [based on the] information that you've gleaned from various people since the last meeting really. ... I don't do a lot of homework other than speaking to the delivery crews, I don't do a lot of homework for the meeting. I don't spend a lot of time carrying out preparation for the meeting, that's just a matter of turning up and having the discussion really.

Personal stance or attitude also has an impact on the attention paid to specific items discussed at the meeting. The examples below demonstrate that cynicism may cause excessive attention to be given to a particular subject, whereas detachment may allow better attention to be paid to the discussion as a whole.

I think we had quite a few questions about [an external presentation], but I think, also because I think we were probably quite cynical about it I think probably (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Well, it's not for me to say what they should discuss at what level or length, because that's up to the chairman. Who is the person who is chairing the meeting. I am just recording the actions. What I obviously do is I would record every action against every topic that's on the agenda. Which normally - even if Andrew alters the sequence of the agenda, I would still address every area that's on the agenda (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

An extended version of a quotation already used earlier shows that the attitude of curiosity can overcome the negative effect that lack of experience can have on the ability to maintain attention.

***Depends if I'm interested.** If it's general stuff, definitely interested. If you're into the nth degree of a widget inside a transformer then I'm generally interested if it's a safety issue and I'm trying to understand the nuances of how that happened, because that's when we tend to get into it, when it's a safety issue, and they start describing that if you did this, this order or that order, and you think - and it's not my comfort zone, so I have to listen extra hard to try and understand it. But then if they go the step beyond, which is just engineering-ese for the sake of it, because they love talking it. ... So how I follow it I suppose depends on the subject. But I'm quite interested in nearly all of it because sometimes, one, if I'm doing the safety briefing it's important that I know what to put in and what to put out. But I don't know. **Just quite curious I suppose, so I like to follow it, I don't like to be left out** (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

The quotation above also refers to another factor that influences attention – personal interest. The degree of interest in the matter seemed to affect the intensity of attention that was paid to the subject discussed at the meeting.

*[The] data modelling [presentation]. **That was interesting.** No, I think that was useful. Because I think there's a lot of big issues around that. **I actually had contributed fairly strongly to that I seem to remember.** Because I was saying, I can't remember all of the points I was making, but I was having a dialogue with Tom about what we needed to do, the systems that need to be put into that, who was going to - **it's a bit of a passion of mine**, is that we don't actually have anybody in the business who has a vision, who is holding the vision of how our systems and their data might develop - in a two way relationship, is how the business drives forward and so on (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

Repeating and extending part of the quotation used earlier,

So in terms of a meeting I find it very interesting. I'm not bored at all. Sometimes I think we could really get the pace going a bit more and get a bit of energy and sometimes I feel they're a bit lifeless and could do with more energy at the meetings, but I guess the engineer in me, who - that's my background, I can see what they're talking about, I can visualise it, I can understand what they're talking about (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Closely related to personal interest is another moderator of attention – personal relevance. Personal relevance here means the relevance of the discussion to the remit or the area of responsibility of the manager. However, the data seems to suggest that this moderator functions a way different from personal interest: if interest seems to affect the intensity of attention, relevance appears to influence what the attention will be paid to and whether it will be paid to at all. In this sense, relevance seems to prompt thoughts or actions directed at a particular issue.

I don't think [this meeting] was different. Only in as much that there was probably more relevance this morning than there is sometimes. Because

sometimes I can attend and there's not really a great deal, that either I bring to the party or are of interest to me. But this morning there was one or 2 issues (a) about coloration and broadside which came up. That was a good chance to prompt me to ask the question which I had actually forgotten to ask because someone had already asked about the colour (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

I guess my ears prick up if something resonates with me and I think it's important to me. So sometimes Alex used, and I think of a previous meeting that we had, he started talking about maintenance and he started talking about contractors and then I was putting 2 and 2 together and thinking, well can I use some of the approaches that he's using in his arena in to my area of operation. So very often some things just click with me more than others. Other things, for example the presentations by the IT guys ... Sometimes that doesn't always sink in as deeply as the others. I suppose I'm just being human. I'm just focusing on the things which are critical to me. And I can get value out of that meeting (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

This process becomes more difficult for those managers whose remit overlaps only slightly with the remit of the other managers. For instance, Ian, a Senior Manager in The Energy Co. describes the relevance of the meeting in the following way:

I would say 20% of the meeting is useful for me, 80% of it is just nice to know. And the 20% useful to me is safety and people probably.

Nonetheless, the moderating effect of personal relevance seems to work in the same way even in cases such as Ian's.

I try to listen to them. And I just try and help them when I think I can. Or - but I wouldn't say the word detect, but keep the interest to my bit of the business. At the front as well. So if I see there's something going on or being talked about that influences or change what we're doing. Or - that's when I sort of like to chirp up a bit (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Two other moderators – “Multitasking” and “Number of Issues” – seemed to be related to the attention capacity of the managers and hence affected the focus and the intensity of attention during the PMR meeting. Not surprisingly, performing several tasks at the meeting lowers the ability to focus on the items being discussed. Answering the question of how he follows the discussion, Richard, a Senior Manager at The Energy Co., said:

The other things which are of general interest perhaps I'm thinking about other things during that meeting. I mean very often we're walking into to these meetings with Blackberries, because I'm getting a lot of messages coming through, and yesterday there was a lot of discussion going on with my guys out in the field and they were emailing me, so I was responding to that. ... And there was a, they wanted some answers on something so this is a convenient way of just sending answer back. So I'm listening with one ear to some of that stuff, but I'm also trying to do this. Then I'll put that to one side, if I hear something which is sort of like really important that I might be able to use in the future, and then go back to that. We shouldn't be doing this in a meeting I know. But you're trying to juggle so many things at the same time.

Likewise, the manager in charge of taking minutes and running the electronic equipment noted that that it was difficult for him to perform several tasks and still follow the discussion.

I find that very difficult actually. Because then what I'm doing is I'm potentially driving the IT, presenting and taking the minutes. ... And I do deliberately try to keep my section very brief, because if I extend it too far, it would be very difficult to present, take the minutes and potentially drive the IT all at the same time (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Similar to the effect of multitasking, the number of issues debated at the meeting caused managers to distribute their attention across multiple objects. That, in turn, often led to the perception that inadequate attention has been devoted to certain items.

*I wish that we could put more into the strategy bit. But we tend to land up seeing everybody, because we only meet once a month we get lots of people that want to meet you. And sell their message. So we had the taskforce update, which is fine but then you've got zero harm update, and they didn't really have much to say really. **And there's lots of other things that people want to get their bits in and it tends to be everybody trying to get your attention as a team to sell their message. And that's okay, but it's not strategy then, it's just message getting** (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

Finally, the intensity of the discussion can influence the attention of the managers involved in the PMR meeting. This intensity could come from the personal pressure put on the managers or from the demand placed on their attention by the length and difficulty of the meeting. Personal pressure came from the structure of the meeting as well as from the chairperson's focus on the ownership of performance issues.

...the important thing is that they get ownership of their own performance rating. To say look, it's not just me sitting there and telling it. It's to sort of say, look you know you can see we're not delivering. And I was pleased to see that at the last meeting. The intention is that if they take ownership of that they take ownership of that, they know for themselves, "well, crickey, I know I'm not, we're not quite hitting that" (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.).

*Previously the meeting used to drag feet. Now the [individual] presentations place the responsibility on the individual. ... I think it's important that we do do those presentations, even though it's very uncomfortable, certainly it is for me at present, I need time, **because it does focus your mind on what has been going on** and even though it has been uncomfortable it has been useful for me to catch up on what's been going on (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

The intensity of the meeting affecting the attention of the individuals could also be generated by the length and the demands of the meeting itself.

*[The last meeting] certainly was the longest! That's probably my overriding memory of it. I think **we were kind of drained by 6 o'clock when it finished**. Well it went on until 6 o'clock. **And I mean we were struggling at that time**. Partly because of the environment of the room I think. It wasn't terribly conducive to having a meeting all that long because it was so hot in there (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

We tend to land up doing everything in one [meeting] and you're just weary at the end of the day rather than having maybe some open discussions. You just - it's just an endurance test to get through them (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Thus, the analysis of the data produced a set of factors that, in the managers' views, can affect their ability to pay and sustain attention during the meeting.

The discussion of the moderators of attention concludes the presentation of the findings under the “Attention” theme. Overall, as the data in the theme demonstrates, attention is one of the critical elements in managers' experience of PMR meetings. My analysis of the data conceptualises attention as a finite resource available to the managers and splits the managers' accounts of attention into two categories – “Autonomous Attention” and “Directed Attention”. Subsequently, the analysis distils a number of factors – “Moderators” – that can influence the deployment of attention during the meeting.

6.1.2.2 Engagement

Engagement is the second and the final first-level theme in the analysis of managers' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. This theme delves deeply into the elements constituting the process of this experience as recounted by the managers in the interviews. The theme is broken down into four second-level themes – *Individual Processes*, *Interaction*, *The Space*, and *Supra-Individual Processes*. The findings within each of these themes and their sub-themes are presented below.

6.1.2.2.1 Individual Processes

In most cases described so far, the sub-themes within each theme were presented sequentially, as a simple list. In the case of “Individual Processes” however, some of the sub-themes constituting the second-level theme as well as their interrelations were so complex that a separate model had to be drawn up. This model presents the relationships between the individual processes that involve an individual’s ostensive aspect of the routine. Graphically, this model is represented by Figure 6, and the individual components of the model have been numbered in order to facilitate the subsequent discussion.

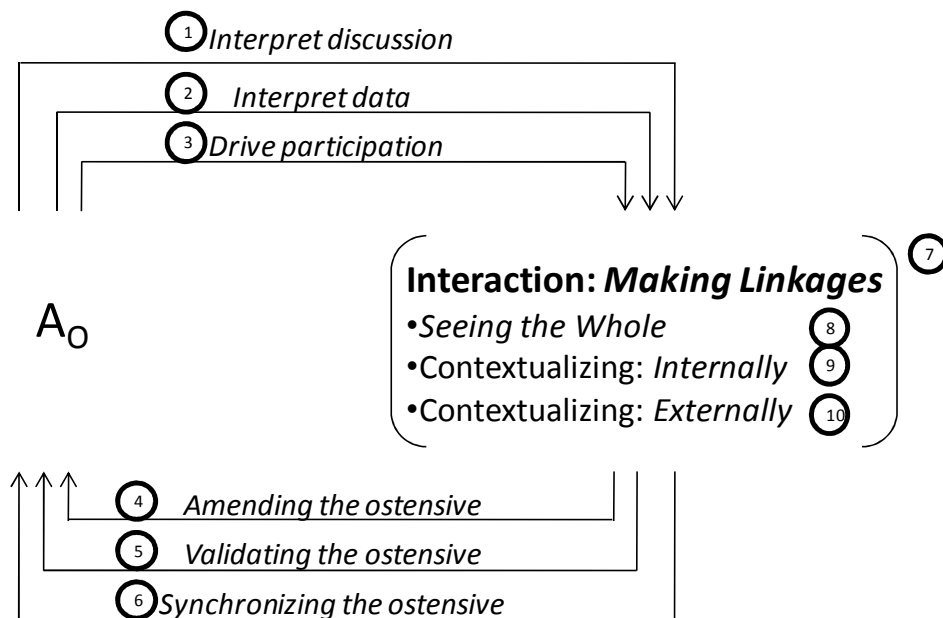


Figure 6. Individual processes involving the ostensive aspect

The model relates the ostensive aspect of the routine as experienced by an individual agent (A_O) – a manager – to the interaction taking place during the meeting and explicates the processes that make up this relationship. The labels in italics represent the distinct sub-themes in the discussion of these processes. The managers used their current view of the routine (i.e., the ostensive aspect) to make interpretations of the discussion (No. 1 in the model) and the data (No. 2 in the model) presented at the meeting as well as to drive their own participation in the interaction (No. 3 in the model). The discussion in turn helped them to validate (No. 5), amend (No. 4), or simply synchronize (No. 6) their view with those of other participants. The interaction

itself played a key role in this process by facilitating the interplay between the ostensive aspects of multiple participants – a process that one of the interviewees described as *Making Linkages* (No. 7). These linkages enabled the managers to reconstruct the view of the routine in its entirety (i.e., *Seeing the Whole*, No. 8) and, subsequently, to establish the internal (No. 9) and external (No. 10) context for their reflection. Each of these processes is now illustrated by the data obtained in the cases.

Managers used their current understanding of the routine to interpret the debates that took place during the PMR meetings (No. 1 in the model).

So for example, I could look around the table and I know who has the heaviest workload. I know what their main priorities are. If there was - one of the biggest problems we have at the moment is a lack of resource. We had a discussion about who has the highest need and the highest priority. I know who has that need. If I was to do a priority list of how, if we had say 35 vacancies, how they should be split across those heads of. And if [the chairperson] did the same thing, it would be extremely close. So when there's discussions about resourcing and priorities, I actually know the full background behind that (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Likewise, current view could be used to interpret the data reviewed at the PMR meeting (No. 2 in the model).

Obviously there's lots of different analyses up there, and they all kind of interplay, so you can't change one without changing other ones. So if we know one is going out of spec, then we try and make an alteration that would bring that one back into spec but not change the other ones too drastically? So yeah, you kind of have to picture the process and think, well if I do this, it'll do that to that parameter but will also do this to this parameter. And so you have a - how they would bounce off each other and how they will change each other (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

The managers also leaned on their understanding of operations to drive active participation in the meeting (No. 3 in the model). For instance, responding to the

question of what triggers his contributions to the meeting, Harry – a Senior Manager at The Energy Co. – noted:

Because I know a lot about what they do, I'm usually reasonably well informed. So they start talking about ... a particular way of operating a switch or delivering a project or CDM or whatever. I sort of know what's going on, so usually I'll just say, do you mean X, Y, Z? Or how does this impact. I know the conversation about connecting customers for me. I thought, I can't believe we're going to take that approach. Oh my god, are we going to start working that way? I can see a massive issue if we did work in that way. ... I will see the implications on somebody else and then make a suggestion or pitch in.

The interaction itself made an impact on the managers' view of the routine. Sometimes, their current view was amended as a result of the interaction (No. 4 in the model).

Something that came out yesterday when we were talking about, in my delivery bit, Ian came up with a suggestion about how we might be more productive in the switch gear changes. ... He was talking about the use of generators and how you might sort of configure switching off some of the substations so that you could perhaps either do more or it was a quicker way of doing it. Now, I hadn't heard that before and obviously he hadn't done it himself before. Considering that he was responsible for this area, it was obviously something that he hadn't approached previously. So yes, I mean those sort of meetings can bring out some useful pieces of information, snippets of information (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Sometimes, the discussion at the meeting was used simply to check if the current view of the routine was still valid. Although this element of the meeting is taken for granted, many managers spoke explicitly about it, and this “catch up” was a distinct process in the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting (No. 5 in the model).

Particularly this morning because there was one or 2 issues came up about various things that had been going on during the week. Not all relevant to me but relevant to at least some within the meeting. It's quite a good catch up as far as I was concerned as well, because I hadn't been there for the last week. Several different new products going through at the moment. It was just a chance to catch up on what's been going on really. One or 2 answers on various quality issues, not particularly quality issues, but questions that had been going on (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

Finally, the discussion helped the managers to determine the relation of their view of the current operations with that of other participants. This “synchronization” did not necessarily amend or validate the individual’s view – it simply allowed the individual to position it relative to the view of others (No. 6 in the model).

Because sometimes when you walk into a new job and you're confronted with various pieces of business system, and you try to interact with it, it is a bit intimidating when (1) it doesn't work for you and also if you find, or you think that you're the only one that can't seem to manage it properly. So it was assuring to find out that all my colleagues have the same problem with it. And it wasn't just me doing something wrong (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

The critical function of the meeting was determined by the fact that the interaction allowed the managers to make connections between their own understanding of the current operations and that of other managers (No. 7 in the model). This was best described by Andrew – the Director at The Energy Co.

So like Ian was talking the other day about he hasn't got these gate B papers. So that's the point at which Ian will take the project up. So good, okay so that's a push back into Oscar. Or Oscar would say, well you have, but you know - and what you could see, there was a disconnect. So straight away it was making them link up and say, okay guys, we've got something to sort out here. And then you think you've got it, and you think you haven't

got it. Well what's the truth? How do we, let's get some interaction here. Rather than standing out here saying, well I've got a problem. So it's trying to make sure that we're putting those linkages in.

These linkages allowed the individual manager to obtain a full current picture of operation – the current ostensive aspect of the routine (No. 8 in the model).

I think [the meeting] does help. I think it enables us all to understand what's going on in other parts of our business. Which we wouldn't be necessarily if we didn't have that exercise. It highlights areas where we can perhaps mutually support each other and also make sure that, particularly for me it's useful because I work with everybody else in the team directly in supporting them and also helping them implement change within their business as well. I think it's useful, no very useful. I'd end up having effectively one to one sessions with all of them really to get that understanding, which would be very time consuming for me. Whereas I have the opportunity there to understand what's going on and also talk to them. If there's something - that we've got some kind of interface or crossover (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Having the whole picture in turn helped the managers to place their reflection in a context. This could be done internally – i.e., the whole view of the routine itself provided the context for integrating the current individual view (No. 9 in the model).

But, so we do cover a whole host of issues around performance and that's useful. Because (1) we are all sharing that view, and sometimes things come up and you think, well why is that person doing that? Now we could do it in our own teams but when you see it in context of the whole group then somebody will stand out. Whereas if you get a report sometimes you don't know if that's good or bad. But when you see the whole group, or the whole Major Investments, it sometimes is obvious that there's a problem there or an issue there. [A.P. – And then relative to context you can see whether?] you've got an issue or not. Because sometimes you look at your figures and you think, oh that's really, really awful. And then you look at

somebody else's and you think, actually, that's normal or that's exceptional. So there's that context place that it puts it in (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

This process of putting the individual view in context can also be done externally – i.e., when the entire routine is put in the context of wider business operations, providing a wider perspective for reflection (No. 10 in the model).

Well it's almost like, how do we get a better handle on what the opportunities are for improvement? If we're continually reflecting inside. So those opportunities may be from other organisations. You know, what linkages have our managers got with the people outside the organisations sort of thing. Well is there something we could learn from this? Is that meeting the right environment? Maybe, maybe not, you know? (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.)

Because sometimes you can do like different ways, there's different ways of doing things. So we could all agree on, yeah so actually that's better to do it that way, for whatever reason. Or someone's got other ideas that we hadn't thought of. Other ideas from other breweries and people we've met (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

In the addition to the model described above, the discussion of individual processes in the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine included four more sub-themes, which were equally important. However, they are considerably more straight-forward and could be presented in a simple linear format. In my final template they were labelled *Focusing the Mind*, *Triggering Thinking*, *Invoking Deep Knowledge*, and *Emotions*.

The environment of the PMR meeting itself influences the dynamics of experiencing and using the ostensive aspect described in Figure 6. The managers in the PMR

meetings I studied noted that the meetings affect these dynamics in two ways. First, they force the individuals to concentrate on the operations that are being reviewed³⁵.

We know - yeah - we know we've got a problem with it and the alcohol is now high. See, alcohol again. And we have reduced it before. But then we put it up again and it's still not working so again it's something we could have done during the week, but you don't sit down and focus on that one little thing when there's a thousand other things to sort out. So it's, again another opportunity in that meeting to actually get that done and action it. (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

Second, being in the PMR meeting and focusing on reviewing the routine triggers thinking that affects the ostensive aspect of the routine.

I think it's - it - you know there's things in there - it's only little things you pick up, you know? What people are saying you know. It makes you think and it alters your, it focuses you on some of the issues you've got. And I can't think of any specifics. But I always come away with a list of things I need to sort out, or lists of what - I write down something that might just trigger something, change our thinking a bit. You know? And things like that (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Invoking Deep Knowledge refers to the process of thinking about the ostensive aspect of the routine that was mentioned by several managers in both of the organizations I studied. In essence, this process of thinking involved examining the subject of the discussion not only in relation to the currently held view of operations (i.e., against the ostensive aspect of the routine), but also in the context of more deeply held beliefs and convictions. Moreover, if the current ostensive aspect could be amended (as the model above suggests), changes in the “deep knowledge” appeared to be significantly less likely. When managers thus spoke about “invoking the deep knowledge”, against which they viewed the subject of the discussion, they did it in several ways. First, they appealed to their extensive experience and the ensuing knowledge of the field.

³⁵ Cf. section 6.1.2.1.

I find it fairly straightforward to follow the thing [the discussion – A.P.]. I've been here a long while. And some of the jobs that they're talking about, I've done. That's part of my career. ... A lot of the people issues, I've been here so long now, I don't reckon I'll, I'll be surprised if I haven't come across somewhere or other a similar problem. And there are ways and means over. It's like these vacancy things. And I've seen that before. That'll all blow over, that's just a temporary blip. And Richard says oh-oh-oh. I said, don't worry about it I said. You know? Just carry on as you are, keep - it'll all come right in the end. Just - but - I wouldn't say it's complacency. But they do tend to whiffle on sometimes, when there's more important things to talk about (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

Second, professional qualifications and specialist knowledge provided the basis for making decisions that was not easily challenged.

It's not an exact science. We'll make, or have an action. But it might not be effective. And we'll find that out next week. Because it's brewing, it's a live process, it's not an exact - we can't just say, right, I'll add 0.5% alcohol. It's not as quite simple as that. But all we can do is put all our knowledge in some, put together the actions. What helps? Well, our knowledge, our brewer's knowledge of what we can do (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery.).

Finally, deep personal knowledge of the one's colleagues provides additional background for understanding the dynamics of the discussion.

I mean I've been in the industry for many years. I've been working with the Major Investments Division for many years and I've been taking minutes for many years. ... Sometimes I might actually challenge to say, that was an interesting discussion, I haven't actually captured it specific action, and to try and get that clarity, but most of the times because I know the actual individuals at the meeting very well, I know their styles and how they interact together, it's very easy for me to pick up what the actions are in general and what the suitable timescales would be. Whereas if I didn't have

that experience and if I didn't actually know the individuals, it would be a lot harder (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Thus, the dynamics of experiencing the ostensive aspect of the routine sometimes seem to go beyond the model presented above to include something which could be termed “deep ostensive”. This “deep ostensive” in a sense provides a deeper structure for the potential changes in the current ostensive – a structure, which itself is considerably more rigid.

Emotions is the last sub-theme in the discussion of individual processes of experience. The manager's accounts of their experience of the PMR meetings often included description of emotions. There are two ways in which emotions were experienced in the PMR meeting. First, managers spoke about openly expressing emotions during the meeting. These ranged from frustration to cheerfulness, but the consensus was that the expression of emotions was a positive experience. It was best summed up by Abby – a Senior Manager in The Energy Co.:

You need a group that you can let off steam with and then come away and do what you're supposed to do. So sometimes the meeting goes oh-oh-oh, but actually it's good because you've said it and then you could come away and not need to say it again (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

However, managers also recognized the need to control emotions in order to preserve the constructive focus of the meeting and move towards the common goal.

We all have a tendency to have a moan, and it's nice to get on that bandwagon. We need to control that and stay more focused on the reporting of performance (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

There are tensions within the team, there are tensions, and some real tensions in the team. But to be fair to the individuals, they don't let those tensions get in the way of their relationship. So there's tension between Ian and Oscar's area. There's tension between Oscar and Abby's area in terms of interactions. We have the finance and HR people come along to a

meeting and I know there's tensions between the finance team and Abby's team in terms of roles and responsibilities. So it's just making sure that those tensions don't get out of hand if you like (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.).

6.1.2.2.2 Interaction

A number of sub-themes related to various forms of communication between the managers at the PMR meetings were grouped under the label “Interaction”. These sub-themes described the way in which people related to each other during the meeting. This section presents the findings within each of the four sub-themes – “Discussion”, “Power Games”, “Reading the Individuals”, and “Using the Meeting”.

The dynamics of the discussion in relation to the ostensive aspect of the routine was described in the previous section. Likewise, specific processes taking place through the discussion as the medium are examined in various sections throughout the thesis. The findings presented in this section focus on the ways in which the discussion was experienced by managers as a form of interaction.

All managers in both organizations talked at length about various aspects of discussion. It is not surprising, given that conversation is a basic form of communication. Moreover, the nature of the subject examined in this thesis – the interplay of different views of the same process in a PMR meeting – almost explicitly calls for talking as the primary mode of communication. This was stated concisely, yet powerfully, by Andrew – the Director in The Energy Co.:

Some of it, in some respects having to take action, formal actions and bits and pieces is one way, but of course really what you want to do is for people to be talking.

More specifically, discussion was viewed by the managers in several ways. Overwhelmingly – and in the most general way – discussion was viewed as a tool to highlight problems and differences in individual views and as a medium for converging on a mutually acceptable solution. Various aspects of this view provided the majority of the data in the “Discussion” sub-theme.

Emma and [the Quality Control Manager] could [make decisions on their own]. But it helps to have other people there I think. Because again, because it's a judgement, if someone says "well no that's wrong, because don't forget this happened last week. The – we had some problems with brew house" or whatever. Then you think, oh well, okay we won't make a change this week because it was, that was obviously because of some exceptional circumstances that we know that have changed. So it helps to have other people there (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

Well I think it [the discussion – A.P.] does [help], I think you get a clear understanding really of what the objectives should be. I think if we go away, everybody will interpret something slightly different. And it's clear when we actually sit down around the table to decide what those objectives should actually be (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

In this sense, sharing information was the most widely quoted use of discussion during the PMR meeting.

We need everyone to be there, yeah. And I don't think you could exclude people and have some separate meetings. You all need to be there. ... So that we can share the information. Because we're not always meeting on a regular basis (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Discussion is also helpful for testing the strength of one's own assumptions and generating alternatives.

It's just nice to hear other people's views on what you think is a problem or not. It's just a matter of hearing other people's views and gleaning what you can from that. It could change what you think, it probably might not. It's just an opportunity to bounce ideas off people isn't it? (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Two other roles of discussion highlighted by the managers were the discussion quality and the power of the discussion to generate the ownership of an issue by the participants

of the PMR meeting. Although discussion was generally viewed positively by the managers, they often distinguished high and low quality of the discussion.

Whilst it's nice to have a chat, at 4 o'clock you're still talking about things, no, I don't think so. ... Allow debate but it can't just deteriorate into waffle. Because I think ours do sometimes. I think ours - I think it tails off, the quality of the discussion tails off, and that's the point to bring it back (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Finally, discussing an issue publicly often forced managers to take a particular view and assume ownership of an issue.

If nothing else, it brought that issue to the table. I think we might have missed that issue in the way the meetings were structured before. Because it would have been dealt with outside of a meeting instead of having an opportunity to discuss it with everybody there. ... There's minutes taken. It's a lot more formal, and there's a wider audience than you would normally have just on the end of the telephone ... I think it generates a bit more ownership and it makes people feel more accountable I think (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Overall, although discussion had several specific properties highlighted by the managers I interviewed, its primary purpose was to be the medium for facilitating the majority of the processes taking place during the PMR meeting.

Sometimes, although very rarely, the interaction of the individuals at the PMR meeting resembled power games. This was present only at The Energy Co. and only when the chairperson left the meeting for an extended period without explicitly passing his duties onto someone else.

And also there is a bit of an issue, you can see people playing around with who's supposed to be leading this. Is it Ian? Or Harry wants to take a lead. Everyone else is sitting back thinking, oh I don't really care actually, you know? Make up your minds between you. It's not important to me who is leading this meeting. But perhaps we should, once someone like Andrew

goes out of it, say, alright Richard, you're leading it, or Abby, you're leading it. Make that formal announcement so that - not for status purposes, but so that we can... But when you don't do that, egos start coming in and people start thinking, well who are you, telling me to - that we're going to do this. No, I'm telling you, this is... The status and ego thing starts coming in to play. Which you must have sort of sensed yesterday. It was all rather jokey. But the subtext was - yeah (Richard - Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

It needs to be noted, however, that, although this form of interaction was certainly present, it never escalated to any form of confrontation. Repeating a part of the quotation above, "it was all rather jokey".

Reading the individuals was a common non-verbal form of interaction during the meeting. Understanding the state or stance of the people around the table helped the managers to improve their understanding of the situation and to obtain instant feedback that is sometimes more powerful than an explicit verbal message.

Yeah, you sort of pick up, you can pick up - there are several things you can pick up. One is how close is that individual to understanding some of the issues within that thing. And that can come across in the confidence or otherwise in the presentation. You can pick up when there's a degree of uncertainty. Now in terms of not quite sure how we're going to crack this problem. In fact not even quite sure what the problem is. And really those are the type of problems we need to be surfacing. Because someone knows there's an issue but can't quite define the problem then we need to try and get that out (Andrew - Director, The Energy Co.).

Well I think you get something that's instant, something that's probably more sincere, and something that gives you the comfort level that it is genuine of a response. ... If you have that opportunity to put your point of view, to explain what you're doing, then people have got the whites of your

eyes. They can, you know whether they're listening and understand (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co).

Finally, interaction in the PMR meeting could be used to achieve a certain goal. Most managers spoke about two distinct (although related) ways in which they relied on interaction at the meeting to advance specific priorities – first, using the meeting to secure cooperation of the rest of the team; and second, to make an input into the discussion that would be recognized by the team and would influence future decisions.

Interaction at the meeting could be used to gain the team's commitment to certain decisions.

...if you just do something in isolation you don't necessarily get the buy-in. And you might decide, well I'll go down that route, but actually you get better cooperation if you went down a slightly different route to get there (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Interaction could also be used to ensure that an individual's input is noted and accepted by the team and incorporated into the new common understanding. Sometimes, it could be done to highlight the significance of one's own area and influence the decisions of others.

[Preparing for the meeting] made me aware of what are the messages that I needed to convey to the rest. The thinking about areas where perhaps I needed other people to help me and support me through areas that they are responsible for. And also, where there's any key messages I needed to get across to the rest of the team of a general nature. So, for example, data management was a good example. Where I needed the message to get across there to everyone in the team, is that whenever they're dealing with data they need to be very aware that it's such an important part of the business. They need to focus on it. ... So that was for me about thinking what do I need to be influencing? What messages do I need to be getting across? (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

In other cases, it could simply flag up an individually significant issue that would otherwise pass unnoticed.

Yeah, so what I'm looking at, I try to picture, is how that's going to impact on me. Or how it's going to impact on operations up here really. Because one of the things that's often discussed at those meetings is non brewing days. If they're having days when they decide not to brew, well to a large extent that doesn't make much difference to production themselves, which days they don't produce. So if they say, like Fergus said this morning they are planning a non production day next Wednesday. Well that actually fits quite well with me because we can probably make use of some of the resource next Wednesday. Now had he said, we're not planning to brew next Tuesday, that would have been an ideal opportunity for me to say, well is there any chance that you can make that Wednesday instead of Tuesday, because I can actually use your people on Wednesday, whereas they're not going to be any use to me on a Tuesday (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

Overall, the data suggest that the interaction in PMR meeting can take different forms and be used for different purposes. Interaction itself is an important component of experiencing the PMR meeting and forms a separate theme in the discussion of engagement in the meeting.

6.1.2.2.3 The Space

“The Space” was an interesting second-level theme in the discussion of engagement in the process of experiencing the PMR meeting. This theme described a particular state which the managers in the PMR meetings sometimes entered. This state was characterized by a number of attributes that described the way in which managers used their attention and made decisions during the PMR meeting. The label for this theme came from one of the interviewees’ description of this state – I decided to keep the original, although admittedly colloquial, name rather than attempt to invent a new, if more neutral, label.

The state of being “in the Space” had profound implications for the ways in which managers handled the information, discussion, and other elements of the PMR meeting. The findings presented in this section list the attributes of this state and examine the managers’ experiences within each attribute.

In the most general sense, being in the Space refers to the state of being aware of what is happening in the meeting at the moment and paying attention to it in an open and critical way. In this sense, the state of being in the Space is reflective of engagement rather than simply of awareness³⁶. The Space requires personal engagement.

So yes, so it was a very useful debate, but actually I don't think it was of interest to most other people. I mean I think it was interesting to see that, but I don't think that they were in the same space there in terms of saying well it's, look - you know, Ian certainly wouldn't have been. All Ian would have been concerned about is whether or not, when I close a job where do I record my assets. He's not going to get beyond that. Because it's not important to him. And so that was that (Oscar – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

More specifically, however, the Space is characterized by several key components. First, when managers are in the Space, their habitual responses are often lifted, allowing them to make a decision based on the demands of the present moment and the context of the situation rather than retreating into past patterns of decisions. In this sense, the views held by the managers, including the ostensive aspect of the routine, become amenable to change. Second, the Space is characterized by allowing new and relevant information to emerge and be integrated into the discussion. In other words, relevant information is prompted – sometimes unexpectedly – during the discussion and affects the dynamics of the ostensive aspect of the routine. These components are now reviewed in detail and illustrated by the data.

When managers are fully engaged and are paying attention in a critical and open manner, their usual automatic responses are sometimes suspended, and decisions are

³⁶ This is the reason why this theme was coded under the first-order theme of “Engagement”.

made based on the demands of the context and the moment. Such decisions are normally very effective and sometimes creative.

I mean a perfect example is that thing about resources wasn't it? We're really struggling with resources and Harry - it's human nature to be defensive and to try and keep as big an empire as you have for most managers. There was talk about resources. It was obvious that the primary resource requirement is for the concept section in asset management. The secondary one is in the delivery functions. And Harry very gracious to himself said I've got 11, I could without too much difficulty give up 5, or was it 6? He got a bit carried away then didn't he? So he's got his little silo of 11, with a headcount of 11 and he volunteered to give up 5 or 6. Now if that meeting hadn't have happened and it had been done on a silo basis and someone from HR or finance had come along and said, oh we need to reduce headcount for HR, or we need to reduce the budget from finance, can you give up any of your people, I can only guess what the response would be. But as a team, with a shared understanding of pressures and drivers and priorities and meeting objectives and strategies, he gave up half of his headcount. Well you wouldn't have had that without the meeting. If Oscar had passed him on the stairs, just happened to have said, any chance I can nick some of your headcount, he - maybe guess what the response would be (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

You can see some of the issues that people are having and then it enables you to think, well are there some things that I can be doing that can help that process. And are there things that I can help to do with those issues. Am I doing something that's actually causing some of those problems maybe? Is there - in terms of issues and ways forward, is there some way in which we can collectively help to support what we're trying to do? And in many cases because of the issues we face around not enough people in the business, is it about prioritisation as well. So in some cases it might be that we might have to drop something to enable something to happen in say Ian or Oscar's area that's more important. So we need to have that

understanding and that debate to move it forward (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

In a similar way, the structure of the discussion itself could be amended to allow new priorities to be recognized, if the present moment indicated such a need.

It will be Andrew's decision and he will often communicate that. But if someone has an issue which they wish to raise and it has implications that Andrew isn't aware of, then he's always open to take on board their views and add that into his prioritisation if he so, if he feels that's the correct way. If there was say a short period of the time left towards the end of the meeting, and someone was to actually highlight, he might have a personal interest in making sure this particular item is discussed, nine times out of ten Andrew would agree to that (Ashley – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Besides allowing new decisions and priorities to emerge and be shaped by the demands of the present moment, being in the Space often prompted the managers to come up with or recall relevant information without being asked to do so explicitly.

As you know it's a weekly meeting. What it does do is it pushes people to actually divulge information which some people within the group might be aware of and others not necessarily are. [A.P.: Pushing people in what way?] Well because you're in that formal, you're there to discuss those type of issues. For instance, the colour issue with [the beer brand]. Now both Emma and Ed was aware that they'd had one brew which was slightly out of spec. I had been asked the question within a pub, bad colour, might even know about - now they knew that they'd had that one. Well that hadn't been fed back to other people in the organisation. And that would have never come out in conversation anywhere else. So the fact that you're actually there, you're looking at that information does actually bring it to the fore I think (Erwin – Supply Chain Manager, The Brewery).

Well yeah, something that came out yesterday when we were talking about, in my delivery bit, Ian came up with a suggestion about how we might be

more productive in the switch gear changes. I don't know whether you picked it up. He was talking about the use of generators and how you might sort of configure switching off some of the substations so that you could perhaps either do more or it was a quicker way of doing it. Now, I hadn't heard that before and obviously he hadn't done it himself before. Considering that he was responsible for this area, it was obviously something that he hadn't approached previously. So yes, I mean those sort of meetings can bring out some useful pieces of information, snippets of information (Richard – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

The key factor in this process of letting new information emerge and be incorporated into the reflection is the willingness to relinquish a certain degree of control over the discussion and allow new information to be recognized. As Olivia – a Senior Manager at The Energy Co. – said in almost a throwaway comment,

*What's the role of the discussion? Well I think it is to raise awareness. I think it gives us the opportunity to say, well actually I've got similar issues, or that causes me problems. **Whatever sort of comes out of it really** (emphasis added).*

This openness to debate and the willingness to abandon constant control over the discussion and participation comes from collective engagement with the people whom one trusts to be honest, open, and constructive. I would go so far as to hypothesize that, were I not fortunate to work with the teams that fit this description, the powerful theme of being in the Space would be altogether missing from my findings.

Collective engagement was significant for two reasons. First, it allowed the managers to feel the bond that made engagement possible.

*So I think it's useful that we meet as a team so that we can just share something. A moment, or whatever it is. [A. P.: So not only in terms of the tasks, but also in terms of the?] **Engagement!** (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).*

Second, having people engaged in the conversation gave the managers an opportunity to respond to immediate reactions and maintain an open conversation.

Well regular, day to day interaction tends to be by email. So you can't be sure if anyone's read it. Can't be sure that they understand it. If you have that opportunity to put your point of view, to explain what you're doing, then people have got the whites of your eyes. They can, you know whether they're listening and understand (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.)

However, another – perhaps more important – component enabling the characteristics of the Space described earlier was the ability to place one's trust in the individuals involved in the PMR meeting. In the interviews, the managers commented extensively on the importance of relying on the goodwill of the colleagues in the PMR meeting.

I think generally, I don't think we have any issues. In the team I don't think there's really any side to anybody. I think you know, it's an open and honest debate. And the interaction is good within the team (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

You know, when you're in there, that's the environment I like. I like to work with people who, that enjoying their work and they're doing the, and trying to be the best they can be and you know help us take the organisation forward. And actually Andrew's team I think is in that light. There's no-one there throwing hand grenades, you know, trying to upset things or - people open their mouth when they've got a genuine concern or opportunity. It's very constructive, I think it's a very constructive conversation that we hold. ... I've never experienced a time in that meeting where I've felt that it's not appropriate for me to speak up (Harry – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

As the discussion in this section demonstrates, “The Space” is a particular state, which is shaped by the openness of the managers and their willingness to relinquish habitual responses in favour of contextual decision-making as well as by the prevailing

relationships in the PMR meeting. The Space is a very important element of the process of experiencing the ostensive aspect of the routine, as it is one of the key enablers of the change in the ostensive aspect.

6.1.2.2.4 *Supra-individual processes*

The last second-level theme in the discussion of engagement included a number of processes that explicitly involved a number of individuals. These processes used individual experiences to establish links that spanned different views and in a sense transcended subjective experiences to generate common inter-subjective structures forming the ostensive aspect of the routine. The data presented in this section are organized into four sub-themes: *Team as a Decision Maker*, *Shared Understanding*, *Shaping the Message or Action*, and *Virtual Structure*. These sub-themes are now discussed in turn.

In certain cases, an individual would suspend his or her own process of constructing a view individually, allowing the common view to emerge in the discussion between the members of the team during the PMR meeting. In these cases, the authorship of the ostensive aspect of the routine belonged to the team, and the ostensive aspect itself was shared by the team members³⁷.

Well so we can actually all look at them and decide why something's changed. Because it's not always straightforward. If one parameter goes out it's because of something. So it's about taking, I suppose a collective view as to why it's doing that (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

I've done - with, particularly this putting people to work paper, within Major Investments, I have run a number of workshop, telephone conference call workshops. I drafted, I prepared a draft document, sent that out for review. And basically we've been reviewing that together as a team so that we've got really all the angles covered going forward and it's, also it's a

³⁷ At this point, one has to be careful to avoid slipping into the objectivist view of the routine. The ostensive aspect is still an individual's subjective view of the routine, and the newly emerged view may be seen as an amendment, validation, or synchronization of the individual's prior ostensive (cf Section 6.1.2.2.1). However, the new view was created jointly by the members of the team.

team document. It's not just mine, sitting in an ivory tower, coming up with something (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Managers also often spoke of the benefits of having or creating a shared understanding, which could be conceptualized as a set of overlapping individual views of the routine. Having a shared understanding of the routine enabled the managers to see the connections between individual areas and hence allowed ideas to emerge in the bottom-up direction.

We need to get more explicit conversations about the performance ratings and try and create within the team much greater visibility of what's going on in each of the areas. Rather than me just dropping in and saying, well let's have a look at that, or I'll have a look at that. No. So try and get much better shared understanding within the team of the challenges that there are within the team (Andrew – Director, The Energy Co.).

Having a shared picture of the operations also allowed managers to determine the degree of overlap of their own view of the routine with the collectively held shared model.

...we are all sharing that view, and sometimes things come up and you think, well why is that person doing that? Now we could do it in our own teams but when you see it in context of the whole group then somebody will stand out. Whereas if you get a report sometimes you don't know if that's good or bad. But when you see the whole group, or the whole Major Investments Division, it sometimes is obvious that there's a problem there or an issue there (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

The processes of creating a shared understanding in the team contributed to one of the most important supra-individual processes in the findings – the process of shaping a structure that would be translated into message or an action and either cascaded down throughout the organization or implemented directly. The differences between the organizational level of the PMR meetings in The Brewery and in The Energy Co. were very apparent here.

The outcomes of the PMR in The Brewery were normally translated into action immediately and often by the managers themselves. In this sense, the role of the discussion at the PMR meeting was to craft an action that could subsequently be implemented. The members of the team would go through all the processes of the PMR described in this thesis in order to arrive at an actionable result.

We'll make, or have an action. But it might not be effective. And we'll find that out next week. Because it's brewing, it's a live process, it's not an exact - we can't just say, right, I'll add 0.5% alcohol. It's not as quite simple as that. But all we can do is put all our knowledge in some, put together the actions (Emma – Quality Manager, The Brewery).

We make a decision based on all those variables! But what, where we think, where we think that it was also heading and what we need to do to make them come back. But it's not an exact science at all. It's judgement, it's opinion. ... Emma and [the Quality Control Manager] could do it [on their own – A.P.]. But it helps to have other people there I think. Because again, because it's a judgement (Ed – Head Brewer, The Brewery).

The situation in The Energy Co., however, was very different. The PMR meeting I observed was the meeting of the Senior Management Team, and none of the managers around the table was involved in the direct execution of actions. However, in a way similar to arriving at an action in The Brewery, the managers in The Energy Co. spoke about arriving at a message – a consistent message that could be cascaded downwards in the organization. They used various expressions to describe this process, some of which were very graphic and very powerful.

*It's important I think that we get consensus and that we, in those meetings we do have the discussion so that **we are going forward with one voice**. We're obviously the leaders of our part of the business and we need to be clear on the direction that we're actually giving the rest of the team. So better getting consensus I think amongst ourselves to start with and being*

clear really on what we need to project, going forward (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).

*Yeah, and then I go to my team and I'll tell them, well we've said this but we're actually going to do this. And they'll go oh-oh-oh, and they'll go away to their teams and tell the story. **Because partly you've crafted some of the story there. Andrew will have crafted some of the story from when he heard it and you start to develop - it's not fairyland but you start to pull the strands together and explanation.** ... Because if we have different views of the truth, so part of that discussion is, well what are we going to say? ... And we'll play that common explanation. I hope we do anyway. [A. P.: So it actually helps to?] **Construct a story.** ... If not, we're not parrot fashioned and we don't come out with exactly the same but we come out with a common view of how we're going to tell people (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

*I think (a) it [the meeting – A.P.] brings governance. It's the kick - it should be the kick off and it is the kick off of communication sometimes. Between me to cascade out. It's the formal place to kick off communication. ... **[We] shape the message.** From what you hear round the table. ... **[It] shapes, helps shapes my thinking with my direct reports.** That they then take that message and talk to their direct reports, and then it just cascades down. (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).*

Shaping the common way the operations were to be understood and passing it down to the lower levels of the organization was one of the key supra-individual processes of an individual's engagement in the PMR meeting. Although the team at The Brewery was concerned with shaping a direct action and the team in The Energy Co. was concerned with shaping a message for subsequent cascading, the process of arriving at a common actionable view of the routine was very similar.

The processes described in this section received their strongest expression when the interplay of participants' views pushed them beyond their subjectivity so significantly

that it effectively approached an objectified view of the routine. This view in turn acted as a virtual structure constraining and guiding the possible actions of the entire team.

First, a certain degree of objectification was necessary, as the managers in both companies I studied had responsibilities for areas other than the routine reviewed at the PMR meeting. Consequently, at the meeting they all needed to agree and focus on the same object of attention – the routine that was reviewed. For instance, the responsibilities of all managers in The Energy Co. went beyond the Major Investments Division, and hence, participating at the PMR meeting I observed, managers spoke about the need to concentrate explicitly on the Major Investments Division operations. In other words, they needed to single out and agree on what constitutes the Major Investments routine.

I think we know what the picture is. It's just sometimes we need just to piece it back together again. And that meeting probably does just bring it back as a - it brings the business to one where then, we then in-between the meetings to work slightly apart. And don't forget, each senior manager at that table, like myself has got other things than Major Investments they're dealing with. And that's an opportunity as well to make sure that from a general business point of view that's brought together as well (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

More specifically, however, an objectified view of the routine created a virtual structure guiding the actions of the individuals, especially in the cases where a formal structure was absent.

*There's a lot of duplication and - that the business is not particularly well - unfortunately Andrey, we live in a world at the moment where we love to fire fight. The organisation is, enjoys fire fighting and is not very good at forward planning. **So therefore if you don't know what other people are up to, if you're in an organisation where everything is all planned and structured and that you'd have less opportunity, there'd be less opportunities for missing things. And there'd be less opportunities to be able to benefit from working together. But in a fire fighting mode as we***

operate, you do need to know what's going on because you can then pick up and use things that way (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co., emphasis added).

The significance of this structure was so high that the absence of regular personal contact with the team (and hence the opportunity to be included in the creation of the common view) meant that one's interests might be excluded from the regular operations.

And it does, you may not think so, sitting in as an observer, but it - I think it probably tends to gel a little bit. That if you didn't have. Being the distance we are apart, we don't see each other. I don't see Oscar. I might only actually ever see him sometimes at that meeting at the month. I have seen him a few times this month. But it could be a whole month before I see him. And that means that could be 2 months before I see him, or even 3. And then you'd start excluding that bit of the business from the way you work, wouldn't you? Inadvertently. Because you don't see them (Ian – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Sometimes, the objectified view of the operations or a particular area of operations were so strong and resistant to change that influencing it while it was created was the only opportunity to shape it.

*But, so I was glad that I could contribute to it before it was set in stone, because some of the assumptions made I thought weren't great. But having said that, if I was Harry, I'd have put something down, knowing that it was a strawman for people to talk about anyway. So it's not a reflection, it's just - you put something down and people like it or they don't. **But it was important that we debated that. Because once it gets set in stone, you're stuck with it** (Abby – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).*

Finally, the role played by this structure was so important that, even if the processes for creating it did not exist, it would have to be done in a different way. The most obvious

way to substitute the creation of such a structure was to push the integrative function up to the chairperson.

...if you didn't have these meetings, you would then be relying on your regular meetings with Andrew. ... So you'd have to rely on the fact that if you're having discussions about something that that would lodge in Andrew's mind, hang on a minute, someone else in another area. So that - there's a danger there that you could end up just being very siloed in terms of approaches. ... It moves it upwards to Andrew, [and it would be] extremely difficult for him. Because he has got the wider piece as well in his, with the Executive Meeting, he's picking up all the other issues that are going on as well. So he's trying - to keep all of that together would be very difficult for him (Alex – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

[If the meetings did not exist], I think it would put an awful lot of responsibility and workload on Andrew then to drive it forward. We are his senior team. And therefore we take responsibility for assisting him in actually moving the business in that right direction. It would put more responsibility and workload on Andrew if we weren't there having those meetings. ... He'd have to integrate everybody. And that would be very, very difficult. Whereas at the moment, we do it off our own back really (Olivia – Senior Manager, The Energy Co.).

Supra-individual processes described in this section describe the part of the engagement that requires the highest degree of interaction on the part of the individuals involved in the meeting and that approaches the view of the ostensive aspect of the routine as an objectified shared understanding of the operations. However, the focus on the individual's subjective experience remains, as all accounts presented here are accounts of the individual experience of various elements and processes of the PMR meeting.

The discussion of supra-individual processes concludes the analysis of the findings within the “Engagement” theme. All together, the discussion of individual processes, interaction, The Space, and supra-individual processes provides a detailed account of

the way meeting participants engage with the experience of participating in the PMR meeting. Together with the discussion of the processes of attention, these themes describe the way the meeting participants experience the PMR meeting, or, more specifically, the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting.

This section also concludes the discussion of findings of the entire Template Analysis and provides a comprehensive list of themes constituting the meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting.

6.2 From constructs to relationships

The output of the Template Analysis is a hierarchical structure of main themes that reflect the key features of the interviewees' experiences. Most of the themes, therefore, can be treated as constructs in the description of such experiences. The presentation of the findings in the preceding section followed the structure of the Template Analysis reflected in Figure 5 and discussed all emergent constructs sequentially. However, in order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the elements comprising the meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting, it is useful to examine the possible relationships between these constructs as the meeting participants perceive them.

Although the discussion in Section 6.1 was organized by the theme, the data shown in the section demonstrate that meeting participants rarely, if ever, talk about individual features of their experience in isolation, without linking it to other themes. Thus, while the task of the preceding section was to present a comprehensive array of themes and demonstrate their hierarchical structure, the task of this section is to explore the connections between individual themes that were intimated by the data. Considering that the discussion of these connections was inseparable from the discussion of individual themes, to accomplish this task, this section draws upon the data presented earlier. However, the organizing principle for the analysis in this section is no longer the hierarchical structure of the constructs, but rather the perceived relationships between the elements constituting the whole of the meeting participants' experience. Therefore, the results of the Template Analysis represented in Figure 5 are decomposed in order to

provide the material for a more sophisticated model of the meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect in the context of the PMR meeting.

In the following sub-sections, the key relationships between the constructs suggested by the data are discussed in turn. Since the focus of the discussion is the experience of the meeting participants within the context of the PMR meeting, the analysis of the relationships between the constructs are arranged by the main categories of the Experience theme – *Attention* and *Engagement* (i.e., the right side of Figure 5). The themes comprising the discussion of the PMR elements in their contextual role are discussed in their relationship to the elements of attention and engagement.

6.2.1 Attention

6.2.1.1 Moderators of attention

Attention was the only theme the discussion of which explicitly incorporated its relationships with other themes in the analysis of the meeting participants' experience. The discussion of the moderators of attention³⁸ distinguished a number of factors that influenced the attention of the managers in the PMR meeting. These factors included attitude, interest, relevance, preparation, experience, multitasking, number of issues discussed at the meeting, and the intensity of the discussion. As the label “Moderators” suggests, the relationship between these factors and attention was that of moderation – in other words, these factors affected the ability of managers to pay and sustain attention during the PMR meeting.

However, the analysis of attention as comprising two components – autonomous and directed³⁹ – makes it possible to make the discussion of moderators more detailed by splitting the list of moderators into moderators of autonomous and directed attention. The first six moderators in the list (attitude, interest, relevance, preparation, experience, and multitasking) are factors that belong to the individuals themselves and are beyond the direct control of the management. This in turn suggests that they may moderate the autonomous component of attention. The other two moderators (the number of issues discussed and the intensity of the discussion) are determined by the factors outside of

³⁸ Cf Section 6.1.2.1.3

³⁹ See Section 6.1.2.1 for a more detailed discussion.

the meeting participants' discretion – the design elements of the meeting itself as well as the actions of the chairperson – and therefore can be seen as moderators of the directed component of attention.

The discussion of the moderators of directed attention in the preceding paragraph brings up an interesting point – these moderators seem to be related to the way the meeting is designed and conducted, which has been discussed in the Section 6.1 within the theme labelled *PMR meeting as the context of experience*⁴⁰ (i.e., the left side of Figure 5). Thus, it may be hypothesized that other constructs comprising this theme may also include moderators of the directed component of attention. This is logical since the *Content* and the *Structure* of the meeting are designed specifically to focus the participants' attention on specific issues, and the wider organizational *Context* of the meeting cannot but exert an influence on the participants' attention. A closer examination of the data in these three second-level themes comprising the theme *PMR meeting as the context of experience* reveals that this hypothesis is indeed well-founded.

The detailed analysis of the themes comprising the discussion of the PMR meeting as the context of meeting participants' experience includes certain elements that were identified simply as the salient components of the PMR meeting. However, these themes in the broad sense can be seen as factors directing the attention of the managers participating in the meeting. Indeed the data presented earlier demonstrate that the context, content, and structure of the PMR meeting can have a moderating effect on the attention of the meeting participants. For instance, such content elements as data presentation and action taking have shown to have an attention-directing influence in the meeting⁴¹. Likewise, contextual factors such as the physical environment of the meeting and the organizational culture have profound effects on the way meeting participants focus their attention in the PMR meeting⁴². Finally, the structural elements of the meeting by their nature have a direct impact on meeting participants' attention. Meetings are designed and conducted in order to focus on a particular issue, and the second-level theme labelled *Structure* captures the elements of the design and conduct

⁴⁰ Cf. Section 6.1.1

⁴¹ See Sections 6.1.1.1.1 and 6.1.1.1.2 for a more detailed discussion and the relevant illustrations.

⁴² See Section 6.1.1.2 for a more detailed discussion and the relevant illustrations.

of PMR meetings. Such factors as the composition of the team, the actions of the chairperson, the formal structure of the meeting determined where and to what extent the meeting participants focused their attention⁴³. Thus, the content, context and structure of the PMR meeting in broad sense can be seen as factors influencing the directed component of the attention of the meeting participants.

Returning to the list of moderators which opened this section, one can see that the two moderators of the directed attention in the list – the number of issues discussed and the intensity of the discussion – can be subsumed into the category of *Structure of the PMR*, as both of them represent issues of conduct. However, before the categories of *Content*, *Context*, and *Structure* can be considered to contain the complete list of moderators of directed attention discovered in the data, it is necessary to note that the discussion of *Targets* that appeared under the theme of *Directed Attention* does not seem to fit into this categorization. Although in theory it could be considered a contextual factor, the managers in the organizations I studied did not discuss it as such. Rather, they spoke of performance targets as a stand-alone source of attention-directing pressure that was not explicitly linked to any other theme in the discussion. Since this chapter is concerned with the presentation of the data, I decided to refrain from speculating and simply to report performance targets as a moderator of directed attention in addition to the three major categories discussed here.

In light of the discussion presented in this section of the chapter, the relationship between attention and its moderators can be represented by the Figure 7 below.

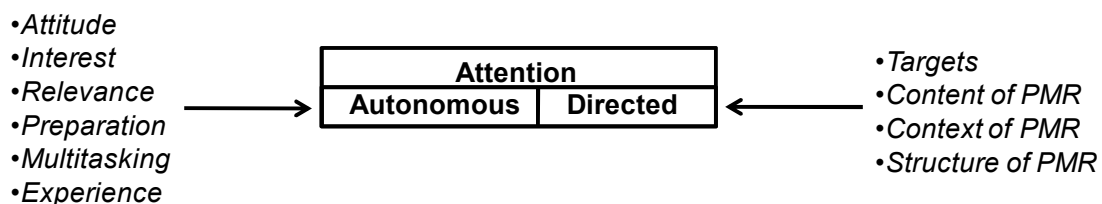


Figure 7. Attention and its moderators.

⁴³ See Section 6.1.1.3 for a more detailed discussion and the relevant illustrations

6.2.2 Engagement

The discussion of the constructs within the engagement theme involved several relationships that need to be made explicit.

6.2.2.1 Interaction and The Space

As the findings presented in Section 6.1 demonstrate, the themes of *Interaction* and *The Space* are key themes in the discussion of the meeting participants' engagement in the experience and are closely related⁴⁴. In order to understand their distinct roles, however, it is necessary to make this relationship more explicit. As the discussion of the data shows, interaction comprises various forms of communication between the meeting participants in the PMR meeting and refers to the indispensable element of the meeting. No meeting can be imagined without some form of interaction. The Space, however, is a state that is not always achieved (or, indeed, aimed for). While the processes in The Space make up one of the key themes in the discussion of meeting participants' engagement and while these processes are made possible only through interaction, there is nothing in the data to suggest that all meeting participants enter this state at every meeting. Therefore, the relationship between these two constructs is that of inclusivity. Interaction takes place at every meeting, and it may or may not enter the state of The Space during this interaction. Graphically, this relationship is represented by Figure 8 below.

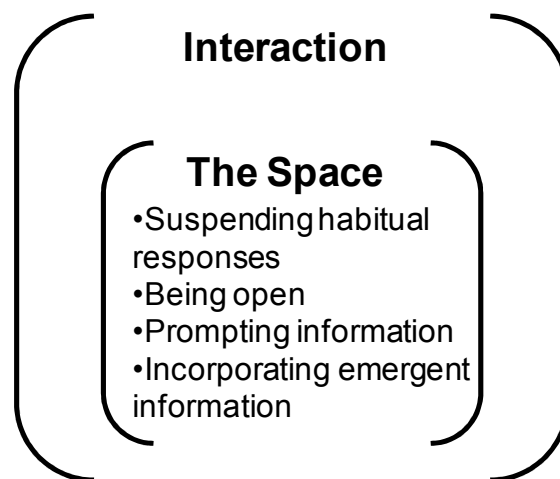


Figure 8. The relationship between Interaction and The Space.

⁴⁴ See Sections 6.1.2.2.2 and 6.1.2.2.3 for a more detailed discussion.

6.2.2.2 Individual processes and Interaction

As the discussion in Section 6.1.2.2.1 demonstrates, individual processes are the processes that link an individual agent's ostensive aspect of the routine to the interaction that takes place during the meeting. Thus, the individual processes themselves perform a connecting function that can be represented by the Figure 9 below.

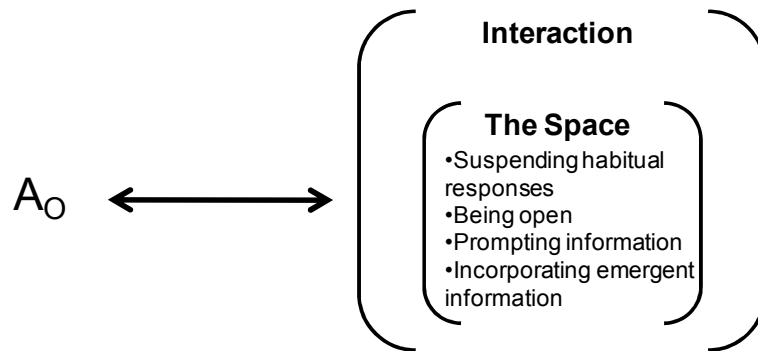


Figure 9. Individual processes as the link between the ostensive aspect and Interaction

The arrow in this figure contains all individual processes that link the ostensive aspect with the interaction at the meeting and is thus a concise representation of Figure 6 developed in Section 6.1.2.2.1. For the sake of clarity, this figure is presented again as Figure 10 below.

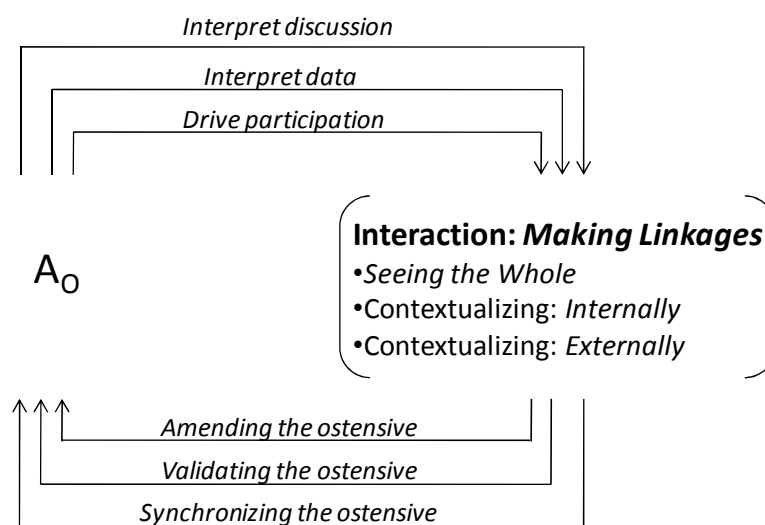


Figure 10. Individual processes involving the ostensive aspect

Consistent with the discussion of individual processes presented in Section 6.1.2.2.1, the arrow in Figure 9 is bidirectional, indicating that while individual agents use their ostensive aspect to drive their participation in the meeting, the interaction in the meeting in turn has an effect on the individual's ostensive aspect.

6.2.2.3 Supra-individual processes and Interaction

Supra-individual processes refer to the processes of the formation of a common, objectified ostensive aspect of the routine in the process of discussion and interaction during the PMR meeting⁴⁵. Therefore, they link the interaction element of the PMR meeting with one of its outputs – the common ostensive aspect of the routine under review. Similar to the discussion of individual processes in the preceding section, supra-individual processes perform a connecting function and can be represented by the Figure 11 below.

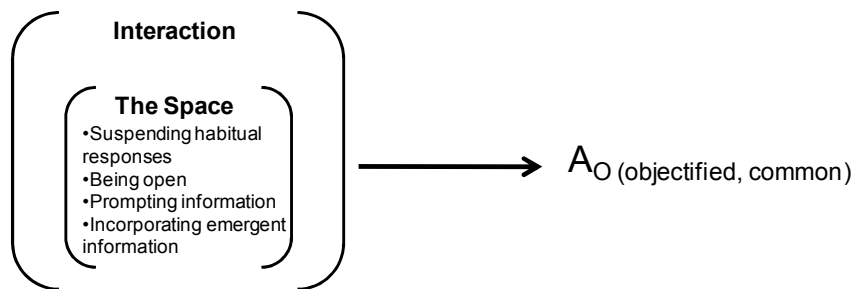


Figure 11. Supra-individual processes as the link between Interaction and the common ostensive aspect.

However, unlike in the case of individual processes discussed in the preceding section, the arrow is unidirectional, as the data presented substantial evidence that the common ostensive aspect may emerge from the interaction but no evidence that it may in turn affect the interaction.

6.2.3 Attention and Engagement

Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2 discussed the relationships between the elements of attention and engagement respectively. However, it is also necessary to examine the relationship between these major categories of experience themselves. As the data discussed in

⁴⁵ See Section 6.1.2.2.4 for a full discussion.

Section 6.1.2.1 demonstrate, managers viewed attention as a resource upon which they had to draw in order to be engaged in the processes constituting the PMR meeting. In this sense, attention can be seen as a requisite of engagement, and their relationship can be represented by Figure 12 below.

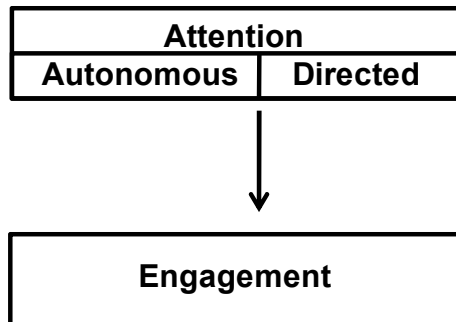


Figure 12. The relationship between Attention and Engagement.

The unidirectional arrow in the figure reflects the assumption that while engagement requires attention as a necessary prerequisite, it is possible to pay attention without being fully engaged in the processes of the PMR meeting.

6.2.4 Summary

While Section 6.1 presented the major constructs that emerged from the data through the use of Template Analysis, Section 6.2 continued data analysis to identify the relationships between the key constructs. The discussion of the relationships was driven by the two major themes constituting the analysis of the meeting participants' experience – *Attention* and *Engagement*. A number of relationships between the elements of both themes were identified, and the relationship between the themes themselves was discussed. As such, this section prepared the ground for the development of a more sophisticated model of the experience of meeting participants.

6.3 Conclusions

Chapter 6 presented the findings of the data analysis. These findings consist of two parts. First, through the use of Template Analysis, the major themes were identified which constituted meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. These hierarchically structured themes were

discussed in depth and illustrated by the data. However, the output of Template Analysis is simply a description of the experience, although certainly a very elaborate and powerful one. Nonetheless, in order to move to a more nuanced and more sophisticated understanding of meeting participants' experience, a second stage of analysis was performed. The data was analyzed further in order to determine the relationships between the key constructs that the data contained. Section 6.2 of this chapter presented and discussed these relationships. In the process of this analysis, the structure of the results obtained through Template Analysis was decomposed in order to allow the elements and their relationships to be organized in a different and more revealing way. This analysis prepared the findings of this study for the next stage of the discussion – the examination of their theoretical value and significance. This examination is the task of the next chapter.

PART III
WHAT THE STUDY TELLS

Chapter 7. Discussion: Theorizing the findings.

While the first two parts of the thesis described the problem addressed in the study and reported on the design, execution, and findings of the empirical stage of the research, Part III attempts to answer the question of what the data mean – first of all, in itself, and second, in relation to the problems outlined in Part I of this thesis. Chapter 7 explores the findings presented in Chapter 6 in light of their theoretical significance and connections with the relevant bodies of literature. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the value of the findings and to prepare the ground for the discussion of the key contributions of this research which is the topic of Chapter 8. In order to accomplish this task, the analysis in this chapter attempts to move beyond the examination of isolated constructs and relationships identified in Chapter 6 towards a more sophisticated and more coherent understanding of the experience of meeting participants.

7.1 Conceptual model

The detailed description of the meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting was presented in Chapter 6. It included a structured description of the key themes in the analysis of meeting participants' experience and identified the relationships between these themes. In order to arrive at a deeper understanding of meeting participants' experience, however, it is necessary to move from a description to a model, and this section attends to this task.

The model presented here is developed on the basis of the findings discussed in Chapter 6. This model brings together the key constructs developed in Section 6.1 according to the relationships identified in Section 6.2. As such, although its organizing principle differs from that of the Template Analysis, the model is a direct development of the structure of the findings shown in Figure 5 and maintains full genealogical links with it. Graphically this model is represented in Figure 13 below.

The main part of the model puts forward the key constructs and relationships constituting meeting participants' engagement with the experience of the ostensive

aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. The model suggests that the agents – the managers involved in the PMR meeting – come into the meeting with the views of the routine that may be different from each other.

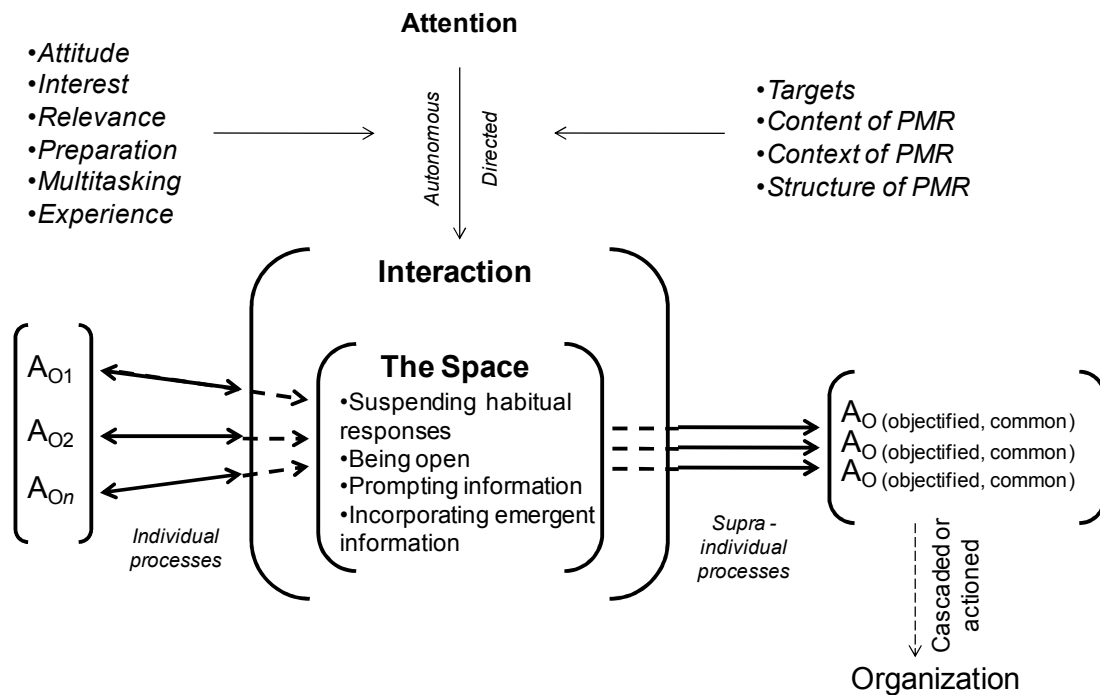


Figure 13. The experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. Conceptual Model.

In the model, these are denoted $A_{O1..n}$, representing the different subjectively held ostensive aspects of the routine. The meeting participants then enter the process of interaction⁴⁶ during which their subjectively held ostensive aspects participate in a number of processes⁴⁷, driving the involvement of the individuals in the discussion and sometimes leading to changes in the ostensive aspect.

In certain cases, meeting participants enter a particular state which is characterized by their ability, first, to suspend automatic responses, thus effectively relinquishing their ostensive aspect of the routine; second, to be open to being challenged and to incorporating new information; third, to generate or recall new relevant information; and fourth, to appreciate and incorporate the emergent contextual information into their

⁴⁶ Cf. Section 6.1.2.2.2 Interaction.

⁴⁷ Cf. Section 6.1.2.2.1 Individual Processes and Section 6.2.2.2 Individual processes and Interaction

view of the routine. The name given to this state by one of the interviewees was “The Space”⁴⁸. Since this state is not entered at every meeting⁴⁹, parts of the arrows describing the individual processes in the model are dashed.

Besides driving the amendments in the individual ostensive aspect of the routine, the interaction at the PMR meeting can facilitate the creation of a single ostensive aspect that would be shared, if only to an extent, by all participants in the meeting. This mechanism is supported by a number of distinct processes⁵⁰. Again, while these processes may involve the state of The Space, it is not a necessary condition. Therefore, parts of the arrows representing these processes in Figure 13 are drawn in a dashed line. Finally, this common view of the routine can act as an abstract structure that can subsequently be used for guiding an action or be cascaded throughout an organization as a coherent view of the routine⁵¹. Although, strictly speaking, this process does not describe a relationship between constructs and therefore was not introduced in Section 6.2, it was discussed by the meeting participants as an inseparable part of supra-individual processes⁵², which connects the output of the PMR meeting with the rest of the organization. Consequently, it was added to the model in Figure 13, although with a dashed line.

At the PMR meeting, the engagement with the experience of the ostensive aspect in general and with interaction processes in particular is heavily influenced by the degree and the quality of attention that meeting participants are paying⁵³. Attention is a key resource needed in the PMR meetings, and as such, it affects most of the processes describing the engagement in the PMR process. Two modes of attention can be distinguished – autonomous (i.e., self-directed) attention⁵⁴, which does not require external direction, and directed attention⁵⁵, which is prompted and guided by factors other than the participants’ sole discretion. Attention is in turn influenced by a number

⁴⁸ Cf. Section 6.1.2.2.3 The Space

⁴⁹ Cf. Section 6.2.2.1 Interaction and The Space

⁵⁰ Cf. Sections 6.1.2.2.4 Supra-individual processes and 6.2.2.3 Supra-individual processes and Interaction

⁵¹ Cf. Section 6.1.2.2.4 Supra-individual processes

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Cf. Section 6.1.2.1 Attention and Section 6.2.3 Attention and Engagement

⁵⁴ Cf. Section 6.1.2.1.1 Autonomous attention

⁵⁵ Cf. Section 6.1.2.1.2 Directed Attention

of factors, and the latter differ based on the mode of attention⁵⁶. Autonomous attention is affected by a number of individual moderating factors⁵⁷ such as personal attitude or the degree of preparation, and directed attention is influenced by the performance targets imposed on the meeting participants⁵⁸ and by the design of the PMR meeting itself⁵⁹.

In an attempt to reflect the complexity of the relationships observed in the data, the model presented in Figure 13 brings together multiple constructs that emerged in the process of data analysis. It also provides a significant level of detail, enumerating all factors affecting attention and listing the key characteristics of The Space. Finally, it implicitly combines two organizing principles – the sequential presentation of the process of the change in the ostensive aspect during the engagement and the logic of the effect of the attention and its moderators on the engagement. The resulting complexity of the model aids the synthesis of the findings and the emergence of a comprehensive representation of the phenomenon under study, but at the same time detracts from the conceptual clarity of the theorized constructs and their relationships. In response to this issue, I developed Figure 13 further into a more formal representation of the model, which, although less detailed, is better structured and therefore enhances the conceptual clarity and utility of the model. This representation is reflected in the Figure 14 below.

The constructs and relationships presented in Figure 14 are identical to those in Figure 13, and therefore describing Figure 14 in its entirety would be redundant. However, it is useful to highlight several elements. First, the formal model bounds and makes distinct the sequential presentation of the process of change in the ostensive aspect during the engagement that emerged from data analysis. The structure of this change is identical to that described in Figure 13 – the individual and supra-individual processes link the original ostensive aspect to the interaction (which may involve the state of The Space), and the resulting ostensive aspect depends on which processes took place. However, the

⁵⁶ Cf. Section 6.2.1.1 Moderators of attention

⁵⁷ Cf. Section 6.1.2.1.3 Moderators

⁵⁸ Cf. Section 6.1.2.1.2 Directed Attention

⁵⁹ Cf. Section 6.1.1 PMR meeting as the context of experience

formal model makes the distinction between the individual and supra-individual processes clearer.

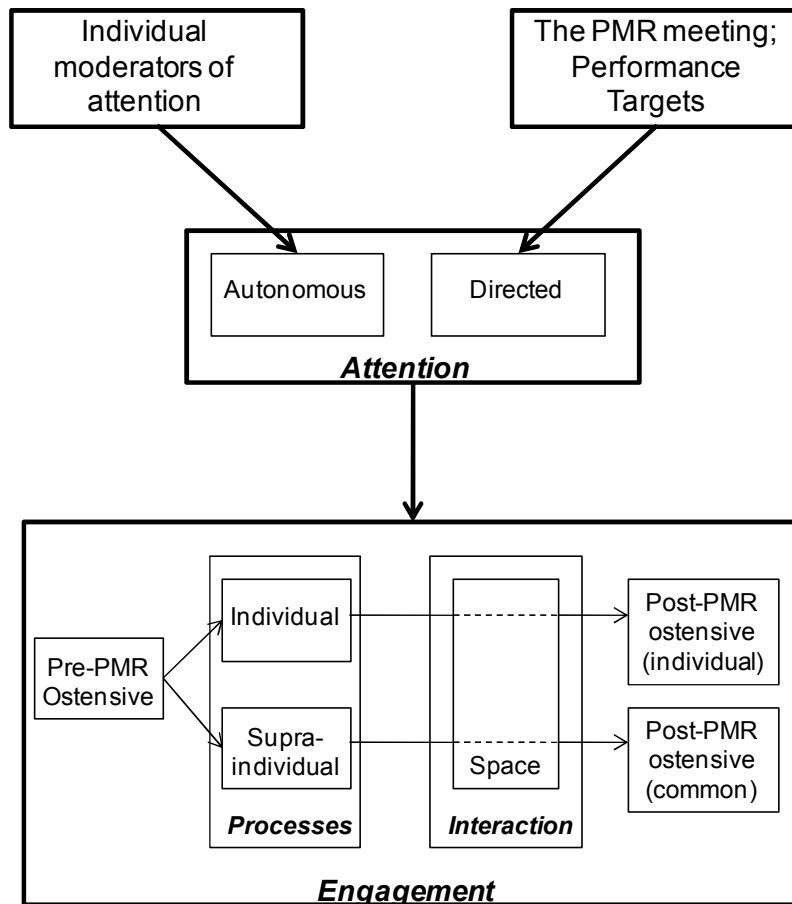


Figure 14. The formal conceptual model.

Second, the effectual relationship between attention and engagement is made clearer in the formal model. The model suggests that attention influences the process of engagement with the experience of the ostensive aspect in the context of the PMR meeting. The effects of moderators of attention on the distinct components of attention are likewise clearer.

Finally, the formal model makes it possible to theorize the mechanism of the effect of the PMR meeting on the ostensive aspect of organizational routines. As the model implies, the design and conduct of the PMR meeting (i.e., its context, content, and structure) along with performance targets affect the way attention is used during the

meeting, which subsequently influences the process of engagement that is directly responsible for the change in the ostensive aspect of the routine reviewed at the meeting.

The model outlined in Figure 13 and refined in Figure 14 develops the initial findings presented in Figure 5, emphasizing the relationships between the constructs that emerged during data analysis. As such, this model is the first step towards theorizing the findings of this research. Although both the constructs and the individual relationships were derived from the data and special care was taken in Chapter 6 to demonstrate the “trail of evidence”, the development of the complete model presented in this chapter is necessarily an act of synthesis. Therefore, further discussion may be helpful in order to determine the value of the model in terms of answering the questions set up in the beginning of this study and to establish its theoretical robustness.

The detailed discussion of the contribution of this model to the literature that shaped the research question is the subject of the next chapter. However, it is useful to mention briefly the link between the model as it is presented in Figure 14 and the research issue driving this study. In essence, the value of this model lies in its microscopic focus. Not only does the model examine a particular element of an organizational routine – the ostensive aspect – but it also spells out the processes that this element undergoes in a PMR meeting. In so doing, it describes the mechanism of stability and change in the structural aspect of organizational routines when the latter is placed under the pressure of PMM. As such, the model illuminates the elements and processes that link a key performance management practice – the PMR meeting – *directly* with the organizational processes that generate performance – the organizational routines.

The rest of this chapter, however, is dedicated to the discussion of the value and meaningfulness of the way the elements of the model have been put together. The model itself is relatively straightforward, and its logic is easy to understand. However, in order to determine the theoretical robustness of the postulated relationships and to establish the scope of the model, the links of the key constructs of the model to the

relevant literature domains need to be discussed. This task is explored in the next section.

7.2 Key emergent themes

7.2.1 Emergent findings: The need for a theoretical perspective

Although the formulation of the research question was guided by a particular analytical lens – organizational routines – its empirical part was exploratory in nature. In other words, the analytical lens determined the research question and the design of the interview questionnaire rather than the coding framework. The latter emerged inductively, following the procedures of Template Analysis. The strength of this approach was that the research process, although guided by a tight research question, allowed unpredictable emergent findings to be incorporated into the final model, thus extending the current knowledge of the examined phenomenon. However, this process encountered the classic difficulty of the grounded approach, namely, the fact that relevant and useful theoretical perspectives for the discussion of the results can be determined only *ex post* – after the data have been collected and the analysis carried out.

Furthermore, compared to purely grounded approaches, my case presented an additional difficulty. Although the structure of the findings and the conceptual model were developed inductively, the research question was formulated with the aid of the conceptual apparatus of the organizational routines perspective. Therefore, in order to maintain the consistency of the argument and the validity of the results, the theoretical perspective that is needed for a coherent argument needs to be compatible with the assumptions of the original analytical lens. With these considerations in mind, the key emergent themes in the findings were reviewed.

7.2.2 Key emergent themes

7.2.2.1 Attention

Attention was one of the most significant themes that emerged during data analysis – it was one of the two first-level themes in the analysis of meeting participants' experiences. Attention was an important resource used by meeting participants in the PMR meeting and a key factor affecting the dynamics of the ostensive aspect of the routine during the meeting. Given the prominent role of attention in the results of this

research, a more detailed discussion of the links of this theme with the related bodies of literature is useful.

7.2.2.1.1 *Attention in management accounting research*

Among the strands of research that comprise the Performance Measurement and Management literature, management accounting and management control systems devote the most effort to the analysis of the role of attention in performance management. As far back as in the early 1980s, researchers in management accounting pointed out the relative neglect of this theme in accounting research and discussed the benefits of concentrating efforts on filling this gap (e.g., Birnberg and Shields, 1984). The most enthusiastic answer to this call was provided by the stream of research dedicated to the analysis of auditing and auditor decisions.

In general, the process that this research examined assumed that auditors follow certain analytical procedures for examining client accounts where potential problems are expected, and these procedures largely determine the focus and the process of their attention (Wright and Ashton, 1989). The contributions to the research on auditing mostly focused on the questions of how auditors focus their attention during the analysis of the financial statements (e.g., Libby 1981, Hooper and Trotman, 1996) and what exactly the object of their attentions is (O'Donnell and Lehman, 1999). Most of these studies employed experimental methods (e.g., Hooper and Trotman, 1996; Phillips, 1999) and often focused on the performance of the auditing process (e.g., Libby and Trotman, 1993). As most of these studies used quantitative data, attention needed to be operationalized as a construct. In order to arrive at a measurable proxy, many studies, drawing on the research in psychology, considered attention in conjunction with memory and thus operationalized it as recall (Libby and Trotman, 1993; Phillips, 1999).

Although the literature on auditing provided a rich analysis of the processes of individual attention, it was of limited use for the discussion of the findings of this thesis. With its focus on the analytical procedures guiding the attention of individual auditors, the conceptualization of attention in the auditing literature could be linked to the category of *Directed Attention* in the final model of this thesis. Analytical procedures constrained and guided the attention of auditors just as performance targets, the actions

of the chairperson, and the design of the PMR meeting guided the attention of the managers in the meeting. The model, however, suggests that another component of the attentional resource – autonomous attention – could be distinguished and is influenced by a different set of factors. Furthermore, research on attention in auditing focused on the performance of individual auditors, i.e., on the effectiveness of the process of paying attention, rather than on the effect that attention has on the process of making decisions.

However, the research on the use of attention in auditing decisions may provide an interesting direction for elaborating some of the findings in this research. The concepts of serial and configural process strategies in the discussion of auditors' attention parallel some of discussion of the ways of analyzing performance data provided by the managers at The Brewery. The research on auditing noted that the examination of accounts may proceed according to two basic strategies: serially – i.e., paying attention to one item at a time and making the judgment after each item (Libby, 1981) – or configurally – i.e., searching for a pattern and moving from an item to an item in accordance with the pattern (Brown and Solomon, 1991; Hooper and Trotman, 1996). The choice of the strategy would be determined by the objective of the analysis. If the goal is to determine deviations from standards, a serial strategy is appropriate; if, however, the goal is to uncover a pattern in the data, a configural strategy may be more effective. The strategies could also be combined in the process of analysis (O'Donnell and Lehman, 1999).

The discussion of the process of examining the data at the PMR meeting in The Brewery can be seen as a combination of the basic strategies identified in the auditing literature. As the description in Chapter 6 demonstrates, the process begins as a step-by-step analysis of performance indicators (i.e., a serial strategy). However, the process then turns into a search for the pattern that can explain a particular problem in the system, and the indicators are examined configurally⁶⁰. A reasonable speculation here might be that, since the purpose of PMR meetings is to “manage performance” rather than merely to record a deviation from standards, the managers involved in these

⁶⁰ See Sections 6.1.1.1.1 and 6.1.2.1.1

meetings will adopt a configural strategy for paying attention in order to determine the causes of the problem.

Overall, the analysis of attention in the auditing strand of the management accounting literature has provided several insights that help to frame the discussion of the findings of this research. However, the framing of the problem, the conceptualization of the construct, and the methods employed by the research on auditing limit the usefulness of this perspective for theorizing the model developed in this thesis. Apart from the auditing strand, the development of the research on attention in the management accounting literature has been scarce. Rare contributions employed the construct, often *ad hoc*, to answer a wider problem, as in the case of Darrough and Melumad (1995), who develop a mathematical model showing that the narrow focus of managerial attention may be explained by the high cost of screening talented managers who can split attention between different divisions⁶¹. Such contributions do not provide any insight into the processes of attention that would be useful for discussing the results of the research presented here. However, the work of Robert Simons (1987, 1991, 1994) on management control systems provided a conceptualization of attention, which is in many ways similar to the view of attention assumed by the model developed in this thesis.

7.2.2.1.2 Attention in management control systems research

Simons focuses on various management control systems that exist in an organization and examines the ways in which top managers use these systems. He defines management control systems as “formalized routines and procedures that use information to maintain or alter patterns in organizational activity” (Simons, 1991, pg. 49). Performance evaluations are one of these systems. Since the phrase “patterns in organizational activity” conforms to the definition of an organizational routine adopted in this thesis, performance evaluation can be defined as a management control system to “maintain and alter” organizational routines. Such formulation is very close to the way the relationship between PMR meetings and organizational routines have been conceptualized in this thesis.

⁶¹ In this study, attention is operationalized simply as the proportion of time that a manager spends in one division.

Furthermore, in his early work (e.g., Simons, 1991), Simons draws the distinction between the diagnostic and interactive uses of management control systems. The distinguishing factor between these ways of using a system is the degree of top management attention directed to it. In Simons' words, a system is considered interactive "...if a top manager reported that his personal, regular, and frequent use of a system was a top priority both for himself and for his subordinates, and that this system was used to set agendas for regular interlocking meetings with direct subordinates and others to review data and resulting action plans" (1991, pg. 52). This quotation is also a *de facto* definition of attention for Simons. The top manager's attention is used to communicate strategic priorities to the subordinates and to facilitate "maintenance or alteration" in the organizational routines that generate performance.

This view of the performance management process matches closely the discussion of *Directed Attention* in the model developed in this thesis. More specifically, it relates to the discussion of the role of the chairperson in the meeting. Indeed, as the discussion of the PMR meetings in The Energy Co. demonstrates, the chairperson directed the attention of his subordinates by focusing the discussion on particular issues⁶². The actions of the chairperson in the meeting communicated the priorities⁶³ to and drove action⁶⁴ of other managers. However, despite such strong parallels with Simon's analysis of the role of attention in using management control systems, this is also where the relevance of his approach for this thesis ends.

While the findings of this thesis focus on the individual processes of attention and examine the role of attention in the internal dynamics of routines, Simons' interest remains on the higher level of analysis. He focuses on the role of *top management attention* in enabling the interactive use of management control systems in organizations, thus leaving the actual processes of change initiated by this use unexplored. This focus on the organizational level of analysis also explains why for

⁶² These dynamics were not observed in The Brewery, as the PMR meeting there did not have a formal Chairperson.

⁶³ See Sections 6.1.1.3.3 and 6.1.2.1.2.

⁶⁴ See, for instance, the discussion of influencing the performance appraisal process in Section 6.1.1.2.3.

Simons, understanding the construct of attention as an individual cognitive process is largely irrelevant – in order to answer his question, top management attention to a control system can be described simply as “intensity of use”. Consistent with this focus, empirical studies designed on the basis of Simons’ work operationalized attention as a questionnaire item producing an organizational level variable (Bisbe and Otley, 2004; Widener, 2007). If Simons’ framework thus examines both the attention and the object of attention as organizational level items, the discussion of attention in this thesis focuses on the corresponding lower-level processes that take place in a particular context. They might have been initiated by the interactive use of control systems, but they need to be discussed on their own terms.

7.2.2.1.3 Attention in organizational studies research

The main difficulty with using Robert Simons’ levers of control framework for theorising the results of research presented here is echoed by much of the work in organization studies that is concerned with the construct of attention. The overwhelming proportion of work employing the construct of attention builds on the ideas of Herbert Simon and focuses on the organizational level. Although Herbert Simon started his analysis of organizational behaviour by spelling out the assumptions behind the model of individual choice (1976), his primary interest lay in the ways organizations make decisions. His work, drawing largely on the behavioural and cognitive traditions in decision-making, produced an extraordinary impact on the development of organizational studies as a field. In his seminal work, Simon (1976) saw organizations as structures directing the attention of individual members to organizational goals. Therefore, although he acknowledged the role of individual processes of attention, his work was focused on the analysis of organizational outcomes.

The development of Simon’s work largely preserved the focus on the behaviour of organizations. This included research on attention. From the early work of Cyert and March (1963) to the development of the attention-based view of the firm (Ocasio, 1997) and to the recent work on specific attentional processes (Levinthal and Rerup, 2006; Rerup, 2009), organizational research has been concerned with the task of describing *organizational* attention. The seminal contribution of Ocasio (1997), in which he develops a full-fledged attention-based view of the firm, is a landmark work on

attention in the recent research in organization studies. In this work, Ocasio defines attention as “...the noticing, encoding, interpreting, and focusing of time and effort by organizational decision-makers on both (a) issues; the available repertoire of categories for making sense of the environment: problems, opportunities, and threats; and (b) answers: the available repertoire of action alternatives: proposals, routines, projects, programs, and procedures” (pg 189). Thus he acknowledges that attention is an individual process. However, he then proceeds in the direction of aggregating these processes under the influence of organizational structures, stating explicitly that he is interested in “*organizational attention*, the socially structured pattern of attention by decision-makers within an organization” (pg 188, emphasis in the original).

This view is then similar to Robert Simons’ conceptualization of attention as an organizational level construct that constrains and guides the attention of the managers. Therefore, it is related to the findings of this thesis in a similar way – it is concerned with what this thesis calls *Directed Attention*, yet it remains on the organizational level of analysis and applies to context other than that of a PMR meeting. Thus, its usefulness as a comprehensive theoretical perspective for theorizing the results of this research is restricted. However, adding to the contribution of Simons’ levers of control framework to understanding the moderators of directed attention, the research on organizational attention provides the language for discussing other factors affecting directing attention. Viewed through the lens of the organizational perspective on attention, performance targets and the design elements of the PMR process represent organizational structures, within which individual attention is situated and by which it is constrained. Changing these structures purposefully will then have repercussions on the way attention is directed.

7.2.2.1.4 Attention in cognitive psychology and cognitive information processing research

Over the past several decades, the study of attention developed into one of the most prominent streams in the research in cognitive psychology (Müller and Geyer, 2009), and a full review of this research is a task in its own right. However, for the purposes of this thesis, such a review is not necessary. Nonetheless, some of the recent contributions to the study of attention in cognitive psychology may be helpful for improving the understanding of the construct of attention as it is used in this thesis. Moreover, unlike

the discussion of attention in the literature on management control systems and organizational studies, cognitive psychology examines attention on the individual rather than organizational level.

The distinction between directed and autonomous attention discovered during data analysis in the research reported here is somewhat similar to the distinction between voluntary and involuntary attention in cognitive psychology (James, 1892; Corbetta and Shulman, 2002). Involuntary or stimulus-driven attention occurs without volition and requires minimal effort, whereas voluntary or goal-directed attention refers to the individual's active focusing of the attention and therefore requires cognitive effort. Voluntary attention is thus conceptualized as a resource that is susceptible to depletion and needs periodic restoration (Kaplan, 2001). Furthermore, in the research in clinical neurology, voluntary attention is called *directed attention* (Morecraft et al., 1993).

A close examination, however, reveals the difference between the dichotomy used in cognitive psychology research and that in the study reported in this thesis. In the findings of this thesis, both *autonomous attention* and *directed attention* presupposed the act of volition on the part of the individual, but, while the former could be described as self-directed attention, the latter referred to the part of the resource that was captured and directed by external factors (e.g., performance targets, actions of the chairperson). In contrast, the distinction between the involuntary and directed (voluntary) attention in the research in cognitive psychology is a distinction between automatic and volitional acts, and is thus a different way of conceptualizing attentional processes. However, what the research in cognitive psychology demonstrates is that, when attention is a wilful act of the individual – as it is the case in both *autonomous* and *directed attention* in this thesis – it requires cognitive effort and can thus be understood as a finite cognitive resource that is subject to depletion.

Furthermore, the relevance of the detailed analysis of attentional processes in cognitive psychology for management research has been questioned by some of the contributors to the information-processing view of decision making (e.g., Sproull, 1981, 1984). Nonetheless, even the information-processing tradition in the research on attention drew

on the understanding of attention as a non-specific cognitive resource with a limited capacity (Kahneman, 1973). This demonstrates that attention in the broadest sense is understood as a general resource that is needed for cognitive operations. This view of attention supports the way in which attention was theorized in this thesis.

Summing up the discussion in this section, it has to be said that the theme of attention, which was one of the prominent themes that came out of the analysis of data, certainly links the results of the study to several bodies of research. These links deepen the discussion of directed attention and its moderators and provide possible directions for a further exploration of the processes of attention in the analysis of data. Most importantly, they demonstrate that the fundamental way in which attention was theorized in this thesis – as a finite resource necessary for engagement – is consistent with the general view of attention in the related literature. However, owing to the methodological and analytical differences, most of the discussion of attention in related disciplines provides limited help for theorizing the model developed in this research in a way that makes the full argument coherent. Thus, while the value of the discussion of attention is readily acknowledged, other key themes need to be explored.

7.2.2.2 Decision making in groups

The processes involving the individual and collective views of routines were another prominent theme in the findings of this research. Although the findings discuss the categories of individual and supra-individual processes separately, all of these processes take place in the context of a PMR meeting, which is by definition a group activity. The key role of these categories in the final model makes it advisable to examine the research on the processes of decision making in groups in order to determine whether the discussion of the results could be usefully expanded.

The literature exploring the processes of decision making in groups has its roots in the disciplines of psychology and organizational behaviour. This literature generally focuses on all processes taking place between the members of the group, without imposing the constraints of a particular event or context (Hinzs et al., 1997; Kerr and Tindale, 2004). For instance, it would examine the performance of a group, such as a team of sales people, over time and throughout multiple events. In this sense, its focus is

much broader than the focus of the investigation in this thesis, as the latter delves into the analysis of the experience of group members in a particular context – a PMR meeting – and is interested in the ways in which this context affects the participants’ decision-making processes related to the ostensive aspect of the routine.

However, the literature on decision making in groups provides a number of insights that are useful for the discussion of the results of the research presented here. The most relevant contribution of this literature lies in the discussion of two key constructs: the central construct of “mental model” (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Rouse and Morris, 1986; Mathieu et al., 2000) and its recently proposed development – the construct of cross-understanding (Huber and Lewis, 2010). A mental model is an individual representation of a particular system which includes “...(1) the variables included in the system, (2) the properties and states of those variables, and (3) the causal or other relationships among those variables” (Huber and Lewis, 2010, p. 7). This definition bears a striking resemblance to the definition of the ostensive aspect of a routine and is thus worthy of further attention.

Comparing the constructs of the ostensive aspect of the routine and a mental model is difficult because they do not share a common genealogy. Feldman (2000, 2003) developed her model drawing on the ideas of structuration and the study of practices. Her idea of the ostensive aspect of the routine is thus inseparable from the performative aspect as the other part of the structure-action duality. A mental model is simply a representation of an object in the mind of an individual and does not require an explicit link to action. However, an individual could certainly have a representation of a pattern of action that constitutes a routine, in which case this representation would be similar to the ostensive aspect of the routine.

The discussion of mental models in the literature on decision making in groups is particularly interesting in the context of shared mental models (e.g., Cannon-Bowers and Salas, 2001; Mathieu et al. 2000; Cannon-Bowers et al., 1993), as the latter are directly relevant to the findings of this research. Shared mental models describe the degree to which individual mental models are compatible or similar and are formed

through such processes as interpersonal communication and the leader's influence. (Cannon-Bowers et al., 1993). Shared mental models then have a positive effect on team performance (Mathieu et al. 2000; Cannon-Bowers et al., 1993).

In its focus on the formation of the commonly held ostensive aspect, the discussion of supra-individual processes in this thesis has certain parallels to the analysis of shared mental models in the literature on group decision making. The evidence produced by this literature may then drive further questions as to the effect of supra-individual processes on task performance. For instance, assuming the parallels between the constructs hold, it may be hypothesized that supra-individual processes leading to the formation of a common ostensive may have a positive effect on the performance of the routine. Nonetheless, it is important to remember that while the overlap between individual ostensive aspects may certainly lead to the creation of a collectively shared view of the routine, the ostensive aspect itself is fundamentally subjective in nature.

More interesting, however, is the construct of cross-understanding – a recent contribution to the group decision-making literature (Huber and Lewis, 2010). While shared mental models focus on the similarity of individual mental models, cross-understanding is concerned with the degree to which individuals know and understand each other's mental models, without necessarily changing their own. This construct seems to be closely related to the idea of “linkages” discussed under the theme of individual processes in the final results of the research presented here. Indeed, just as cross-understanding may be necessary before mental models could change, making “linkages” between individual views of routines during the discussion at the PMR meeting may be necessary before the processes of amending, validating or synchronizing individual ostensive aspects could take place⁶⁵.

Huber and Lewis (2010) suggest that cross-understanding has three major effects on the processes of decision making in groups: the effect on communication and comprehension, the effect on mental models, and the effect on collaborative behaviours. The last two of these effects resonate strongly with the findings of this thesis.

⁶⁵ See Section 6.1.2.2.1 for the detailed discussion.

The effect on mental models refers to enriching one's individual mental model through discussions with other members of the group. However, this enrichment may take place without forming a shared mental model, especially when an individual mental model is rooted in deep-seated convictions or values. The discussion of the *Individual processes* theme in this thesis likewise notes that an individual's ostensive aspect may be amended in the discussion, as new information is gathered; however, the "deep ostensive" based on experience, professional qualification or personal knowledge of the people around the table is not likely to change⁶⁶.

The effect on collaborative behaviours refers to the fact that knowing others' mental models helps members of the group to frame and coordinate their own actions so as to achieve a common goal. The findings in this thesis demonstrate that in the context of the PMR meeting, seeking information from others in order to understand and support them in the pursuit of common interest takes place in the state of The Space, when an individual is open to adjusting his or her view of the routine and willing to collaborate⁶⁷. This is also consistent with the discussion of *Supra-individual processes* that demonstrates the willingness on the part of the individuals to suspend the formation of their own ostensive aspect in order to achieve a collaborative outcome.

The effect on communication and comprehension refers to the fact that the members of the group "...choose concepts and words that are maximally understandable and minimally off-putting to other group members" (Huber and Lewis, 2010). There was nothing in the data to suggest the presence of this effect in the two organizations I studied. However, given the close counterparts of the other two effects of cross-understanding in the findings as well as the parallel between cross-understanding and the process of making "linkages" in the PMR meeting, it may be reasonable to expect that further research will uncover an element of the PMR meeting that will be similar to the effect of cross-understanding on communication and comprehension.

Despite the similarities between certain constructs in the literature on group decision making and the elements of the model developed in this thesis, this literature does not

⁶⁶ See Section 6.1.2.2.1 for a more detailed discussion.

⁶⁷ See Sections 6.1.2.2.3 and 6.1.2.2.2 for a more detailed discussion.

provide a useful perspective for a coherent and comprehensive discussion of the results. Its usefulness is limited mainly for the reasons similar to those discussed in the previous section. Although research on group decision making devotes considerable attention to the analysis of individual processes, its main focus and most common level of analysis remains the group. Its primary question is then group performance. Although it is certainly related to the issues examined in this thesis, it is quite different from the focus on the way individuals experience the link between the PMR meeting as a PMM instrument and the ostensive aspect of the routine under review. In fact, the analysis of the individual experience – the pivot point tying the PMR meeting and the routine – is completely missing from this perspective. Thus, although the contribution of this perspective to the discussion of the results of this thesis is noted, another key emergent theme needs to be reviewed.

7.2.2.3 The processes in the Space - Mindfulness

The last major theme that emerged in the analysis of the data was related to the category of the Space and the processes it comprised. As the discussion in Chapter 6 demonstrates, the Space was characterized by the willingness of the individuals involved in the PMR meeting to relinquish their habitual responses, remain open to the new information as it appeared, and incorporate contextual factors into their thinking. This state also required the participants of the PMR meetings to pay close attention to what was happening in the meeting at the moment. This combination of breaking free of established thought patterns, paying attention to the immediate content of experience in an open way, and being receptive to the context of experience is related to the concept of mindfulness, which is explored in this section.

Research on mindfulness started in the 1970s and evolved into a complex field spanning cognitive and clinical psychology, organizational behaviour, and organization studies. The concept of mindfulness entered the academic debates in psychology through the work of Langer (1978) and remained relevant to this day (Brown et al., 2007; Ludwig and Kabat-Zinn, 2008). It subsequently entered the organization studies through the work on the automatic information processes (Sandelans and Stablein, 1987) and on high-reliability organizations (Weick and Roberts, 1993).

The definition of mindfulness depends on the chosen perspective, but two broad ways of conceptualizing mindfulness can be distinguished. The first draws on the idea of mindfulness as a meditative experience, where “...you just sit, not pursuing anything, and insights come up on their own timetable, out of stillness and out of spacious open attention... (Kabat-Zinn, 2000, pg. 69). This is what Weick and Putnam (2006) call the Eastern perspective on mindfulness. It is based on the Buddhist tradition, focuses on nonjudgmental observation of experience and has found its application mainly in clinical psychology as the basis for the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction programme (Kabat-Zinn, 1982; Williams et al., 2001). The second approach understands mindfulness as the process of actively drawing novel distinctions about the object of attention (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000). Weick and Putnam (2006) call this the Western perspective on mindfulness, and Sternberg (2000) calls it the *cognitive style*. This understanding of mindfulness was advanced by Langer (1989) and has been the predominant way of conceptualizing it in organizational research (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006). Consequently, it warrants a closer examination.

Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) define mindfulness as the process of drawing novel distinctions, which “...keeps us situated in the present. It also makes us more aware of the context and perspective of our actions than if we rely upon distinctions and categories drawn in the past. Under this latter situation, rules and routines are more likely to govern our behavior” (pgs 1-2). This process is then characterized by four factors: “(1) a greater sensitivity to one’s environment, (2) more openness to new information, (3) the creation of new categories for structuring perception, and (4) enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives in problem solving” (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000, pg 2). Attention is critical to this process, as it is required not only to maintain the focus on the object but also to keep noticing its new characteristics.

This conceptualization of mindfulness provides striking parallels to the findings of the research presented in this thesis. The discussion of the processes in the Space matches almost every characteristic of the state of mindfulness⁶⁸. The process of relinquishing habitual responses to change the individual view of the routine in the PMR meeting can

⁶⁸ See Section 6.1.2.2.3 for the full discussion.

be seen as the process of creating new categories for structuring perception unencumbered by the “distinctions and categories drawn in the past”. The processes of incorporating the context of the discussion can be understood as the heightened sensitivity to the environment. Finally, these processes are impossible without being open to and incorporating new information into the current view of the routine, which is also a characteristic of the state of mindfulness. Moreover, the central role of attention as a key resource enabling all processes in *The Space* parallels the discussion of attention in Langer and Moldoveanu’s (2000) view of mindfulness.

These exceptionally close parallels suggest that the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of a PMR meeting could be viewed as centring on the state of mindfulness where the participants’ attention is paid to the routine and directed by performance targets and the design of the PMR meeting. If managing performance can be seen as a process of managing routines, performance management in the context of the PMR would then aim for creating a state of mindfulness where routines could be reviewed and revised as appropriate.

In comparison to the perspectives reviewed in the previous two sections, mindfulness provides a more comprehensive treatment of the findings. By definition it includes the processes of attention, illuminates and puts into context the processes in the state of the *Space* and ties together various individual processes. However, this does not provide much insight into the dynamics of supra-individual processes and the objectification of the ostensive aspect of the routine. Nonetheless, it has the advantage of focusing its analysis on the level of the individual, which is consistent with this research. Moreover, using mindfulness as a theoretical perspective for the analysis of the results presented here is consistent both with the adopted model of routines, which emphasises the role of agency in the execution of the routine, and with contemporary research on routines, which notes that routines require conscious re-enactment.

7.3 Conceptual model in light of the relevant disciplines

The discussion of the literature pertaining to the key emergent constructs in the model makes it possible to improve the understanding of the relationships in the model as well

as to position the model within the relevant discussions in the related bodies of literature. The analysis in Section 7.2 made several contributions to the discussion of the model presented in Figure 14.

First, as the discussion of attention in the management accounting, management control systems, organizational studies, and cognitive psychology literature demonstrates, attention in the most general sense can be viewed as a finite cognitive resource (individual or organizational) that is used for cognitive activities and is prone to depletion. This view strongly supports the way attention was theorized in this thesis⁶⁹. Moreover, the insights into attention focusing strategies made by the literature in auditing suggest that the effects of the purpose of the review, which is a contextual moderator of directed attention in the model, may extend beyond the intensity and the object of the attention to include the strategy of using attention. Although in the literature this relationship is not examined in the environment of a meeting, it is nonetheless supported by the data in my study, and thus the model can be said to include it.

Second, although the literature on management control systems and organizational studies focused on attention on the organizational level, it provided support for the way directed attention was conceptualized in the model. The research in management control systems demonstrated that the overt attention of top management to particular control systems had the power to focus the attention of the subordinates on these systems. Thus, top management attention communicated organizational priorities and drove organizational action by directing the attention of subordinates. A very similar relationship, although on a micro-scale, was theorized in the model presented in this thesis and supported by the data. The actions of the chairperson in the PMR meeting directed the attention of the meeting participants towards specific issues and items in the discussion.

Moreover, the discussion of attention in the literature on organizational studies supported the broader view of the design of the PMR meeting (i.e., its context, content,

⁶⁹ Cf. Figure 12 and Section 6.2.3.

and structure) as a moderator of attention. In this literature, attention was seen as subject to various organizational structures that shaped and directed the attention of organizational actors. This view is paralleled, although again on a micro-scale, in the model developed in this thesis, as the model explicitly considers the design element of the PMR meeting as moderators of directed attention. Thus the discussion of attention (especially the directed component of attention) stemming from the relationships proposed in the model finds strong links with the research on attention in relevant domains of literature.

Third, the literature on decision making in groups shows certain similarities to the way the processes of engagement with the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine were conceptualized in the model. This literature is particularly useful for the analysis of the *Interaction* element in the model and its links with *Individual* and *Supra-individual processes*. In light of the insights from recent contributions to the study of group decision making, the interaction of individual ostensive aspects of the routine during the PMR meeting can be seen as a special context-bound case of larger processes of decision making in groups. This in turn makes it possible not only to improve the understanding of particular observations underpinning the relationships postulated in the model (e.g., the effects of interaction on collaboration and on changes in the ostensive aspect), but also to build expectations for further research using this model (e.g., the communication effect of interaction).

Finally, the literature on mindfulness in general, and on the cognitive style of mindfulness in particular, shows that the major parts of the model can indeed be tied together in a coherent and non-contradictory fashion. First, the elements comprising the view of mindfulness as a process of drawing novel distinctions about the object of attention are remarkably similar to the characteristics of *The Space*, which is one of the central categories that emerged in the process of data analysis. Second, the discussion of mindfulness emphasizes the crucial role of attention in the process of engagement that is consistent with the view of attention as a limited cognitive resource. Finally, the research on mindfulness is consistent with the fundamental theoretical structure underpinning the model developed in this chapter – Feldman and Pentland's (2003)

conceptualization of routines as dynamic entities. Thus, not only does the literature on the cognitive style of mindfulness demonstrate parallels with particular elements of the model, but it also provides support for the logic that was used to construct the model itself.

Overall, the discussion in Section 7.3 has demonstrated that the elements of the conceptual model developed in this chapter are related to each other in a coherent way and that the relationships are supported by the research in the relevant domains of literature. The model of the experience of the ostensive aspect of organizational routines in the context of the PMR meeting can thus be described as a sequence of specific processes that comprise individuals' engagement in this experience. The engagement may include a state of mindfulness, where routinized automatic responses are suspended in order to allow the formation of the ostensive aspect that is most appropriate in terms of the demands of the moment and the context. This engagement requires the individuals' attention, which is a limited cognitive resource, can be subdivided into autonomous and directed attention, and is subject to a number of moderators. While a number of individually controlled factors affect autonomous attention, directed attention is shaped by performance targets and the design of the PMR meeting.

If, consistent with the discussion in Chapter 2, organizational routines are the vehicles of organizational performance, the model suggests that the task of managing performance in a PMR meeting can be viewed as that of affecting the elements of the meeting directly accessible to management. In other words, using performance targets and the design elements of PMR meetings participants can channel the attention of the participants in the meeting towards critical issues and purposefully foster the state of mindfulness on the part of the individuals involved in the meeting. Moreover, since attention is a critical resource in the process of experiencing the ostensive aspect of the routine, managing attention in a manner consistent with its nature of a limited resource is a key task for performance management in the PMR meeting.

7.4 Conclusions

This chapter built on the findings presented in Chapter 6 in order to arrive at the model that would allow an understanding of the more nuanced dynamics in the process of experiencing the ostensive aspect of organizational routines in the context of the PMR meeting. Section 7.1 described the model and its key elements and relationships; Section 7.2 examined the emergent themes in the model in the context of the relevant bodies of literature; and Section 7.3 summarized the contributions of these bodies of literature to the conceptual coherence and the value of the model. In a way, the task of Sections 7.2 and 7.3 was to examine the degree of confidence that could be put in the model in its own right. With the conclusion that this degree is sufficient, the discussion is ready to proceed to the analysis of contributions that this model makes to the bodies of literature that gave rise to the research question of this thesis.

Chapter 8. Contributions: The literature after the study

Chapter 8 continues the discussion of the model developed in the previous chapter and positions it in relation to the main bodies of literature that were used to set up the problem and craft the research question. In so doing, Chapter 8 aims to demonstrate the contribution of the study reported in this thesis to the existing body of knowledge. In order to maintain the focus of the discussion, however, Chapter 8 opens with a brief recapitulation of the key findings of the study, which is followed by the discussion of the primary and secondary contributions of this research.

8.1 Summary of the findings

The empirical part of the thesis examined meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the performance management review meeting. The analysis of the data collected in the two case studies was carried out in accordance with the procedures of template analysis (King, 2004b) and yielded a hierarchical structure of themes which represent the key features of the participants' accounts of their experience. Graphically, this structure is reflected in Figure 15.

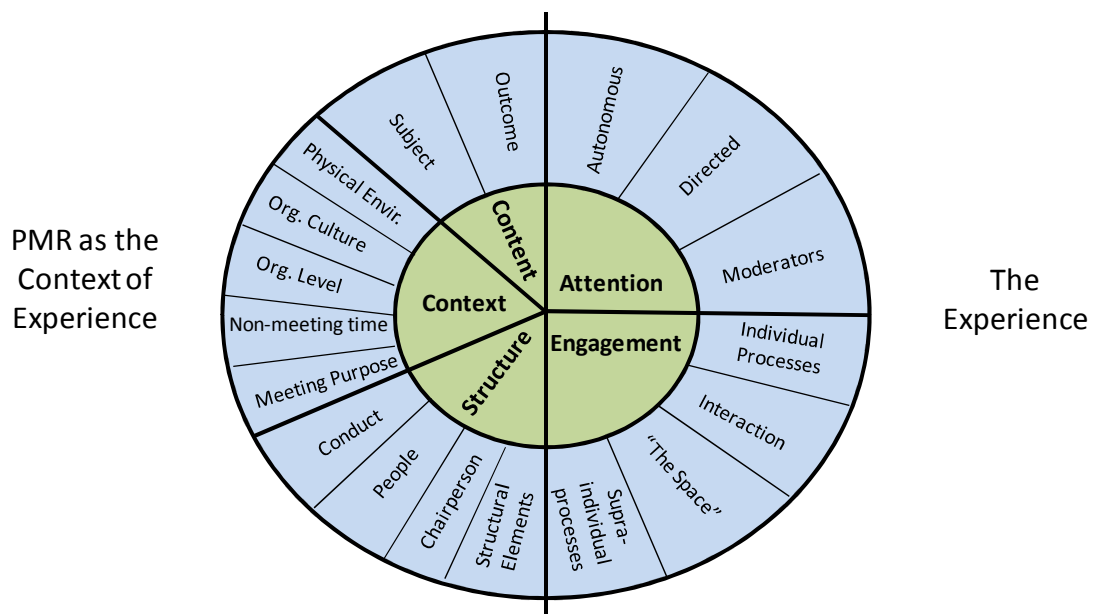


Figure 15. Copy of Figure 5. The experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. Template Analysis.

The results of the template analysis provided a thick empirically grounded and hierarchically structured description of meeting participants' experience and made it possible to gain an insight into the salient factors constituting the way meeting participants experience the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. However, in order to move to a more sophisticated understanding of these factors, the results of the template analysis were decomposed, the relationships between them were analysed, and a model demonstrating the dynamics of the experience was constructed. This model is presented in Figure 16.

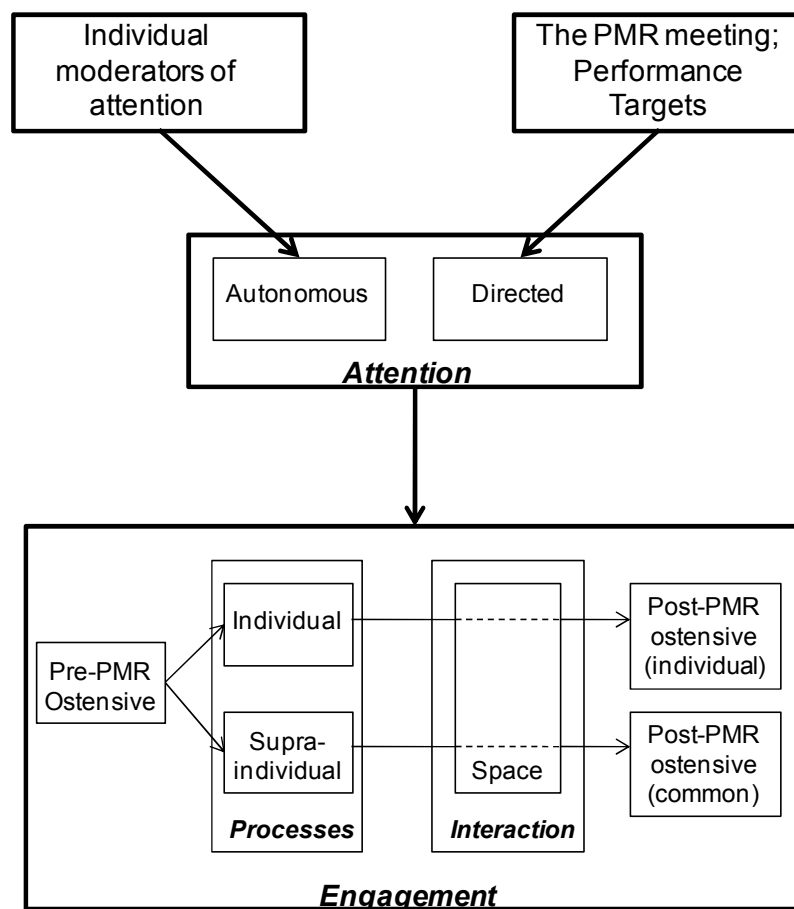


Figure 16. Copy of Figure 14. The formal conceptual model.

This model explicated the processes constituting the engagement with the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting and postulated that engagement requires the use of attention as a limited cognitive resource that could be divided into the autonomous and directed components, each of which was influenced

by a number of factors. Interaction was the central element of engagement and in turn included the possibility of entering a state where automatic decisions based on historically evolved views of the routine were suspended, and a new ostensive aspect of the routine was created in response to the demands of the present situation. In certain cases, the interaction facilitated the creation of the ostensive aspect of the routine that was to a large extent shared by all participants of the meeting. This ostensive became the commonly held view of the routine that was subsequently cascaded throughout the organization or translated directly into action⁷⁰.

This model was subsequently examined in light of the domains of literature where the discussion of the key constructs in the model took place. This examination provided support for the relationships postulated in the model and for the general structure of the model. The literature on attention, group processes, and mindfulness provided the strongest basis for improving the understanding of meeting participants' experience expounded in the model⁷¹.

Following this analysis, the discussion turns to the evaluation of the key contributions of this research to the existing literature. First, the primary contributions – the contributions that answer the research question and respond to the general question driving this study – are presented. This is followed by the discussion of secondary contributions – the various insights into the literature on performance management and organizational routines that were gained during the conduct of this study.

8.2 Primary contributions

The development of the research question for this study started with the observation of the conflicting evidence produced by the literature that examined the impact of performance measurement on performance (e.g., Hoque and James, 2000; Davis and Albright, 2004; Ittner et al., 2003, Franco-Santos, 2007). It was noted that the nature of these and similar studies – the research design that aimed at discovering the overarching impact of PMM on performance – did not allow the observation of the actual mechanism through which measurement produced its impact on performance. As such,

⁷⁰ See Section 7.1 for a full discussion.

⁷¹ See Sections 7.2 and 7.3 for a full discussion.

these studies treated the processes that generated organizational performance as a “black box” which connected the intervention to the outcome.

At the same time, another stream of contributions to the management accounting literature examined the organizational micro-processes that took place in response to the act of measuring performance (e.g., Mouritsen, 1998; Johanson et al. (2001a,b); Vaivio, 2004). These contributions noted that the process of measuring performance stimulated the search for the drivers of performance, during which the agents involved in organizational processes iterated between examining the assumptions underlying these processes and translating new assumptions into practice⁷². Thus, this literature provided a glimpse into the “black box” of organizational performance, as it examined the micro-practices that generated performance.

In this thesis, it was proposed that the organizational routines literature could bridge these two strands of literature in a way that can be examined empirically. By its nature, the construct of routines is inseparably linked to performance (Nelson and Winter, 1982, Feldman, 2000) and can be modelled as the iteration between reflection and action on the part of the agents involved in the routine (Feldman, 2000; Feldman and Pentland, 2003). The task of examining the impact of measurement on performance then becomes the task of examining the effect of measurement on organizational routines.

Considering that the immediate impact of PMM on routines is an impact on its ostensive aspect and taking into account the constraints on time and resources, this thesis focused only on the ostensive aspect and examined the dynamics of this effect in the context of the PMR meeting. The latter was chosen as a critical context for examining the link between PMM and organizational routines owing to its power of exerting direct pressure on the agents involved in the execution of a routine and focusing their attention on the performance of this routine (Martinez et al., 2010).

In the process of designing the study reported in this thesis, it became clear that the ostensive aspect of a routine is a subjective construct; in other words, each individual

⁷² See Chapter 2 for a more thorough discussion of this literature.

involved in the routine would have his or her view of it – his own ostensive aspect. Thus, asking the question about the *impact* of the PMR meeting on *the* ostensive aspect of the routine would be meaningless. Instead, in order to preserve the ontological essence of the construct, the research question focused on the analysis of meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting⁷³. This is consistent with the work cited above (e.g., Vaivio, 2004; Johanson et al., 2001a,b), which essentially assumes an agent-centred view of performance.

Explicating the way meeting participants link the PMR meeting with the ostensive aspect of the routine, the model developed in this research and presented in Figure 16. provides a step towards understanding how a particular PMM practice – a PMR meeting – is translated into the organizational processes that generate this performance. Herein lies the *primary contribution* of this thesis to the literature on performance management. The model developed in this research *extends* the work of Mouritsen (1998), Johanson et al. (2001 a,b), and Vaivio (2004) by explicating the constituent elements and the structure of organizational effect of PMM intimated in their contributions. While their work simply noted that PMM interventions seemed to affect the processes of performance by stimulating the search on the part of organizational actors, the findings of this thesis make a concrete step towards understanding the structure and dynamics of this relationship.

The research reported in this thesis agrees with the contributions cited in the preceding paragraph in the sense that it focuses on the agents involved in the organizational processes that generate performance. However, it makes a further step towards the agent-centred view of performance, making explicit the assumption that the link between PMM and the processes constituting organizational performance – i.e., organizational routines – is made by the agents involved in these processes. This in turn means that understanding how PMM is translated into performance requires an understanding of the agents' individual experience of making this link. This thesis contributes to the existing knowledge by developing an original empirically grounded model that provides a detailed insight into the structure of this experience. Consistent

⁷³ See Chapter 3 for a full discussion of this issue.

with the aims of the research discussed in Chapter 4, the thesis thus provide a suggestive theory of the relationship between the PMR meeting as a form of a PMM intervention and the ostensive aspect of organizational routines as vehicles of performance.

The results of the study reported in this thesis suggest that in the PMR meeting the translation of PMM into organizational routines requires an active engagement of organizational agents. Engagement is in turn a complex process that consists of multiple elements and places demands on the agents' attention. The design and the conduct of the PMR meeting, however, can direct the attention of the agents towards key issues and influence their engagement with the ostensive aspect of the routine. By explaining the dynamics of this process, the findings of this thesis further clarify the link between PMM and the micro-processes of performance noted in the contributions cited above. Moreover, by distinguishing and explaining the role of a key performance management practice – the PMR meeting – in the formation of the ostensive aspect of organizational routines, the findings of this thesis open organizational processes further to purposeful intervention that reduces the chance of unintended consequences of measurement (Kerr, 1975; Hood, 2006).

The last point brings the discussion of the contributions of this research back to the literature that examines the impact of PMM on performance. By virtue of building on the work of Mouritsen (1998), Johanson et al. (2001 a,b), and Vaivio (2004), the research conducted in this thesis can be seen as a further step towards opening the “black box” that separates PMM interventions from their anticipated outcomes. In other words, the research in this thesis delves deeply into the processes that broadly connect PMM with performance and examines this connection on the micro-level. As such, it provides a framework for both analysing the processes that are inaccessible to the studies evaluating the impact of performance measurement on performance on a larger scale and for enabling informed local action.

Admittedly, the contribution made by this research to the literature on performance management is but a small step towards explaining the mechanism that links PMM to

organizational performance. While the limitations of this study will be discussed in depth in Chapter 9, it is useful to note some of them here. One of the most obvious limitations of this research is the fact that it focuses only on the context of the PMR meeting, which, although powerful, leaves aside other instances where the connection between measurement and performance may be made. The other limitation is the fact that the study examines the effect of the PMR meeting only on the ostensive aspect of the routine, leaving the process of translating the ostensive aspect into the performative aspect unexamined. Moreover, this thesis examined the link between the PMR meeting and a single element of a single routine, which is very different from (and much less spectacular than) the question of understanding the connection between PMM and the complex notion of organizational performance. Nonetheless, given the lack of research into the micro-processes of the link between performance measurement and organizational performance, the results of this study represent a distinct contribution to the existing body of knowledge.

8.3 Secondary contributions

Section 8.2 discussed the contributions of this research to the literature that gave rise to the research question that drove this study. However, in the process of designing and executing the study several new insights into the related bodies of knowledge were gained. These insights constitute the secondary contributions of this research. They are subdivided into two categories – the contributions to the knowledge of PMM and the contributions to the knowledge of organizational routines.

8.3.1 Performance Management

The secondary contributions of this thesis to the current state of knowledge in the PMM literature include the detailed empirically grounded description of the PMR meeting and the analysis of the effect of performance measurement on performance through the analytical lens of organizational routines. These contributions are now discussed in turn.

8.3.1.1 Performance management review meetings

As the discussion in Chapter 2 demonstrates, the role and functions of meetings in organizations have been generally under-examined. This lack of research is even more pronounced in the literature on PMM, which is surprising, given the central role of PMR meetings in the deployment of PMM systems and in managing performance in

general (Martinez and Kennerley, 2005, 2006; Martinez et al., 2010). Essentially, Martinez and Kennerley's (2005) analysis of an elaborate system of PMRs in an energy supplier in the UK is the only empirical contribution examining the meetings specifically designed to focus on the task of managing organizational performance. However, this work took a relatively high-level approach, analyzing the organization-wide system of PMRs. Therefore, it noted the critical effect of the meetings on managing performance, but kept silent on the question of how these meetings were designed and how this effect was accomplished through the people involved at the meetings.

The components of the PMR meeting itself as well as the mechanisms that enable its various functions were explored in a contribution by Martinez et al. (2010), where I was one of the authors. Although this contribution did focus on the analysis of the internal structure and functions of PMRs and provided valuable insights, it was an analytical paper that developed a number of propositions based on the analysis of the literature.

The results of this thesis, however, provide a detailed description of the key components of the PMR meeting that is empirically grounded and hierarchically structured according to the guidelines of template analysis. Graphically, this description is represented by Figure 15. The themes in Figure 15 are the key features of meeting participants' accounts of their experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. In other words, the themes are the elements that meeting participants saw as salient when asked to reflect on the PMR meeting and the way it influenced their view of the routine that was reviewed in the meeting.

The results of template analysis suggest that the elements of the PMR meeting itself could be structured into three categories – the content, context, and structure of the meeting. These categories are very similar to those derived by Martinez et al. (2010), yet in this thesis, they were derived inductively. Hence, they provide empirical validation for Martinez et al.'s framework. However, the findings of this thesis go beyond identifying the generic categories for conceptualizing the PMR meeting to determine a number of second- and third-level themes that provide a detailed

description of the key elements of the meeting. As such, the results of this thesis develop a coherent set of empirically derived components of the PMR meeting that is missing in the current literature on PMM and that can be used for designing more specific questions in future studies.

The results of the template analysis also show that meeting participants' experience of the PMR meeting could be understood in two broad categories – engagement and attention. Similar to the discussion in the preceding paragraph, these categories are further subdivided into the components and moderators of attention and the processes of engagement. Grounded in the data, these sub-categories allow a better understanding of the critical elements of meeting participants' experience in the PMR meeting and make it possible to ask better and more precise questions about the dynamics of experience in the PMR meeting. Thus the results of the template analysis – the descriptive element of the findings – introduce a very broad set of empirically derived themes in the study of PMR meetings which are severely lacking in the current literature on PMM.

The model developed on the basis of the descriptive findings provides an additional contribution to the study of PMR meetings in the PMM literature. The structure and logic of the model has been described several times in Chapter 7 and in Section 8.1 in this chapter. Therefore, repeating this discussion here would be redundant. However, a brief note on the value of this model for the research on PMR meetings is useful. This model is presented in Figure 16. Decomposing the structure of the template analysis and reconstructing the elements of meeting participants' experience in the context of the PMR meeting based on the relationships identified in the data, the model allows the PMR meeting to be seen as an instrument for managing organizational performance. In other words, by explaining the way the PMR meeting can be used to direct attention and affect engagement of the managers involved in the meeting, the model suggests that the design and conduct of the PMR meeting can be used for a purposeful managerial intervention aimed at managing performance. Thus, the model developed in this thesis presents a distinct contribution in addition to the descriptive findings arrived at through the process of template analysis.

Overall, the centrality of the PMR meeting in the research design in this study coupled with the lack of relevant empirical work reported in the literature allowed this thesis to make a substantial contribution to the current knowledge of PMR meetings within the broader literature on PMM.

8.3.1.2 Organizational routines as an analytical lens

Although the concept of organizational routines has been used widely in the performance management and management accounting literature (e.g., Burns and Scapens, 2000, 2008), its application to the study of the phenomenon of organizational performance is scarce. This may be explained by the fact that most of the discussion of organizational routines focused on their role as enablers and inhibitors of organizational change in all the multiplicity of forms that it can take (Burns and Scapens, 2008; Tranfield et al., 2000; Tranfield and Smith, 2008; Becker et al., 2005). However, as Becker and Zirpoli (2008) point out, organizational routines provide an analytical lens that can be useful for studying a variety of organizational phenomena. Nonetheless, with the exception of the papers that I co-authored (Pavlov and Bourne, 2007a,b), the use of the organizational routines perspective specifically for the study of organizational performance is very limited.

By virtue of employing the organizational routines perspective – and, more specifically, Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) conceptualization of routines – as the analytical lens for studying organizational performance, this thesis makes a contribution to the literature on performance management. The analysis of organizational performance in light of the organizational routines perspective makes it possible to decompose the construct of organizational performance into its constituent elements and relationships. This in turn permits asking novel questions both about performance as a construct and about the process of managing performance. The analysis in this thesis, for instance, focused on the way the structural aspect of performance – i.e., the ostensive aspect of the routines – was shaped during the interaction at the PMR meeting. This focus led to the understanding of the micro-dynamics of the organizational processes that are inherently linked to performance. Moreover, the use of Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) conceptual apparatus made explicit the processes that are located between the PMM intervention

(in the form of the PMR meeting) and the organizational performance (in the form of the routine under review), thus not only highlighting the complexity and volatility of the link between PMM and performance, but also suggesting possible ways in which performance can be amenable to managerial efforts.

However, the usefulness of the organizational routines perspectives for the study of performance management is not exhausted by its application in this thesis. For instance, this thesis focused only on the ostensive aspect of the routines and only on the PMR meeting as a context. However, employing Feldman and Pentland's (2003) complete model permits asking further and deeper questions about organizational performance and performance management. For instance, if organizational routines consist of the reflection (ostensive) and action (performative) components, understanding the dynamics of their reciprocal relationship may enable performance management to affect these components selectively or to facilitate their translation into each other so as to manage organizational performance in a more informed and less ambiguous way. Likewise, this model of routines may help to identify and distinguish the specific effects that performance measurement has on performance (Pavlov and Bourne, 2007a,b).

Overall, the organizational routines perspective in general and Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model of routines in particular offer a valuable lens for analyzing organizational performance. This thesis thus makes a contribution to the field of PMM by introducing the application of this lens specifically to the study of organizational performance.

8.3.2 Organizational routines

By using Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model of organizational routines as the analytical lens driving the design of the study, this thesis has also made a number of contributions, although admittedly limited, to the literature on organizational routines. These include the dynamics of the ostensive aspect in isolation from the performative aspect and the multi-level structure of the ostensive aspect. These contributions are discussed below.

8.3.2.1 The dynamics of the ostensive aspect

One of the most significant contributions of Feldman and Pentland's work on organizational routines (Feldman, 2000; Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Pentland and Feldman, 2005) was the development of the view of routines as dynamic processes carried out by organizational agents. What they have shown is that no routines are fully automatic, and even the simplest routines involve some reflection on the part of the agent involved in the execution of the routine. Routines are thus prone to change as the agents iterate between action and reflection, between executing routine and making sense of it. Even stability in the routine is then a consequence of the agents' active decision to refrain from incorporating changes into the routine – either on the ostensive or on the performative level.

The last point implies that both the ostensive and the performative aspects of the routine are prone to autonomous variations that may or may not become part of the routine. Although this is tacitly acknowledged in Feldman and Pentland's model, most of their work has been devoted to the dynamics of translating the ostensive aspect into the performative aspect and vice versa. In an early contribution (Feldman and Pentland, 2003) they distinguished three processes through which the ostensive aspect influences the performative aspect and three processes through which the opposite effect takes place. This was later expanded to include the interaction with artifacts (Pentland and Feldman, 2005). However, one of the questions that remained unanswered was the way in which agents dealt with the autonomous variation in either aspect before it could be translated into the other. The results of the research reported in this thesis provided a step towards answering this question, thus extending Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model.

The discussion of individual and supra-individual processes in the PMR meeting distinguished a number of ways in which the ostensive aspect of the routine could undergo change *without* the recourse to the performative aspect. The PMR meeting by its nature invited the articulation and debate of the ostensive aspect of the routine without providing the immediate opportunity to test the emerging options in practice. Each individual's ostensive aspect of the routine was thus developed directly at the

meeting. As the discussion of individual processes in Section 6.1.2.2.1 demonstrated, the interaction during the meeting could lead to an amendment, a validation, or synchronization of individual ostensive aspects of the routine. The ostensive aspect could thus be changed during the “battle of the ostensives” that took place during the interaction directly at the PMR meeting. Moreover, the ostensive aspect was used to drive participation in the interaction and thus to open itself for possible change. The dynamics of these processes are presented in Figure 6.

Further, besides driving changes in the individual ostensive aspects, the interaction during the meeting also had the power to forge the ostensive aspect that would be shared to a certain extent by the participants in the meeting. This common ostensive aspect could subsequently be translated into concerted action. The discussion in Section 6.1.2.2.4 provides the detailed illustration of these processes.

Overall, the research reported in this thesis described several specific processes through which the ostensive aspect can be changed autonomously, without necessarily going through the iteration with the performative aspect. As such, this thesis provided empirical grounding for and made explicit the idea tacitly implied in Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) work that the ostensive aspect can go through autonomous variations before it will be translated into the performative aspect. This in turn means that a complete description of change in routines goes beyond the iterations between the performative and the ostensive aspects and incorporates the changes inherent at least in the ostensive aspect. This extension of Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) model represents a contribution of this thesis to the organizational routines literature.

8.3.2.2 Structural complexity of the ostensive aspect

The discussion of the individual processes in Section 6.1.2.2.1 focused on the dynamics of the individual ostensive aspect of the routine during the interaction at the PMR meeting. As the discussion demonstrates and as Figure 6 reflects, for the most part, the data suggested that the ostensive aspect was used to drive the participation of the individuals in the interaction and was in turn influenced by the interaction. However, the data also demonstrated that, in certain cases, part of the ostensive aspect underwent change as a result of the interaction, while another part remained undisturbed. The part

that was malleable included the elements that described the current view of the routine; the part that was stable, while also used to construct the ostensive aspect, included more deeply held structures. These structures were the professional qualifications of the meeting participants, their long-term experience and the ensuing understanding of the field, as well as their personal knowledge of the people involved in the routine. Moreover, the participants spoke of these deeply held structures as ultimate certainties, against which the changes in the current ostensive aspect of the routine were charted.

What this discussion intimated was that the ostensive aspect of organizational routines may have several layers, and some layers may be more open to change than others. In other words, while a part of the ostensive was made up of the current elements that were constantly changing (e.g., the current way of accounting for personnel), another part included deeply held convictions and beliefs (e.g., knowing the culture of the company). The “deep ostensive” was considerably less likely to change through the individual processes described in Section 6.1.2.2.1. Moreover, it seems that the changes in the individual’s “current” ostensive aspect of the routine take place within the boundaries set by the “deep ostensive”.

This structural complexity of the ostensive aspect of routines has not been discussed in the organizational routines literature. Therefore, by advancing the conceptualization of the ostensive aspect, it extends Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) model of organizational routines and makes a contribution to the organizational routines literature.

Overall, by employing Feldman and Pentland’s (2003) model of organizational routines as the central analytical framework for designing and executing the study, this thesis has made several contributions to the organizational routines literature. On the most general level, the thesis provided another empirical application of the model, focusing on the ostensive aspect of the routine. Furthermore, the results of the thesis enriched the existing understanding of the ostensive aspect by explicating the processes of autonomous variation in the ostensive aspect and suggesting that the aspect may be structurally complex.

8.4 Conclusions

Chapter 8 provided the discussion of the contributions of this thesis to the existing body of knowledge. This thesis claims its primary contribution to the discussion of the impact of performance measurement and management on performance in the management accounting literature. A number of existing studies produce conflicting evidence of the impact of performance measurement initiatives on performance. At the same time, a different stream of literature suggests that measurement may stimulate the iteration between reflection and action on the part of people involved in the organizational processes. This thesis builds on both of these streams and employs the analytical lens of organizational routines to develop a model that explicitly links a key practice in performance measurement and management to the processes constituting organizational performance through the cycle of reflection and action on the part of the people involved. By addressing the current issue of understanding the effects of PMM on performance, this model makes a valuable contribution to knowledge.

In the process of answering the research question, the thesis has made a number of secondary contributions to knowledge in the fields of PMM and organizational routines. The contributions to the PMM literature include the introduction of the organizational routines perspective as a powerful lens for studying the issues of organizational performance management and a detailed empirically grounded description of the PMR meeting. The contributions to the organizational routines literature include the development of the concept of the ostensive aspect of organizational routines through identifying the processes of autonomous variation in the ostensive aspect and describing its structural complexity.

Chapter 8 provides the last element of the study reported in this thesis. The next chapter summarizes the work that has been done in the thesis and outlines the avenues for further research.

Chapter 9. Conclusions.

This chapter concludes the dissertation. With the full background, setup, execution, and results of the study presented in the previous eight chapters, Chapter 9 presents the summary of the key points in the research process. First, it retraces the development of the research question; second, it summarizes the findings of the study and the main contributions of the thesis; third, it explores the limitations of the research design; and, finally, it closes the discussion by outlining the implications of this research for theory and practice.

9.1 Developing the research question

The chain of the decisions leading to the development of the research question is presented in Figure 17 below. It represents a fragment of Figure 1 that describes the decisional structure of the entire thesis and that was presented in Chapter 1. Therefore, repeating the full description of the figure here is unnecessary. However, a brief summary of the way the research question was developed would be useful.

The inquiry described in this thesis starts with the general question of the effectiveness of managerial interventions aimed at measuring and managing organizational performance. Given the amount of attention paid to the issues of PMM both by practitioners and by organizational scholars, it is reasonable to ask whether performance measurement and management does indeed produce an effect on organizational performance and if so, how this effect is achieved. Underlying this question there is an assumption that organizations introduce performance measurement and management initiatives with the aim of improving performance.

A critical investigation of the literature on PMM revealed that the studies evaluating the impact of PMM initiatives yielded conflicting results. For instance, several studies (Hoque and James, 2000; Malina and Selto, 2001; Davis and Albright, 2004) found that the introduction of the Balanced Scorecard and similar methods of measuring and managing performance produced a positive impact on performance. However, other contributions (Perera et al., 1997; Ittner et al., 2003; Franco-Santos, 2007) found that

the relationship between PMM methods advocated by the Balanced Scorecard was absent or even negative. What this analysis showed was that there was no clear link between PMM interventions and organizational performance. In other words, an organizational “black box” separated PMM interventions from their intended outcomes.

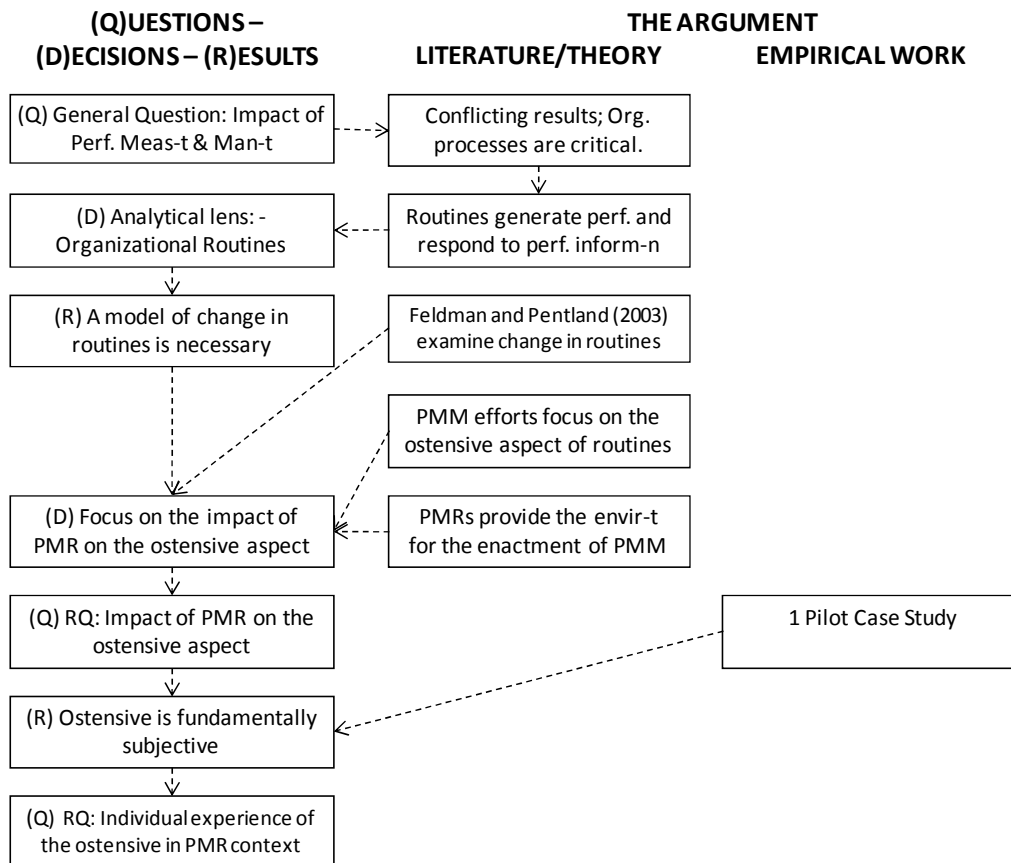


Figure 17. The development of the research question

However, at the same time, another stream of contributions to the management accounting literature suggested that the process of measuring performance stimulated the search for the drivers of performance on the part of the people in the organization (Mouritsen, 1998; Johanson et al., 2001 a,b). Moreover, this search takes place as people iterate between reflection and action, and non-financial measures advocated by the Balanced Scorecard and similar methods are particularly powerful in driving these iterations (Vaivio, 2004). What this stream of studies meant for the question that I was asking was that the “black box” implied by the studies evaluating the impact of PMM initiatives on performance may contain organizational processes that are responsive to performance measurement and develop through the iteration between reflection and

action. What I needed then was an analytical lens that could provide a conceptual model that would in turn be consistent with the views of performance and performance management presented here and permit asking an empirical question concerning the impact of PMM on performance.

Such a lens was provided by the organizational routines perspective. This perspective views organizations as bundles of processes that generate organizational performance – organizational routines (Nelson and Winter, 1982). Routines are responsive to performance feedback (Cyert and March, 1992) and evolve as the people involved in the routine iterate between the reflection (ostensive) and action (performative) aspects of the routine (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). Viewed through the lens of organizational routines, my question was transmuted into the question of how PMM affects the iteration between the ostensive and the performative aspects of organizational routines.

However, this question was further modified in order to reflect two important considerations. First, although a PMM initiative may aim to change the performative aspect of the routine (i.e., the observable output of the routine), by its nature, it can directly affect only the ostensive aspect. In other words, PMM does not directly change the actions of the people; rather, it affects the understanding that the performance needs to be changed. Thus, the direct effect that PMM has on routines is the effect on the ostensive aspect. Second, the constraints on the time and resources did not allow me to design and carry out a study that would examine in sufficient detail the full dynamics of Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model of routines. For these two reasons, I made the decision to focus on the effect of PMM on the ostensive aspect of routines.

This decision influenced the way the generic notion of PMM was bounded in this thesis. With the focus on the direct effect of PMM on the ostensive aspect of the routine, I needed an element of the PMM system that would allow this effect to be observed. Following Martinez and Kennerley's (2005, 2006) conceptualization of performance management review (PMR) meetings as the elements of the PMM systems that provided the environment for the direct enactment of PMM, I chose the PMR meeting

as the focal element of the PMM system for the study. A preliminary research question thus emerged from the analytical part of the work. This question is presented below.

Preliminary Research Question: How does the PMR meeting affect the ostensive aspect of the organizational routine reviewed at the meeting?

A small pilot study was carried out in order to evaluate the clarity of the research question and the viability of the research design. While the research design proved to be well-constructed, the results of the case study suggested that the ostensive aspect of organizational routines was a subjective phenomenon. In other words, each individual involved in the execution of the routine made his or her own generalization of the routine, thus obtaining a unique ostensive aspect of the routine that he or she would subsequently translate into action. This was later confirmed to be consistent with the meaning of the ostensive aspect (Feldman, 2008). Talking about the effect of the PMR meeting on *the ostensive aspect* of the routine reviewed at the meeting was therefore nonsensical. Instead, the individuals' subjective experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine under review in the context of the PMR meeting needed to be examined. Reflecting these considerations, the research question for the main study was rephrased as follows:

Research Question: How do meeting participants experience the ostensive aspect of the routine under review in the context of the PMR meeting?

This research question became the final research question that was used in the main part of the study, which included two concurrent longitudinal case studies.

9.2 Findings

The findings of the main study took two forms – a hierarchically structured description of the meeting participants' experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting and a conceptual model that reflected a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of the processes comprising this experience. These two outputs are reflected in Figure 18 and Figure 19 respectively.

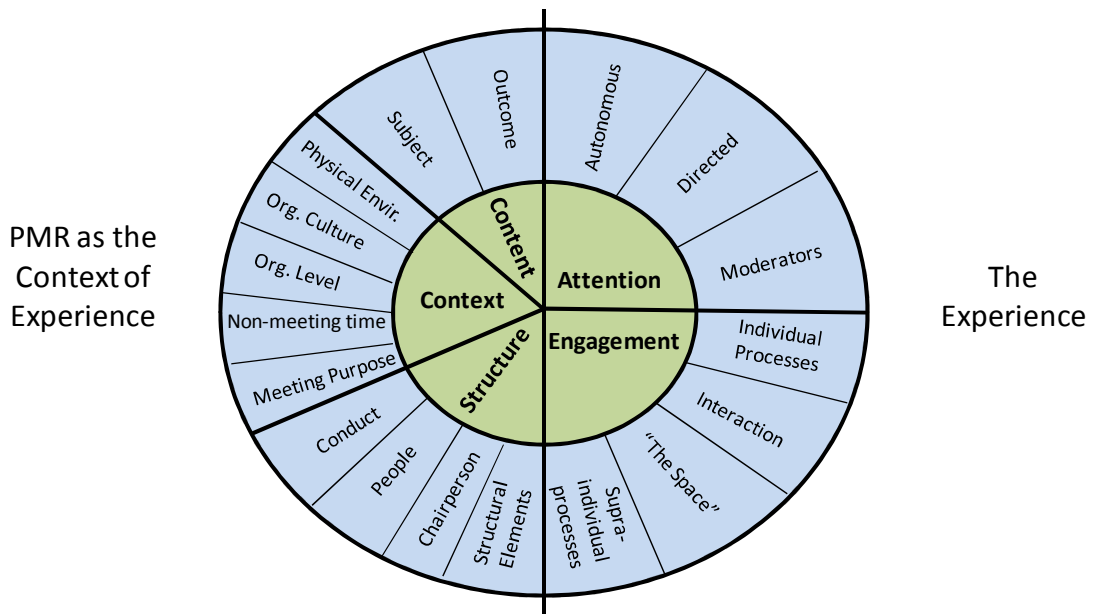


Figure 18. Copy of Figure 5. The experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting. Template Analysis.

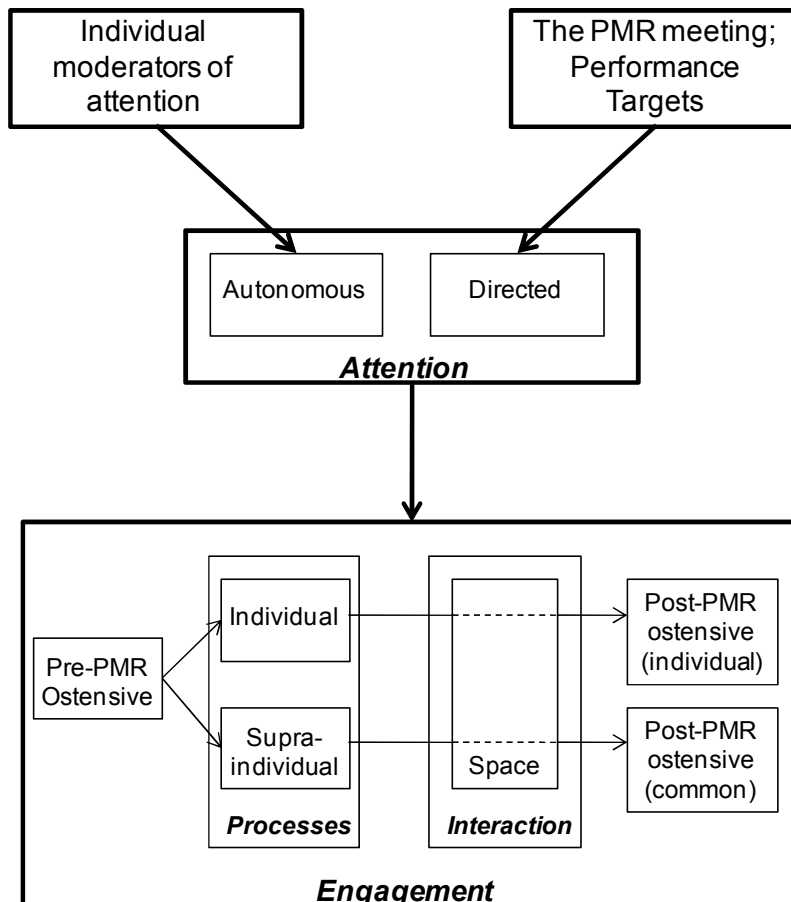


Figure 19. Copy of Figure 14. The formal conceptual model.

Figure 18 reflects the results of the template analysis, which produced a detailed empirically grounded description of the key factors in the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine under review in the context of the PMR meeting. The analysis suggested that the discussion of the PMR meeting as the context for experience could be organized into three first-level themes – the context, content, and structure of the PMR meeting – each of which contained a number of specific sub-themes. The experience itself could be described in terms of the attention that the experience required as well as in terms of various forms of engagement with the experience. As such, the results of the template analysis provided a descriptive answer to the research question. However, in order to link this answer to the original question of the effect of PMM on performance, a further step needed to be made.

Figure 19 describes the result of the second step. Following the presentation of the findings in the form required by template analysis, the hierarchical structure of Figure 18 was decomposed, and the themes were rearranged according to the relationships discovered in the data⁷⁴. The resulting conceptual model was discussed at length in Sections 7.1, 7.3, and 8.1, and repeating the full discussion here would be unnecessary. However, a brief summary would be useful.

The model explicates the processes that constitute the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine under review in the context of the PMR meeting. The model suggests that individual agents (i.e., the meeting participants), each with a subjective view (i.e., the different ostensive aspect) of the routine under review, enter the interaction at the meeting, where their ostensive aspect participates in a number of processes that both drive the agents' participation in the interaction and affect their original ostensive aspects. In certain cases, the meeting participants enter the state where the historically evolved views and habitual responses are suspended, allowing the participants to develop a new ostensive aspect based on the demands of the present moment and current context. Interaction may also facilitate the creation of a common ostensive that is shared to a certain degree by all meeting participants. This common ostensive is subsequently cascaded throughout the organization or translated directly into action.

⁷⁴ See Section 6.2 for a detailed discussion of this step.

This chain of processes constitutes the engagement of meeting participants in the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine under review and requires their attention, which is viewed as a limited cognitive resource necessary for the continuous engagement in the experience. Attention has two components – autonomous (i.e., self-directed) and directed – and is moderated by a number of factors. While a number of personally controlled factors influence the autonomous component of attention, directed attention is influenced by performance targets as well as by the design and conduct of the PMR meeting.

By drawing the relationships between the elements of meeting participants' experience, the model moves beyond the mere description offered by the results of the template analysis and allows one to make a step towards answering the general question driving this study – the question of how PMM affects performance. The model makes it possible to trace the effect of PMM on the development of organizational routines⁷⁵ which generate organizational performance. The relationships in the model suggest that in the context of the PMR meeting, PMM affects organizational performance by affecting the directed component of meeting participants' attention through the use of performance targets and context, content, and structure of the PMR meeting.

These findings allowed the thesis to make a number of contributions to several domains of knowledge. These contributions are briefly summarized below.

9.3 Summary of contributions

This thesis claims to make its primary contribution to the strand of management accounting literature examining the effect of PMM on performance and a number of secondary contributions to the fields of PMM and organizational routines.

9.3.1 Primary contribution

As the discussion in Section 9.1 demonstrates, the research question and the design of this study grew out of the analysis of conflicting evidence produced by the literature examining the effect of PMM on performance. This analysis indicated that there was an

⁷⁵ More specifically, the ostensive aspect of organizational routines.

organizational “black box” that separated the PMM interventions from the intended outcomes. Opening this “black box” would thus allow one to approach the understanding of the effect of PMM on performance. A step towards this task was made by a number of studies (Mouritsen 1998; Johanson et al., 2001 a,b; Vaivio, 2004) that observed that one of the effects of PMM was to stimulate the search for the new solutions through the iteration between reflection and action on the part of people involved in organizational processes. However, although these studies suggested what the “black box” might contain, they did not suggest any specific mechanisms through which PMM might affect it.

Continuing this line of research, this thesis developed an empirically grounded model that specifically links PMM (in the form of the PMR meeting) with performance (in the form of organizational routines). This model proposed a number of relationships that link the PMR meeting to the processes related to the ostensive aspect of organizational routines, thus allowing the effect of PMM on the performance-generating organizational processes to be traced directly. By describing a complex mechanism that links a PMM intervention directly to the processes generating organizational performance, the research in this thesis has opened the “black box” to the extent that has not been achieved in the previous contributions to the field. Thus, the model developed in this thesis represents the primary contribution of the thesis.

9.3.2 Secondary contributions

Besides the primary contribution described in the preceding section, the thesis made a number of smaller contributions to the domains of PMM and organizational routines.

Two secondary contributions were made to the broader literature on PMM. First, the results of the template analysis provide a detailed empirically grounded description of the PMR meeting and its constituent elements. Although PMR meetings are a vital element of the organizational PMM system (Martinez and Kennerley, 2005, 2006; Martinez et al., 2010), a detailed analysis of their structure and components is lacking in the literature. Moreover, empirical studies focusing on the PMR meeting are particularly scarce. The results of this thesis provide a structured description of the PMR meeting

that consists of multiple elements and is grounded in the data. As such, the thesis contributes to the current state of knowledge of the PMR meetings and permits asking further questions about the constructs and relationships that constitute this key element of PMM systems.

Second, the thesis introduced the organizational routines perspective and, more specifically, Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model of routines as an analytical lens for understanding the phenomenon of organizational performance. Although the organizational routines perspective in general has provided help to the study of management accounting for a long time (e.g., Burns and Scapens, 2000), its application specifically to the analysis of organizational performance has been limited. By employing Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model of organizational routines as a lens for analyzing organizational performance, this thesis demonstrates that the study of organizational performance can benefit from the analytical power provided by recent research on organizational routines. Examining the construct of organizational performance in light of Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model makes it possible to decompose the construct into finer elements and relationships and pose the questions that might have been difficult to answer before. Thus, the introduction of the organizational routines perspective, and Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model in particular specifically to the study of organizational performance is another contribution of this thesis to the literature on PMM.

The thesis also claims to make two contributions to the organizational routines literature. Both of them extend Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model of routines that was the central analytical lens in the thesis. First, the results of the thesis introduce a number of processes that describe the autonomous variation in the ostensive aspect – i.e., the variation that occurs without the recourse to the performative aspect. While Feldman and Pentland (2003) implicitly acknowledge the existence of such variation, they focus on the change in the ostensive aspect through the iterations with its performative counterpart. This thesis describes a number of processes through which the ostensive aspect changes during the interaction with other agents' ostensive aspects, without being translated into the performative aspect. This improvement in the

conceptualization of the ostensive aspect represents a contribution to the knowledge of organizational routines.

Second, by examining the dynamics of the ostensive aspect in the interaction that takes place at the PMR meeting, the study in this thesis determined that the ostensive aspect is structurally complex. In other words, an individual's ostensive aspect of the routine may comprise several layers, some of which are more open to change than others. While the layer of the ostensive aspect that reflects the incidentals of the routine caused by the current situations may be relatively easy to change, the "deep ostensive" such as the long-term experience or the knowledge gained through professional qualifications is considerably less open to change. The concept of structural complexity in the ostensive aspect likewise represents an extension to Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model and thus provides a contribution to the current knowledge of organizational routines.

9.4 Limitations

The research reported in this thesis is subject to a number of limitations that stem from the methodological and design-related choices as well as from the inevitable contingencies of empirical work.

As the discussion in Chapter 4 demonstrates, the case study strategy was chosen in order to maximize the learning about a phenomenon, the detailed description of which seemed to be escaping researchers' attempts. Thus the basic research strategy fits the purpose of the study. However, within the case study design, several decisions were made that impose certain limitations on the findings of the study. First, the design of the case studies followed the logic of induction, turning to data in order to develop the constructs comprising the final model. Although this is consistent with the purpose of the study, it also means that the opportunity for empirical generalization is extremely limited. Different methods must be used in the future in order to determine the generalizability of the findings of this study.

Furthermore, the case selection strategy within the case study design led to additional limitations of the results of the study. The strategy of selecting *extreme cases* (Patton,

1990), while serving the purpose of gaining a deeper insight into the examined phenomenon, also meant that the research cannot claim that the results reflect an analysis of a *typical* case. Rather, they represent a deep multi-faceted analysis of the phenomenon, certain parts of which may be found in typical cases.

Finally, as an inevitable result of the design meeting the data, the context of the research determined the selective salience of the resulting constructs. For instance, the teams that I observed both in The Energy Co. and in The Brewery were characterized by a deep degree of trust and openness of the individuals, which in turn allowed them to enter the state of mindfulness during the meeting, which entered the final model as one of the central constructs (The Space). It is possible, and even likely, that this construct would not be part of the model, if the general atmosphere at the meeting made trust and openness impossible.

Besides the limitations imposed by the design of the case study itself, a number of limitations were caused by the analytical choices made during the overall research design.

First, the selection of organizational routines, and Pentland and Feldman's (2003) model in particular, although fully justified, determined the general approach to the design of the empirical part of the study. A study using a different theoretical lens would arrive at different findings⁷⁶. Nonetheless, as the discussion in Chapter 2 demonstrates, the organizational routines perspective provided a very robust and very useful foundation for answering the research question. Second, the study focused only on the ostensive aspect of organizational routines, leaving the link to the performative aspect on the level of a theoretical assumption postulated by Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model. This decision limited the explanatory power of the findings. However, the ostensive aspect was judged to be the most appropriate element of the routine to focus on, and the constraints on time and resources prevented the design of a larger study. Finally, the research was carried out only in the context of the PMR meeting and thus may have limited applicability outside the context. Moreover, the exclusive focus on the PMR

⁷⁶ Although possibly at the same conclusions!

meeting meant that other instances of the effect of PMM on the routines were overlooked. Nonetheless, the PMR meeting was argued to be the most appropriate context to study the relationship in question and thus provided support for the power of the findings.

The research limitations described in this section were an unavoidable part of the decisions made during the design of the study. However, they also indicated the opportunities for further work.

9.5 Implications of this thesis

This section begins with a discussion of performance management in light of the key themes that emerged from the analysis and concludes with the analysis of the implications of this thesis for research and practice.

9.5.1 Performance management in light of the results of this thesis

The results of this study provide a particular angle for the discussion of performance management in organizations. The analysis of processes taking place in the PMR meetings demonstrates that managing organizational performance may in the final instance be reduced to managing the people involved in performance-generating processes. Thus, in the most general sense, the view of performance management suggested by the results of this study is that of people management. This observation, obvious at the first glance, makes it possible to talk about performance management as an active and continuous process of managing performance. This view goes beyond the conceptualization of performance management as the creation of systems of rules or incentives that are assumed to channel desired behaviour in a predictable way. The view of performance management implied by the results of this study acknowledges the role of systemic elements, such as the design of the PMR meeting and the power of performance targets. However, it goes beyond these elements to emphasize the defining role of mindful decision-making in the creation of organizational performance.

According to the results of this study, performance management can be seen an active process of influencing individual views of organizational routines – the blueprint that

will subsequently be cascaded down throughout the organization or translated into action immediately, generating organizational performance. Moreover, since organizational routines are by definition collective entities, the process of managing performance will involve coordinating individual views of the routine and, sometimes, facilitating the development of a common ostensive aspect of the routine that could be translated into action in a coherent way. The creation and coordination of individual views of the routine are not automatic processes – they involve the attention of the individuals and sometimes require that the individuals remain in a state similar to the state of mindfulness, willing to reassess their historically evolved understanding of the routine and to be open to incorporating new information into it. Managing performance is thus inseparable from managing the attention and mindfulness of the individuals involved in the routine.

Delving into the processes shaping organizational routines, not only does this view of performance management extend beyond the design of frameworks for performance measurement (Pun and White, 2005), but it also advances the literature on “managing through measures” (Franco and Bourne, 2003) with its focus on the gap between performance information and the appropriate action. As implied by the results of this study, managing performance is a micro-process of active involvement in the development and coordination of the ostensive aspect of organizational routines. Due to the nature of the latter, however, this process has certain limits.

As the results of this study demonstrate, individual attention and the state of mindfulness are necessary for the change and coordination in the ostensive aspect of the organizational routines. Neither of these factors, however, is directly controllable by the management. The attention of the individuals has an autonomous component which is influenced by factors beyond the reach of organizational policies, and thus obtaining an individual’s full attention may be difficult, if not impossible. Moreover, the outputs of the state of mindfulness, with its characteristics of openness to contextual information and attention to novelty, are by their nature unpredictable. The output of such a state may be appropriate and effective, but not necessarily predictable.

The lack of predictability inherent in the state of mindfulness and to a certain extent implied by the sheer complexity of interaction processes during the meeting is largely caused by the incorporation of the contextual information into the decision. With the embeddedness of the PMM system in the complex network of organizational factors such as culture, human resources, and information systems (Kennerley and Neely, 2002, 2003) and with concurrent demands of multiple management control systems acting as a package (Otley, 1980; Fisher, 1998; Malmi and Brown, 2008), the decisions made by the participants of the PMR meeting are far from predictable and certainly are not easily traceable to a particular system of rules or incentives. In fact, what it means is that in a complex environment and especially in the state of mindfulness, central considerations bow to local contextualization. This thesis has described these processes in the context of the PMR meeting, but, owing to their generic nature, they may take place elsewhere in the organization. The process of managing performance is then the process of enabling contextually embedded local action in the desired way, which is similar to Ahrens and Chapman's (2007) notion of situated functionality.

Thus, in light of the results of this thesis, performance management is an active and direct process of involvement in the organizational processes that generate performance, which takes into account the central role of people in the execution of these processes and accepts its own inevitable limitations.

9.5.2 Implications for future research

The implications for future research stem from the findings of this study as well as from the research limitations discussed in Section 9.4. In addition to providing an answer to the research question driving the study, the findings of the thesis make it possible to ask new questions about the examined phenomena. Some of these questions are driven by the relationships postulated in the final model.

First, attention proved to be a key element of the model, and future research needs to improve the understanding of the role of attention in the processes that take place at the meeting. For instance, while the model suggests that attention is moderated by a number of factors, the question remains whether specific moderators can direct attention –

especially the directed component of attention – towards specific processes of engagement during the meeting. In other words, while the model shows that performance targets as well as the content, context, and structure of the meeting can be seen as levers for directing attention, further research is needed to distinguish their particular effects on attention and to determine whether they could be traced to the specific processes that take place during the meeting. Likewise, further research is needed in order to determine whether the moderators of autonomous attention may in fact be amenable to management efforts. Based on their nature, it may be speculated that they might be, but empirical research is needed to determine whether this is indeed the case.

Second, given the central role of the construct of The Space in the model, its functions need to be investigated further. For instance, the suggested parallels with the processes of mindfulness need to be examined since, should they prove empirically valid, they will bring the full power of the conceptual apparatus of mindfulness into the discussion of the processes taking place at the PMR meeting. Furthermore, considering that The Space is a potential rather than required component of interaction, but rather may or may not be achieved, further investigation should start with the analysis of the antecedents and consequences of this state in the PMR meetings.

A number of avenues for further research are also suggested by the limitations of this study. For instance, the research in this thesis focused only on the ostensive aspect of the routines, thus tracing the effect of a PMM intervention in the form of the PMR meeting only on the structural component of the processes generating organizational performance. While the translation of this component into observable action is postulated by Feldman and Pentland's (2003) model, the specific processes through which this happens remain to be investigated empirically. As it is, the model developed in this thesis provides only the first step towards opening the "black box" of organizational performance which may explain the conflicting results of the studies evaluating the impact of PMM on performance. Tracing the effect of PMM on observable action through the complexity of organizational processes is the aim for future work.

Likewise, the model developed in this thesis was derived inductively from the data collected in two organizations, which means that the model offers little potential for empirical generalization. Therefore, designing large-sample studies to test the relationships proposed in the model is an area for further research. Furthermore, the development of the model took place only in the context of the PMR meeting. However, the power of PMM extends beyond the meetings where performance is reviewed. Therefore, the applicability of the model (or any of the relationships that it suggests) to the contexts other than the PMR meeting needs to be investigated. For instance, PMM pressure may shape the ostensive aspect of the routines during project work, preparation of reports, or personal reflection.

Finally, the broader applicability of the model developed in this thesis needs to be explored. For instance, it is possible that the model is valid not only in PMR meetings, but in other forms of meetings that take place in organizations. Some of the parallels with recent research in strategic management suggest that this may indeed be the case. Jarzabkowski and Seidl's (2008) view of strategy meetings as strategizing episodes where judgment is suspended to allow strategy formation to take place echoes the discussion of the processes in The Space described in this thesis. However, whether these phenomena are empirically and philosophically comparable and, therefore, whether the applicability of the model developed here extends beyond PMR meetings remains an area for further investigation.

9.5.3 Implications for practice

With its focus on performance, performance management, and PMR meetings, this thesis examines issues of great interest for practitioners. Therefore, some of the results of the thesis may be very relevant for the practice of PMM. The discussion of practical implications can be divided into two parts – the implications for the task of managing performance in general and the implications for managing the PMR meetings in particular.

As the discussion in Section 9.5.1 demonstrates, the results of this thesis suggest that performance management is an active process of involvement in shaping organizational routines that generate organizational performance. Given the complexity of factors acting on the process of development of organizational routines, managers cannot rely on the PMM systems to produce the desired effect on their own. Rather, managers need to be involved in the local action, where organizational routines take shape, and to influence actively the processes of performance. Thus, as far as the task of managing performance is concerned, this thesis demonstrates the need for the managers' continuous involvement in the use of PMM systems.

The findings in this thesis also have a number of implications specifically for the management of the PMR meetings. First, the model developed in the thesis suggests that attention is a key resource that is necessary for the engagement in the PMR process⁷⁷. Moreover, attention is seen as a limited resource that is subject to depletion over the course of the meeting. The task of managing a PMR meeting is then essentially that of managing the attention of the people involved in the meeting. Thus, the PMR meeting should be designed so as to allow effective focusing (e.g., consistent flow, multiple events, clear role of the chairperson), preservation (e.g., adequate physical environment, appropriate length) and restoration (e.g., breaks, varying intensity) of attention. Furthermore, it is important to remember that, regardless of the degree of performance management effort at the meeting, a portion of participants' attention will not be accessible to the management. The content, context and structure of the PMR meeting, however, provide the levers for managing directed attention – the component of attention that is accessible to management. Thus, manipulating the elements of the design and conduct of the PMR meeting, managers can influence the intensity and the focus of the participants' attention.

Second, the results of the thesis highlighted the central role of the state similar to that of mindfulness (termed The Space in the final model) that is sometimes achieved during the PMR meetings. This state allowed the participants to suspend habitual responses in favour of the demands of the present moment and thus to make appropriate and

⁷⁷ Or, strictly speaking, for the engagement in the experience of the ostensive aspect of the routine in the context of the PMR meeting.

effective decisions. Whether this state is directly accessible by the management efforts remains a question. However, it may be suggested that the state of mindfulness, however brief in duration, should be one of the goals for the PMR meeting. Considering that this state requires active attention of the participants, it may indeed be amenable to management efforts through the route of influencing the directed attention.

Finally, by explicating the various processes that constitute the engagement of the participants in the experience of the PMR meeting, the results of this thesis allow the managers to understand better the interaction that takes place at the meeting. By being able to differentiate the processes of interaction, managers will be able to respond effectively to the current dynamics at the meeting.

9.6 Conclusion

Chapter 9 concludes the dissertation. The chapter retraced the research process described in this thesis, from the development of the research question to the findings and contributions of the study to the relevant domains of literature, and concluded the dissertation with a discussion of the limitations of the study as well as its implications for future research and practice.

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APPENDIX. The interview questionnaire

As the discussion in Chapter 4 of the thesis described, the interview questions were designed partly in advance (in order to cover the general areas relevant to the research question) and partly during the observation phase of data collection (in order to incorporate the specific events of the observed PMR meetings). Thus, no two interviews were the same. However, each was built around the same general structure that ensured the link to the research question and complemented by a set of questions inquiring about the specifics of the particular meeting I was referring to. This Appendix presents both the general interview structure designed in advance and an example of a complementary set of questions developed on the basis of a particular PMR meeting and tailored to a particular interviewee.

The General Questionnaire (The basis for all interviews)

ESTABLISH INTERDEPENDENCE OF ACTION (NB: ONCE ONLY).

Can you tell me about your role in the department's operations and how it relates to the roles of other people in the room?

Are there any overlaps?

How much do you normally need to interact with the people in the room outside the meeting?

What is the nature of the interaction?

MEETING-TO-OPERATIONS CONNECTION (RQ: Mechanism of the connection to the ostensive aspect)

How did the meeting go?

Was this meeting helpful for doing your job?

Was this meeting of any particular relevance to you?

What have you learned at the meeting that you will have to take back to work?

Have you learned anything surprising, anything that you weren't aware of before the meeting?

What exactly at the meeting made you think differently about the operations of the [department]?

Did the meeting trigger any thinking about the way the [department] works?

What was the role of the discussion in triggering this thinking?

What was the role of the people around the table in triggering this thinking?

How do you follow the discussion at the meeting?

What goes through your mind as you are listening to the discussion?

How did the discussion help you understand [the specifics]?

How has your view changed during the discussion?

How did you decide to bring up [the specifics]?

How do you decide when to bring it up?

How do you decide what issues not to bring up?

ESTABLISH THE EXTENT OF INFLUENCE (NB: LAST INTERVIEW ONLY)

Did my presence at the meeting in any way influence the way the meetings were conducted?

[END OF THE INTERVIEW]

Example of a Complementary Set of Questions Based on Observations

The Energy Co.

Fourth Round of Interviews (Meeting: 14 May 2009)

Interviewee: Alex, Senior Manager

This time [the Chair] asked you to do an individual presentation.

Do you think it worked better than a general discussion?

How did you feel about making a presentation rather than participating *ad hoc*?

Did it make you think through your area of operations more thoroughly than you otherwise would?

How did you decide on what went into the presentation?

There were a lot of comments. Did they help you to rethink certain issues?

In what way did the presentations of other affect the way you think about the operations of [the department]?

As far as I remember, you commented a lot on Ian's presentation, especially on the part that had to do with the quality of data collection. Could you tell me more about why it is important?

How do you feel about that issue in general?

Did you find that discussion useful?

Did it affect in any way how you think about this issue? How so?

[The Chair] mentioned that he wanted to see how Major Investments was doing in general, whether it was meeting expectations.

For you, is it a useful way of looking at the operations of the department?

How does it affect the way you see your area and other areas of operations in the department?

What is it about this approach that makes an impact on your view?