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For the love of experience: changing the experience economy discourse

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CHAPTER 7

Maybe stories are just data with a soul, and maybe I'm just a storyteller.

BRENÉ BROWN,
THE POWER OF VULNERABILITY,
2010

Analysis of interviews on free choice learning experiences

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, a discussion on three approaches that can be distinguished within the current literature on experience has resulted in insights into the conceptualizations of experience, the effects of experiences and the values exchanged during experiences. However, in chapter 2 I expressed my critique on the current state of literature on the experience economy, stressing the fact that most of this literature discusses experience from an organizational and objectivistic perspective. Often the point of view of the individual that 'has' the experience is lacking and experiences are discussed almost as if they were products produced and managed under the control of organizations. As I have explained in the previous chapters, this bias towards the organizational perspective results in a very restricted view on the experience economy. For the construction of a sound and integrative theoretical foundation for the experience economy it is of utmost importance to incorporate the individual's point of view. In this chapter I will therefore answer the research question: "Which themes emerge from the existential-phenomenological interviews on individuals' free choice learning experiences?"

As has been explained in chapter 6, the existential-phenomenological interview is a very suitable method for gaining insight into the perspective and experience of individuals and in this chapter the results of the analysis of the conducted existential-phenomenological interviews will be presented. The analysis of the transcribed interviews has resulted in the emergence of three main themes: Engagement, Direction and Investment (see figure 7.1). These are the three main themes that will each be presented in the following paragraphs.

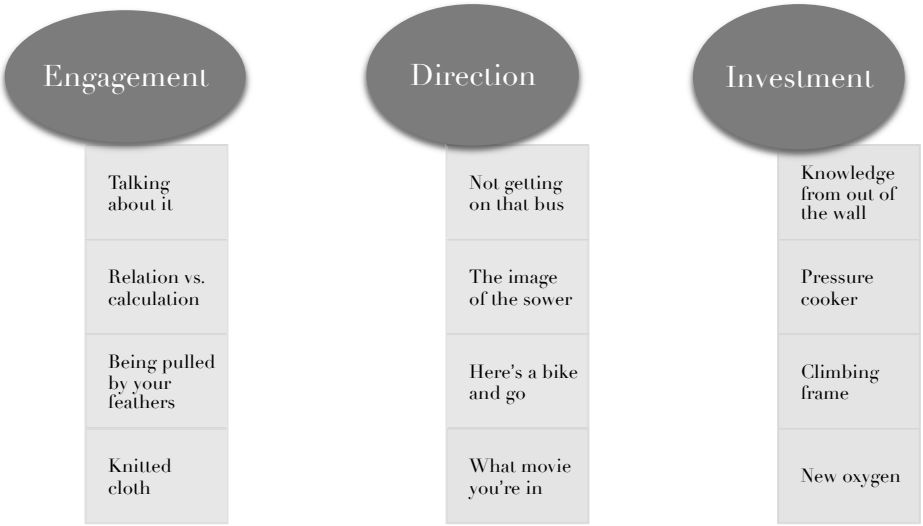

Figure 7.1 – Main and subthemes emerged from interviews

For each main theme, the related subthemes will be discussed and lessons to be learned based on the insights that have emerged from the interviews will be presented. Since most of the interviews took place in Dutch, I have translated the excerpts in English. To protect the privacy of the respondents, details that could be directly related to a specific respondent have been generalized and put between brackets. Also, terms and concepts that were highly specific for one of the experiences have been generalized to improve the readability of the text.

One general issue that deserves attention upfront is the fact that many of the stories that respondents told had a negative tone of voice, as the reader will notice. The reason for this remains unclear. A hypothesis is that respondents assumed that since I came to interview them on their experience, I searched for ways to create better experiences, since I explicitly left out the exact research questions that I had as I explained in chapter 6. It is possible that respondents told me about their complaints and shared their negative feedback, with the idea that I could advice the organizers

on how to improve the experiences. A different hypothesis is that they just had more to tell about the negative aspects of their experience. The truly positive stories that respondents shared were experiences that made a deep and long lasting impression on them. It is possible that they in time had forgotten about the less impactful positive experiences and mainly remembered the negative experiences. Yet another hypothesis is that individuals compare experiences in their minds and that they rate experiences against each other. If other experiences rated higher in their minds, the experiences that were focused on during the interviews would then be negatively evaluated compared to the other experiences the respondents had in mind. Or maybe people have a propensity to talk about imperfections as Brené Brown (2010) notices:

"You know that situation where you get an evaluation from your boss? And she tells you 37 things that you do really awesome and one thing that you, "an opportunity for growth"? And all you can think about is that opportunity for growth? (…) Well, when you ask people about love, they will tell you about heartbreak. When you ask people about belonging, they'll tell you their most excruciating experiences of being excluded. And when you ask people about connection, the stories they told me were about disconnection" (3m47s-4m23s).

One of the recommendations for further research that I will propose in chapter 8 will in fact deal with the question whether it is usual for respondents to be more negative in their responses when asked about their experience and if so, what the reason for this can be.

7.2 Engagement

Engagement, the first of the three themes that will be discussed in this chapter, describes the relation between the different constituents of the experience. Various phenomena that were discussed by the respondents have been grouped together under this theme (see figure 7.2), since all of these can provide insight into the relationship between the different elements of the experience and especially between the different parties that are involved in the experience, like the organizers, the participants and the invited experts.

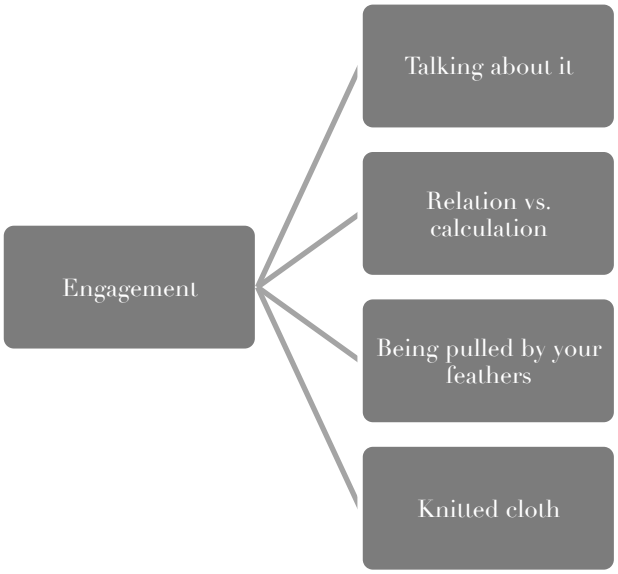

Figure 7.2 – Engagement and subthemes

First of all engagement refers to the engagement of speakers with what they speak about. The seeming disengagement that respondents referred to will be discussed in paragraph 7.2.1, under the heading 'Talking about it'. The term engagement is also used to describe the distance between the organizing team (coaches, teachers, guides etc) and the participants in the experience. This phenomenon will be discussed in paragraph 7.2.2, 'Relation vs. calculation', in which relation and calculation stand for different approaches of the engagement of organizers with the participants. Consequently, in paragraph 7.2.3, 'Being pulled by your feathers', reasons are given for why the emotional distance between the organizing team and the participants should be decreased and why organizers should engage themselves more with the personal development of participants. In paragraph 7.2.4, 'Knitted cloth', the fact that participants are part of the experience and the experience is or becomes part of them, in other words that there is no distance between the two, is discussed. One should therefore take into account that the background of individuals plays a role in the experience and that the experience may play a role in the lives of participants even after it has finished. In the final paragraph, 7.2.5, the lessons that experience-organizations in general can learn from the analysis are discussed.

7.2.1 Talking about it

"Some time ago I saw that (speaker)… I thought: you've gone too far, you've passed it… You talk about it. It was authentic but now it has become an instrument or something"

The first aspect of the Engagement-theme that will be described was 'talking about it'. This aspect consists of two related issues (see figure 7.3). The first issue that will be described is the fact that, as the respondent who was quoted above told during the interview, speakers who presented their stories during the experience were often people who knew a lot about a topic in theory, but who did not work with the topic in practice. They did not live their story so to say. This struck some of the participants as peculiar and did not leave them with a good impression. The second issue related to 'talking about it' is that the subjects that many of the speakers came to present, were subjects that the participants had to deal with on a daily basis and that the organizers knew a lot about too. In some cases the question arose why people from outside of the experience were hired to 'talk about' things about which participants and organizers themselves would have something to say, if they would be given the opportunity.

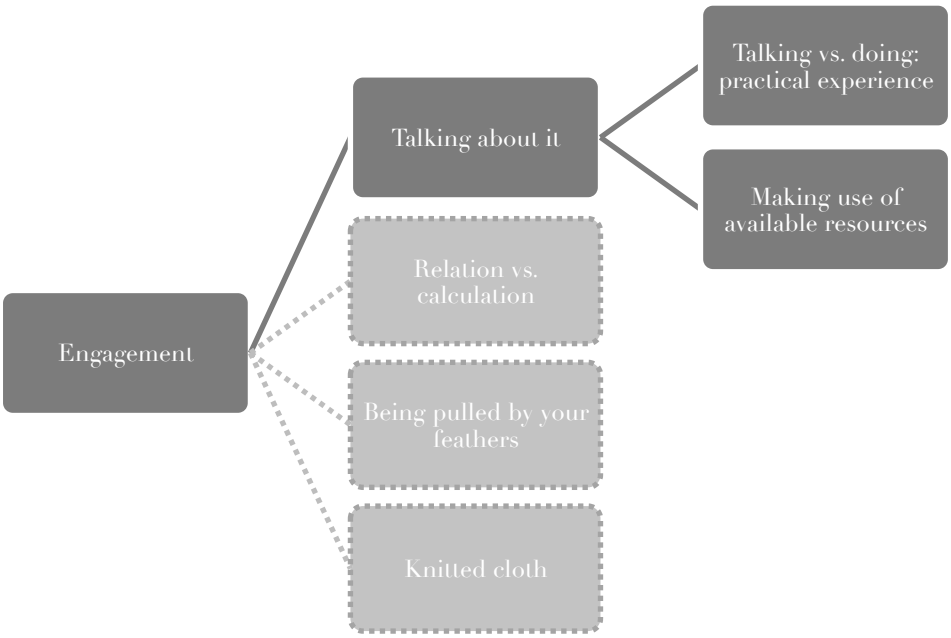

Figure 7.3 – Elements of subtheme 'Talking about it'

TALKING VS. DOING: PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

On multiple occasions respondents indicated that they experienced a clear contrast between people who 'talked about it' and people who were 'authentic', who were a part of what they had come to speak about. "(W)hat you see is that mainly people are invited who talk about it…. it's all nice and easy to talk based on books and so on…", but "(n)owhere have I seen a CEO or large shareholder of a company… someone like that I would have liked to see, because he deals with it. He doesn't give advice about it, he has to do it.". What was lacking was "the incorporation of some practical experience. I think that that would just be essential for me… because you don't need just hotshots. People of the work floor can often tell you very much, often more than those hotshots". "(I)f it's just about the content, then it remains quite distant… less personal… everyone stays in his own group, absorbing information, doing some assignments and writing a thesis or not, but do you get what I mean? It doesn't come close to people".

One respondent made a comparison with managers. "It also has to do with inspiration". She told that in her organization there had been a lot of change in personnel and that "the people who have left, voluntarily or not, those were people who were 'begeisterd', and the people who have come in are managers. And they are very good at their job but a manager doesn't ooze inspiration, at least professionally he doesn't. Related to managing he does. Well, and there you see a discrepancy arising because the responsibilities are no longer with the people who have to do the work… but because of this they also become detached from the primary process, and then they tell how it should be done". This respondent makes a clear contrast between the people who 'do the work' and the people who are detached from the primary process and are 'telling how it should be done'. In fact, telling how something should be done or talking about something while being detached from the primary process, can in some cases lead to quite strange situations.

One of the respondents told about the introduction that was supposed to be the kick-off for the experience. The organization had hired someone for this event, who spoke about what introduction is in a philosophical way. "(W)e have spoken all afternoon about the phenomenon 'introduction'… but we haven't talked about who are you, what do you do, what's your name and where do you work, so I walked back and I

still didn't know what all of those people did. So that was very strange, after half a day". In this situation the disengagement of the speaker and the practice of having people introduce themselves to each other, or in other words, the disengagement of the 'talking about' and the 'actual doing', even defeated the purpose of people wanting to get to know each other.

MAKING USE OF AVAILABLE RESOURCES

It might seem odd that so many speakers from outside are hired, when one thinks of the fact that due to the nature of the educational experiences, the participants as well as the organizers dealt with some of the presented topics on a daily basis and should therefore be able to speak about these topics from a practical perspective. However, little use was made of this practical experience, which was the second subtheme that emerged during the interviews. The lack of attention that was paid to the available resources received quite some criticism in this context. People from outside, experts, professors etc., were hired, while all the while also participants and the organizers themselves had valuable insights that they could share. "(A)lso letting people sometimes just tell their own story if it is relevant to a certain theme… why do you always have to look for it far away when you can also find it nearby?"

One of the respondents explained that what happened during the interview was that he disclosed his vision on many topics, like his vision on personal development and on certain developments in society. According to him this vision would have been valuable to share during the experience, in the same way that it was valuable to share during the interview: "that vision has, it's very arrogant of me to say so, but it has a certain value. Besides me there were (an X amount of) people with an equally great vision. And in front we had two or three professors who also had a fantastic vision. If you could actually disclose that and you are able to do that, then you would have an enormous amount of knowledge and information".

Of course this point could also be made related to the organizing party itself. It is possible that members of the organizing team also had an interesting vision that they could share with the participants, but "I thought that the (organizing team) placed

itself outside, more in an observing role… It was strange to think that they had nothing to tell. It became sort of a Calimero effect like 'let's hire all these hotshots because we ourselves have nothing to say'. Crazy stuff". "(T)he members of the (organizing team) have never stood in front of the group to tell what their ideas were, that was also something quite special of which I now think: what a pity".

Some respondents discussed the neglect of available resources and knowledge in a more general context. During the interviews this theme emerged various times. For example when one respondent spoke about a former job she told that according to her it was a pity "that they would always hire people from outside. And they didn't look enough at what they had available themselves. At a certain moment I discovered that for example there was a project related to (a certain topic) and I applied. I said: hello, I've graduated on this topic, … can I join?... you know, it's always so easy to get everything from outside while inside there can be so much in the people themselves that you don't even know. First make sure that you understand that a little bit. And that you sometimes use those people, so that they can work with that". "(T)here are so many people …that are just wandering around and it's like a vast giant resource that is just running around and can't translate themselves into a job market. …people with the most expensive educations in the world work in restaurants, work with nothing that resembles their academic qualities. And qualifications. It is incredible. It is so sick you know. A giant waste of resources. And I just, it's just, that makes me just annoyed". To waste the available resources may mean that opportunities to create value are lost. In the next paragraph ways in which this waste of resources can be avoided by taking a different perspective, a relational instead of a calculative perspective to be exact, will be discussed.

7.2.2 Relation versus Calculation

"Because the distance has increased, people have started to calculate much more"

The second subtheme that is related to the theme Engagement relates to the position that organizers take in relation to the participants. Many remarks were made about how organizers consciously or not, disengaged themselves and put themselves at a distance from the primary process that was taking place in the educational experience. One respondent called this attitude 'calculative'. To explain what he meant by this

term he told a story about when he was a little child. His family lived on a farm and his father bred cattle for export. When a calf was born that was not right for export, it would be sold to a local trader. One time a trader came and told that he was going through "some rough times, with his family and so on, and that he wouldn't be able to pay so much for the calf". The father, whom the respondent characterized as calculative, responded "too bad, there are ten others who can take your place, I just want to have that money". The respondent, explaining what he saw as his own relational attitude, responded in a very different way: "I was more like: just give him the calf. Don't act so strange, that man is having enough difficulties as it is". The father did not concern himself with the personal struggles of the prospective buyer and just thought about the transaction and the calculated price of the calf. The respondent himself did not have this calculative attitude. He had, as he called it himself, a relational attitude, in which he cared not only about the interests of his father but also the interests of the other person who was trying to enter into a buying relationship with his father. According to the respondent, society inclined more and more towards calculation, which he saw as problematic. The calculative attitude was an attitude where the individual disengaged himself from whatever he was witnessing and stood along the sidelines, watching the transaction as a matter of speak. This lack of engagement can cause problems, for example bad or non-sensical decisions. The respondent for example told about the patients that lived in the facility where he worked. In all the documents they were not being called patients anymore but 'customers'. In the context of customer-friendliness and customer-centricity he found this a good development, "but per definition a customer can choose... That (patient) here has no choice, he has no choice regarding food, he has no choice regarding his clothes, he has no choice regarding his nutrition, also other things, everything is presented to him". So the whole analogy of offering several amenities of which the customer can choose one and pay for it in a transaction, falls short. These 'customers' have no choice so the calculative attitude makes for a flawed perspective on this situation.

A calculative attitude means that one disengages oneself from one's surroundings. From a calculative perspective, the focus of attention is the immediate transaction or the object that is transacted, and it does not matter who the parties involved in the transaction are and what they experience. From a relational perspective, the focus of

attention is not the immediate transaction but the relation between the parties involved and the relation between the parties and the object that is being dealt with. To obtain a relational perspective, organizers could make an effort to pay more attention to the way things are experienced by participants but organizers could also make sure that someone devotes him or herself explicitly to the specific task of taking care of the social context (see figure 7.4).

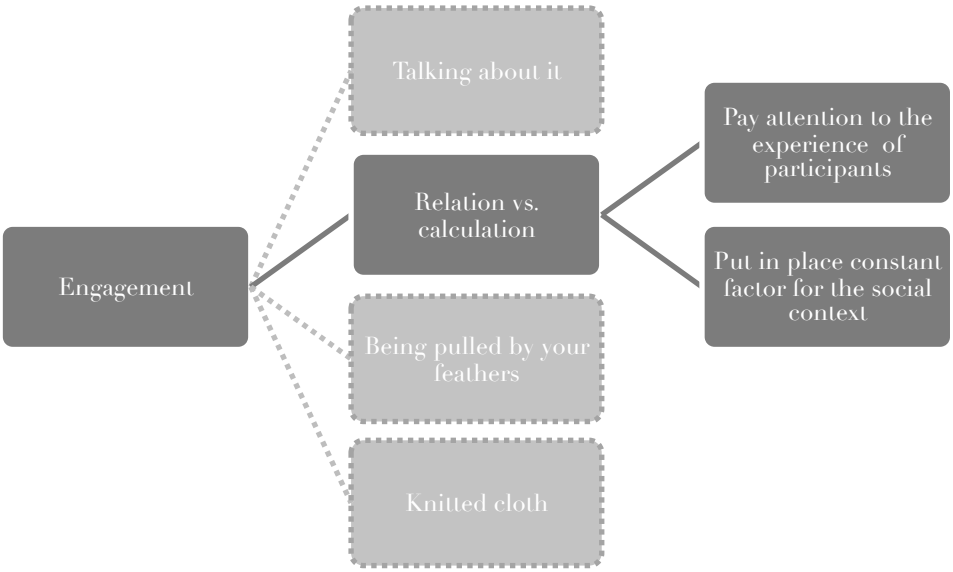

Figure 7.4 – Elements of subtheme 'Relation vs. calculation'

PAY ATTENTION TO THE EXPERIENCE OF PARTICIPANTS

An example of the calculative attitude was given by a respondent who told about how the educational experience ended. She felt that the organizers perceived themselves as standing apart from the experience, in a role of observing what happened in the group, rather than as part of the group and part of the experience. Especially at the end of the experience this became apparent, when the organizers had not thought of managing the ending of the experience. "Like we as (organizers) stand outside of the

system so we don't need to do anything about closure or something. Of course that's completely not the case. You're right in the centre of the system". They seemed to behave as if the transaction in their eyes had come to an end and therefore did not have to be managed. However, according to a respondent: "Rituals are required there. A ritual is required at the beginning of something but rituals also belong at the ending of something. Well, to me it is very characteristic if you look at it from a process-perspective. Then you don't feel like you should design that as a process and that that is important. (Nothing happened?) Nothing at all. No. Nothing". In this case emotions flared up and participants were so disgruntled that some didn't even want to pay or receive their degrees until the problems would be solved. An extra event, suitably named the "afterburner", was organized to give everyone the opportunity to discuss things that were still on their minds and to remove "old sores". The fact that this was necessary "that of course indicates something, if you have lived through an intensive trajectory for (many) months". The assumption was that if the organizers had been more part of the experience this 'afterburner' would not have been needed. The organizing party is an inherent part of the experience and it is an illusion to think they could separate themselves from the experience to observe the transaction from the sidelines.

An example in which there was a sharp contrast between a calculative transactional attitude and a personal relational attitude was when at the end of one of the experiences the participants had to organize an event. Two participants were asked to take the lead in the organizing process, as part of their learning experience. However, although their actions were part of their assignment, they were given a gift by the organizers of the experience to thank them for what they had done. This upset some of the participants and made the organizers the focus of attention: "especially if you start giving presents or something, then all of a sudden you're right in the middle of the system". As this respondent also indicated, the organizers are in a quite difficult position, because on the one hand they have an educational role and have to evaluate and calculate the results of the participants and thus should in one way or another remain objective, but on the other hand they are and always will be part of the system and in this sense part of the relation. How to find a balance between these two positions is an important question. The easiest solution might seem to take a traditional calculative attitude: to provide students with knowledge in the transaction

and to observe and evaluate the students from a distance. But this might cause problems related to the effects that the experience has on the individuals. For example, the participants in one of the experiences had to read an article about the use of information in decision-making processes. One of the participants was severely shocked by the information in the article: "I wanted to leave. I thought, well, I don't know what I'm supposed to do here. .. There you read that merely 10 to 20 percent of all decisions are based on the information that you have made into your life's work. Can you imagine? I read it, and I really was like: what am I doing? What do I do all day long? What in God's name am I doing?" However, the impact that the article had on the participant was not reflected in the way the organizers dealt with it: "he dealt with that text in a very rational way in the group, while I actually wanted to scream like 'I don't know what I should be doing anymore!', but that wasn't possible at all, because (the teacher) wasn't like that at all… so then I was still stuck with my problem of what do I need to do with my life, you know? With my daily work?" As can be seen from this excerpt, the text had had quite a profound impact on this respondent, but because of the calculative and rational way in which the teacher dealt with the subject and perhaps also because of the lack of personal engagement between the teacher and the participant, she was left to her own devices. In this way, the lack of attention for the way things might get interpreted by the participants or a lack of initiative to deal with the impact that certain things may have on the participants, causes the loss of the opportunity to perhaps support the participant in a personal, and possibly a very important and meaningful way.

Participants described various ways in which there could be a lack of attention for the personal effects of the experience. For example when it came to evaluating the experience: "we have asked for some sort of an evaluation at a certain point… but not so much evaluating the education as more like evaluating how far am I with my learning objective, how is it going? That evaluation consisted of some sort of a reflection of the (organizers) about what they thought of it but we were not heard. While I very much had the feeling like I want to be heard about what I think of this". In this example the evaluation that the participants had asked for, was not dealt with in the way they had expected. The participants wanted an evaluation of how they were doing in terms of their development, but the organizers made an evaluation of how they as organization were doing their job.

PUT IN PLACE CONSTANT FACTOR FOR THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

"In terms of group dynamics all sorts of things have happened of course, that have not been managed at all, in no way. In certain people this has just caused a feeling of insecurity. A sense of unsafeness. So connecting people, looking at what does the individual person need, yeah, I found that lacking, there was very little dialogue with students, I didn't like that either".

Of course the relational attitude may not be a natural attitude for everyone. In fact, one of the respondents remarked: "I have noticed that they as (organizers) thought to be very diverse, but they weren't diverse at all. They were very, cognitively focused persons… Who I think have observed and seen an incredible lot, but who have done no interventions. Consciously chosen to do no interventions". Again, also this choice to do no interventions may have had to do with a calculative attitude. If one sees the experience as a transaction in which two parties exchange money and information with each other, there is no need for a relationship. So as long as the flow of information is doing fine, there is no need for interventions. From this perspective, when the program of the day is finished, in other words when all the information for that day has been transferred, everyone is free to do whatever he or she wants, the organizers included. However, for someone reasoning from a relational perspective, it may seem that important contributions are missed in this case, as the following quote illustrates. "For example we had someone with whom at a certain moment I had a discussion. (X) is someone who … made a transfer to a different company because he felt he made no connection in that organisation so he said… I actually don't ever do anything with colleagues… my presupposition was that in was something in (X) and not in the company and I thought: the same thing will happen again, because he behaves in the same way here in (the education) too. At the moment the social program starts, he sits down by himself by the fireplace, reading the newspaper. He retires at 8 PM because he has to finish up something for his work. What connection is he then making in (the education)? And how does he do that? I think that these are things you can only diagnose when you have someone permanently in the group and the (core team) didn't have that. Because they also retired at 8 PM to prepare the next day".

It is obvious that when all these interactions and developments have to be managed this takes more resources than what was usual in the traditional massive educational systems. As one respondent who had started working for the experience he himself had participated in told: "you need the capacity to follow very closely from the coaches and the schools and the staff side the individual development. I mean you have to take into consideration that the (experience) values other qualifications than just academic qualifications. For instance try, in a school with 2000 students, you know, try to focus on the individual and try to give them, just try to look into the personal development and recognize it and develop a model to assess students' development, you know, and also look at what kind of resources it would take to do that".

A solution that was proposed to the organizers by one of the respondents was to bring in a constant factor in the group, someone who continuously has an overview of "what is happening now in that group? How does that group develop? Are the right lateral connections being formed? Are the people coming together who could enforce each other?" An idea would be to "just take a student from the last (education) group who participates another round, but who especially participates a second round to support the group process. So who is there at all meetings, who understands what people are going through, who in fact has just one task: making sure that everyone is feeling good". In fact, at another experience this is exactly what has been done. In this experience, the participants of last year are responsible for taking in the new participants. Besides the benefits in terms of the increased engagement between the organization and the participants of the experience, there are also benefits for the person him- or herself: "the greatest thing is that it is an incredible learning experience and a feeling of responsibility as a student to be part of taking up your coming peers. It was one of the strongest learning experiences".
When one deals with the experience in a calculative way, one is dealing with the experience as a transaction. Especially when participation in the experience can have a vast impact on the individual, one should make sure that the experience is not treated as a transaction but one should indeed be aware of the relational aspects of the experience. "I think that when you start an educational trajectory, in which you're going to fuss with ways of existence, ways of looking, ways of thinking of people, that you should also take care of the social context". Experiences like the ones the respondents had participated in, often had important personal impact. However, this

impact did not always emerge by itself. The next paragraph will deal with situations in which participants were sometimes forced to be confronted with themselves and their "ways of existence, ways of looking, ways of thinking".

7.2.3 Being pulled by your feathers

"and being examined in a critical way of what I do, that's what I had expected. That you would just be pulled by your feathers there"

Several respondents, like the one that has been quoted above, spoke about the fact that they had missed the confrontation during the experience. This respondent had expected to be 'pulled by the feathers' during the experience but when this did not happen she asked one of her co-participants to do it: "she started to interrogate me in detail in her own way like 'what do you do' and 'what happens then' and 'why do you do that', for hours. That's something that I expected to get at (the education). So someone who helps me, to search for my own explanation because nothing is as difficult as being able to explain yourself". On the one hand she thought it was expected of participants to be able to explain themselves, but on the other hand this was not supported or facilitated.

Where the focus in the last paragraph has been on the difference between dealing with the experience as if it were a very rational, transactional and calculative process and dealing with the experience in a much more personal and relational manner by taking personal effects into account, in this paragraph the discussion goes beyond the observation of personal effects and more towards trying to force people to enter the confrontation. This confrontation can take the shape of a challenging interview like in the example mentioned above, but also of a literal confrontation of someone with his or her behaviour (see figure 7.5).

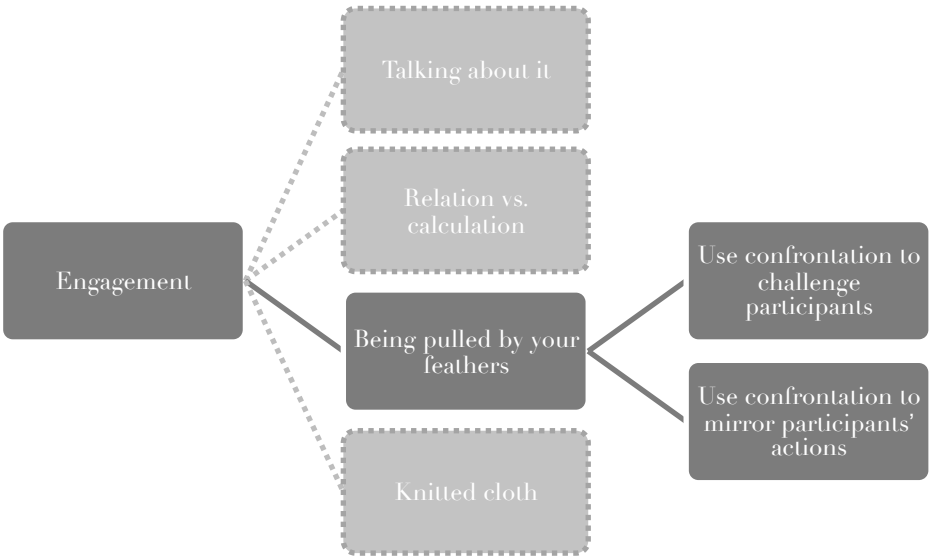

Figure 7.5 – Elements of subtheme 'Being pulled by your feathers'

Use confrontation to challenge participants

The kind of experiences discussed during the interviews may very well be confrontational in themselves for certain people. As one respondent remarked: "It shakes certain things that for many are self-evident to their foundation, it pulls at the core of how you look at the world and look at people. … there were some people in my group… who in that year have really struggled enormously with yeah, who am I, and where do I stand and why do I look at the world like that? Who have had to stretch their frame of reference". The fact that these experiences touch the way people think and behave and so on, already makes them confrontational. As one respondent indicated: "all those perspectives… also quite confrontational, because you experience how you also get locked into perspectives yourself". The content of the education and the way in which the content is offered may already take care of the necessary moments of confrontation and reflection.

Some respondents indicated that they had even let the level of confrontation influence their choice. One respondent had had a couple of talks with the organizers of a competing educational experience and these talks had gone quite smoothly. "(H)e connected very well with me. It also felt right. But when people connect very well with me and feel right, in me that immediately evokes some sort of, because I don't like those harmonious models, because I always drown in those harmonious models. I immediately leave, because for me that is no challenge". In his search for the right course he also had a talk with the organizers of the course he ended up doing, and this talk went quite differently: "they were like: you know quite little about organisations, and I was like: what is this? Of course that was kind of funny… that atmosphere… that appealed to me much more, it was truly much more challenging". According to this respondent, the challenging nature of the introduction had been a main reason for him to choose the experience. Other respondents also described the aspect of challenge. One respondent described it in terms of a difference between hard and soft educations: "in the end, in that aspect I missed a model and I didn't find the education soft enough, or maybe not hard enough. I always think you should reverse it, educations that don't confront people with each other are too soft, they are soft, I think that this is where there would have been an opportunity to get even more out of (the education) together". This respondent indicated that he saw confrontation as a beneficial aspect of educations, which could have caused people to get more out of the experience. In fact, he was not alone in having this opinion. "Personal development, in the end that is one of the most important aspects.... it always does something to your personality…. Of course you can also just say like we'll only pour a lot of theory in there and after that everyone's on his own", but then one will miss the opportunity of finding out what knowledge the participants possess and how they use it. As was already indicated above, one might also miss the opportunity to have a meaningful personal impact on the individual.

At one of the experiences that were discussed in the interviews, a choice was made by the organization to even make the application form confrontational. "(T)he application form… has more to do with you and your core, your DNA and what motivates you and why you feel, who are your role models and why do you feel you should be in school. I think it gives you much. It gives you an experience of yourself.

At least. You will find new things about yourself when you are addressed with surprising questions. But also it will give the school a better platform to assess you". Of course it might be nice for the individual to find out new things about himself or for the school to have a better platform to assess individuals, but the confrontation can also have effects on the ultimate goal people during the experience have: their learning. Some people state they actually need the confrontation or challenge to be able to learn better: "I'm inclined to learn when I feel threatened. I'm inclined to learn when I feel tension. I'm inclined to learn when I have a challenge. The moment I have a new VCR, I start to learn, so I need a challenge. That has to come from somewhere". This respondent indicates that someone or something has to be present for him to feel the need to learn. Although the experience might be confrontational in itself and although some people are better in finding challenges for themselves, there seems to be a clear role for organizers of experiences to at least facilitate the confrontations: "Although I do think that we could have gotten more out of it… I haven't been truly challenged by them. The challenge has come from out of me. But I also actually expect to be challenged by my environment. So that could have been done much more… it can also help you on your way, it can be sort of a catalyst, and I have missed such catalysts". According to this respondent the effect of the experience could have been greater if the organizers had done something in the contact of challenging participants. In fact, "I think that by being critical you make progress with each other. If there is no critical attitude, then it is like it is. I always want to explore: can it be different, can it be better? How can we get more out of it?", and trying to challenge individuals and confront them with other perspectives or with themselves or their own behaviour might be a way of making this progress.

USE CONFRONTATION TO MIRROR PARTICIPANTS' ACTIONS

Based on and named after the former Dutch public transportation system, all participants of one of the experiences were given a certain amount of 'strippen', which they could exchange for time to meet interesting persons like professors, sportsmen, writers, or whoever the participants deemed interesting for their learning process. Participants were not forced to meet with these people and so it could happen that someone ended the year without finishing his or her 'strippen'. However,

as one of the respondents that had someone like that in her group told, since this method is an important element in the learning process, one could wonder why someone wouldn't use all of the 'strippen'. "There even were people who did not finish their strippen. Who have given them to the group. That to me was incomprehensible, in my eyes that is really incomprehensible…. But if you don't use your (strip), then I think this requires at least a talk. What happens to you that you don't use that (strip)? Why, why, why not? Is that (strip) unhandy? Do you find it difficult to organise? Are you afraid to call up a professor? What is the deal with you that you don't do this? These discussions have never taken place". More generally, participants could also be confronted with their behaviour related to the assignments they were given during the experience: "How come you haven't finished your homework? Or that you hand in something of which the group says: listen, we're not going to invest any more energy in you. Cause this was the third time you didn't keep your promises".

Of course not everybody likes to be confronted with his or her behaviour. However, as one of the respondents explained, for some people the confrontation can function as a trauma or a mirror, causing people who otherwise would not have felt the urge to make changes, to change. "(A)s a force, as a potential force within the education. … have the courage with each other to make that transition to that of which you have always been so afraid? Because you don't do that until that trauma emerges, or that mirror emerges, only then do you have that change. ...9 out of 10 times, someone does not change spontaneously from out of himself… it's just like with the frogs, you put those frogs in a wheelbarrow and some always jump out. You lose those. But the others of course come out of it much more mature and developed. In that aspect the education is lacking".

Obviously not everyone will be challenged by the same things and not every challenge will have the same effect on everyone. This is why knowledge of the background of people, of who they are, is of paramount importance. In the next paragraph the need for understanding the background of participants will be discussed.

7.2.4 Knitted cloth

" (Do you ever think back of (the education)?) No. (never?) no, not really… because I tie everything together. It was just a gigantic piece but, well, you develop. Also from a personal perspective, or in terms of consciousness, of course you read a lot of books. It is just one big piece of knitted cloth, it has just been integrated"

In the quote mentioned above, the respondent indicates that the experience and all the other things that have made him develop, that have made him into who he is, have all been integrated. It has all become 'one big piece of knitted cloth'. The experience does not stand on itself for this respondent, it has become one thread in the whole piece of cloth, one part of his life. According to another respondent, it is a part of the "line of development. So it's one type of growing awareness next to other types that you have, that you experience, and the books you read and whatever else you do, and that is just your growing awareness… It was a way of developing next to other ways that I also experience. That's how you should see it…". The fact that the experience can influence one's whole life was reflected in the following quote of one of the respondents, who told about the potential effects of the experience: "at the end of the road you either have a different job or a different wife".

In this context, one should also take into account that the participant in the experience is not some sort of tabula rasa, but a human being who has already experienced many things that have made him into who he or she is. This background of the individual can have a lot of impact on how he or she is going to experience the education, in both positive as negative ways (see figure 7.6). "(T)here should exist, let's say, some basic knowledge. But after that it makes a big difference when I'm attending lectures and I have been educated by my father who is an entrepreneur, than when I was educated by my father who is a civil servant. And let's say if I already had my own internet company when I was in high school, it's truly a different situation from me not even knowing where the economy pages are in the NRC". Another respondent expressed it as follows: "you act through who you are. ...you bring what you have experienced and what you have learned, you bring it with you. And it doesn't have to be expressed directly all of the time, but it still has a certain impact on it". This impact was perceived in different ways. For example "The reactions were very different because everyone had a different background… and that

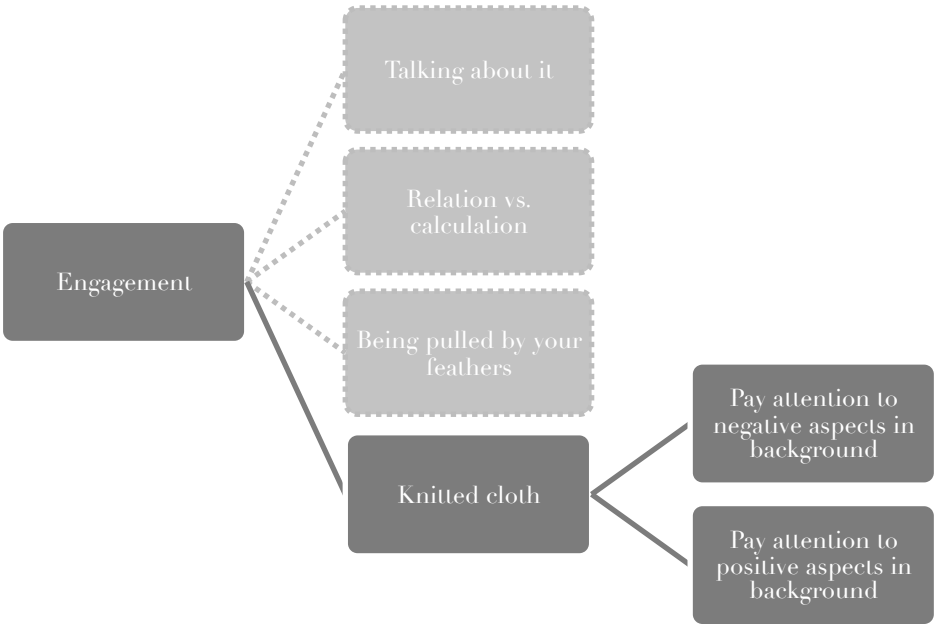

Figure 7.6 – Elements of subtheme 'Knitted cloth'

made the whole just very colourful. I found that surprising, and also a bit a relief". Furthermore, people "have gotten very different things from (the education) because they just have a different background, other interests". Also the quality of discussions during the experience was connected to the background of participants: "I think it is nice if you already have a couple of years of experience. ...Because you can then better put yourself in the place of the experiences that you have had… there were also many technical people there. And they simply look at things in a different way… the way they… talk and think… and perhaps that is also the reason why during classes there was often not so much discussion. It was often quite limited; I had expected more of that too". Other respondents also criticized the different, more 'technical' perspective of some participants. "There indeed were some who have not gotten so much out of it I think… you notice that upfront. You know it upfront because it's a different level of thinking. Not less intelligent or something but less conceptual or something, with less overview or something, you just notice it, you notice it… I have a

couple of people with whom I can talk well, about conceptual levels, and about the totality of these and the idea behind it and philosophy, and others, some of those people are very much into the operational things… and if you notice that upfront then you also know that they are going to get different things from it".

Of course one might say that the goal of the experience is to increase the participants' level of thinking or as one respondent called it: "to stretch their consciousness" but "if the goal is to get people to stretch their consciousness then this will always succeed, everyone on his own level, where he is at that moment in his development". One of the respondents explained why it is sometimes difficult to find a way to evaluate what people learn, precisely because everyone starts at their own level. In his work he often had to work based on a very "mechanical", "phased" and "blueprint" -like method and sometimes he was confronted with problems inherent in this method: if the score for some activity was 5 percent and the goal was to achieve a higher score, this method "says: 'you have to measure, you need indicators with which you can measure because you want to know whether you are attaining your goal'. Well, imagine that I write down '8', eight percent, from five to eight in that system, and I achieve 10, then they say: 'how is that possible? Why didn't you write down 10?'" The point for this respondent was not the score, but what the score means: "that we are getting people to a level that they start to think: hey, wait a minute, how can I observe in a smarter way? And how can I get better returns to my effort? How can I use my scarce resources better?", which are all goals that have the former level of the individual as their basis, not some standard universal level for everyone.

However, at certain points in the experience, especially when topics like meaning and interpretation are dealt with "you would want to have a certain level of consciousness. I think. … I can imagine that it would be very handy if there would be some more conscious people... you need a certain level, otherwise they don't get it". People did in fact not just criticize the level of thinking or the level of consciousness of other participants, but they also reflected on their own. For example, one respondent was happy that she had not participated at a very early age: "it shapes you. Yes, and I don't think that it would have shaped me so much when I was 20 years old. (Because?) Because I think that now you have the insights and a sort of maturity with insights, that now you suck it up. And know how to apply it. I don't think that had I been 20, I would have done that. When I was 20 I have also been to the Gaza strip in Israel for a

couple of months, that also shaped me, but in a more superficial way I think, so it's all, I think this was just the right time, you know, that you also captured the depth that's behind it. Because otherwise I probably wouldn't even have understood it". Another respondent thought that it would have been better for him if he had participated at a later stage in life. Had he been older with more years of experience, the experience would have "connected more with one's own world of experience". Furthermore, he thought he would have had "a different view of education in the broader sense of the word", than the view of someone like him has who comes relatively "fresh from out of school". He thought he "would have even liked it better and found it more interesting, I really think so. And also that my own, my individual contribution to the group would have been bigger. It had definitely been different, but also bigger. You have more practical experience that you can bring into a discussion". This lack of experience was quite an important issue for the respondent, in the way that he kind of felt out of place because of the lack of background and even thought that "perhaps they should have refused to take me in, perhaps they should have refused me. And that also goes for some others in the education. They should have taken us in but maybe in 5 years or so. Or in 10 years… afterwards I think well, maybe it would have been good if they would have said come back in 5 years. I wouldn't have liked it back then, but now that I have done the education I would understand".

When there is a selection process for an experience, as was the case for the experiences discussed during the interviews, the background of the individuals can be taken into account, to evaluate whether the individual would be right for the experience and vice versa. The importance of this intake process is stressed by participants because of the impact that the background of the individuals has on his or her own experience but also on the experience of others. One of the respondents for example blamed the presence of too many participants with a technical background and little more general experience for the fact "that there often was not so much discussion during sessions. It often was quite limited, and I had expected more from that". Had there been more attention for the background of the participants, this problem might have been prevented, but the respondent told that "it wasn't a very thorough intake, but you had to write something about work, and about the experience that you have collected, you had to write a text of one-and-a-half pages and we discussed that". That in some cases the intake process was perhaps too

light could also be deduced from what another respondent told about the selection process: "and so (one of the organizers) gave me the list of assignments that I could make over the weekend, to bring with me to (the first session), while everyone else had been preparing that for months". It is very possible though to construct a much more severe selection process, as was exemplified by the story of one of the respondents, in which the level of education is checked, previous knowledge, the professional context, the employer, the social context, and "then in the end you get a stamp like you're in or you're not in. That is only the first elimination round". It is obvious that in this latter case a better understanding can be gained about the background of prospective participants than if they were to just write a page-and-a-half assignment.

PAY ATTENTION TO POSITIVE ASPECTS IN BACKGROUND

These are of course important reasons for taking into account the background of people. If problems and dissatisfaction can be avoided by paying attention to people's background, it would be good to look into this. However, one of the respondents had a different perspective on the importance of attention for people's background. One should not just pay attention to it to avoid problems, but according to him one should explicitly make an effort to find valuable talents in the individual backgrounds of people. "I am so opposed to the kind of thinking that we should all be educated and trained to be able to do the same things and I would say okay, yeah, reading and speaking a language, that is cool, but to me then it kind of stops. I actually feel that everywhere in our system I think we should be looking for people's talents". He had gotten this idea when he was at a congress where he heard a psychiatrist speak about how to identify young psychopaths so you could help them from a very early age. "(A)nd then I just realized, okay, what if you start spotting the talent of every single individual very, very early in life? … how could you allow young people to just develop their potential, is it musical, is it sheer creativity, is it mathematic, intellectual capacity, a love for language, language philosophy or you know, is it natural, the natural sciences, what if we spot the talents there and give them an infinite opportunity to better themselves and to improve and excel".

Of course there are as many ways in which background can have an impact on the individual's experience as there are backgrounds. However, I would like to illustrate what has been described above with some examples derived from the interview transcripts. One of the respondents, when he wanted to describe the impact that the experience had had on him, told about his studies when he was young. He had started with a very scientific study "and in the last year of that study I fell into a crisis, also in a personal crisis… also a spiritual crisis… because from when I was a little boy I had always dreamt of deep truth,… at the end of my study I was confronted very much with .... that it, the natural sciences… that it consists of a very restricted domain,… it is the exterior side of things, it is external, it is exterior, it is what you can measure,… that was confrontational for me that on my road to truth I had a crisis, because it was just very limited, it was not the deepest truth". Later on, this respondent took up a part time study in the field of theology, history and antique languages, disciplines with which he "fell in love" and in which "I received very good feedback. My professors enjoyed my translations also enormously, they always said. To me it was also the road to liberation, but it put me in a difficult position since I couldn't accomplish synergy with what I was dealing with in the work situation". These two crises, one in which he found out that the physical sciences didn't help him with his passion of finding the ultimate truth and the other in which he experienced himself being in a difficult position between his passion for his studies on one side and his work on the other. The experience he ended up participating in, was in this sense a "great opportunity...because it presented me that very deep drive to learn, but also to learn fundamentally, in a very transformative way, in a way that was compatible with work, that it nourishes each other. Instead of clashing with each other. It related very well with each other". In the experience he studied subjects that had his interest and that at the same time were relevant for his working life.

It is clear to see that this respondent, because of his specific background, had a special need for being able to connect the material of the experience to his work and that he didn't care for dealing only with information about the exterior side of the world. The balance that was made in the experience between the more personal and philosophical topics and the way in which they were related to his work worked very well for him. However, one could also imagine that an educational experience that resembled his former studies would not have worked well for this respondent at all

since he even tells that those former studies have brought him into a situation of crisis. On the one hand it could be just a lucky coincidence that the experience and this individual with his specific background and interests matched so well. On the other hand the initial idea was that this participant's manager would participate in the experience. The manager did not feel like it and thought that it would be more something for this participant. Since the manager and the respondent knew each other quite well, it is possible that the match was not just a lucky coincidence, but that the manager had enough relevant knowledge of the background of the respondent, that he could foresee the match. However, the experience was not tailor-made for this respondent so one could imagine that the match does not happen for everyone. By gathering information on the background of people and trying to anticipate it, one would not just have to wait and see whether a match would emerge, but one could try to create a match by adapting or customizing the experience. This way the perceived quality of the experience could be improved. However, the following example will show that there are also situations in which a lack of knowledge of the background of people can lead to many problems.

PAY ATTENTION TO NEGATIVE ASPECTS IN BACKGROUND

One respondent told about her interest in the way that power is used and misused in organizations. In fact, the topic she had chosen for the thesis that participants had to write for the experience, had to do with the abuse of power in organizations. The thesis was not the only assignment participants were given during the experience though. Participants had to write papers and do other assignments which were periodically evaluated and on which feedback was given by the coaches. The results of this evaluation could be good enough, not good enough and good enough, but with an assignment. This last judgment, good enough but with an assignment, meant that the paper or thesis or whatever was being evaluated, was good enough for passing, but that the organizers thought that with doing some extra optional work, the participant could "make an extra step". However, the exact criteria for giving this extra assignment were not completely clear and the judgment remained a quite elusive concept for the respondent. This also shows in her explanation of what happened when her theses were evaluated and judged by the coaches as being 'good enough but with an assignment'. The situation was that she had written two separate

theses, one about her past professional life in the healthcare business and one about the use and abuse of power in organizations. Both theses were deemed good enough, but she was given an assignment to try to connect the two separate topics since the assumption of the organizers was that both topics were related. At the time of the interview, several years had passed after finishing the experience, and she was at that moment working on making that connection, because with hindsight she realized that the organizers had been right in their assessment. However, the lack of clarity of the concept 'good enough but with an assignment' for this respondent caused her to feel very bad when her work was given this judgment. "I had worked tremendously hard on both (theses), I had invested very much time and energy in it… and to me it was like, I am also quite normative, it was really like being hit by a sledgehammer that I had an assignment, … and to me it was like, it really felt like, well, at that moment I really experienced it like power, like well, I am not good enough... they said: it is not good enough. It is good enough but there is an extra assignment. Well, that hit home, that made, something inside me snapped at that moment".

The normative character and the allergy for power that this respondent said she had, were reasons why she had so much difficulty accepting the judgment according to her. Of course most people would probably have preferred a good enough above a good enough but with an extra assignment, but also the way in which the feedback was given had made her really angry: "after two weeks I called him on the phone and said: hey, I want to have a talk with you because I can't continue with you like this anymore. I can't look at you anymore. I'm incredibly angry with you, for the way you have treated me". Between the moment of that evaluation and the interview, years had gone by and "(n)ow I say yeah, that also has to do with the fact that I have experienced them in the context in which I found myself in back then, the development that I was going through, to look for power, as power and as wrong power. At the moment that (name) started to discuss my (thesis)… If I look back at that now… like what was being said and how did I interpret it, then I say: I just didn't feel taken seriously. While my everything was laying there on the table, there were two of the things with which I was struggling, my whole life lay there, and someone is going to judge that, well, you can already have an opinion on that, that someone else is going to judge that". The resistance of this respondent against someone judging her work, may seem strange when one takes into account her own acclaimed very

normative background. However, during the experience she was confronted with her own being normative all the time and according to her, the biggest lesson she had learned from the experience was in fact that she was normative: "Well, one of the things I have worked on very hard, but of course I always, that's the monkey on my back, I am normative… and what I have worked at very hard, and have to work at every day again, is that I have to postpone my judgment…. So one of the things that I very strictly adhere to, since [education], since I made the decision I don't want that anymore, it really bothers me, as a human being, it causes me to have a narrow perspective on things, I don't want that because it makes me, as a human being, it makes things more difficult for me as a human being, but also that I perceive the world in a different way, so it's not good for me, so it bothers me, but it is not good for me either… Because in [education] I had a strong feeling that being normative holds me back very much. It really bothers me. When you're very normative and something happens that does not live up to your standards, then either someone else is not good enough or you are not good enough yourself. And the 'you're not good enough yourself' can hold you back enormously in some areas….That is just something that grows, that comes along in [education]. That perhaps is the core of the biggest learning point". By taking into account this respondent's 'blind spot' as she calls it, the organizers of the experience could have helped her in a better way with this realization, because now "in my feeling there has been too little intervention on what my blind spot was. But perhaps that was the intention because now I have had to learn to discover it myself, so I don't know. But I do think that for some people this didn't work… experience-based learning happened because you picked it up yourself, but if you don't want to see it or you can't see it, then you won't see it". The chance that people don't want to or can't see their own blind spots is big. To help participants with this, organizers of the experience could for example work with "feedback rounds", and "learning goals, and that other people give feedback on this, the stating of learning points, which you have to show in the here and now, to which other people can react". According to this respondent, these activities could have helped her and others in dealing with their blind spots.

Another example of a situation in which an understanding of the individual's background could have helped the experience was the following: one of the respondents told about when he had started working as a consultant. Continuously he was confronted with situations in which he saw something as self-evident, but his

clients thought otherwise. "(I) had to explain time after time what to me was self-evident: why you prefer model A or model B. And I had to consult with my colleagues every time like, guys, to me B is self-evident, but the client says: why not A? Help me. ... So I started to extract information from all of my colleagues, ran around asking questions… and I noticed that my own expertise really ended up in the periphery. I started to copy everything and parrot everything they had. I thought: I don't like that. In the end it becomes you, because if you practice a lot you start to talk automatically but it was not me. So I thought: I have to do something else. I have to make sure that I develop my own area of expertise". This respondent's problem and main reason for coming to the experience, was that he felt as if he was conforming to the group of peers he was working with and that he had lost his own expertise. With this knowledge of his background, one can understand why he was very reluctant to participate in a forced group process in the experience: "I don't want a forced group process or something… I invest in individuals or in a couple of individuals but I don't intend to invest in the group as a whole... I am here for my own learning process, that is one, and two is: if for my own learning process I need other people, or if other people for their own learning process need me, then we have a negotiation. And then we'll see. If I like it, I would like to stay in touch, I would like that very much even, and the other way around, if you like it and I like it then we also have a deal. But don't start asking me to all of a sudden, in the context of the group, to interfere with people who lag behind or who suddenly want something that doesn't interest me. I won't invest energy in that. And that is not because I don't like those people or something but that's not what I'm here for". This respondent participated in the experience for the explicit reason of retrieving his own expertise and not having to conform to others anymore. So when the group had to divide into four subgroups based on specific topics and he ended up being the only one choosing a certain topic, other groups were overcrowded and he formed a group of one. "(A)nd then they started to pressure me like 'wouldn't you consider joining one of the other groups?' I said 'no, this is what I want'. 'Yes, but we have a problem'. I said, 'well, who has a problem?'... I said: 'I don't have a problem'". The respondent explained the problem as being a difference of perspective. He was there for his own learning process, to retrieve his own expertise. Therefore his perspective on the experience was that it was a "transactional process", "if for my own learning process I need other people, or if other people for their own learning process need me, then we have a negotiation".

The problem was that the organizers had a different perspective according to him: "the moment you want to approach it from some solidarity or collectivistic principle, then you have a different approach. I don't have that. And don't start to force me to have it because then for me the transaction is gone".
The examples given above of how background can have an impact on the experience of the participants, should act as a sign of the importance of taking into account the backgrounds of participants. During the selection process and during the experience itself, organizers should be aware of signs of situations in which certain aspects of the background of individuals help or hinder their experience, so action can be taken to prevent negative and support positive effects.

7.2.5 Lessons to be learned related to engagement

In the previous paragraphs, four subthemes that are related to engagement have been discussed, together with some important points of attention that emerged from the interviews (see figure 7.7). These attention points that have come from the direct experience of individuals themselves, are of course valuable for the educational experiences that were focused on during the interviews, but in this final paragraph on engagement, an effort is made to translate these findings and to see what general organizations that are dealing with experiences, also outside of the educational realm, can learn from the analysis of the interviews.
The lessons to be learned in relation to the theme engagement, can be summarized by saying that organizers of experiences should realize that experiences are systems in which various groups of people are engaged. These people are part of the experience and should not be viewed as neutral, objective individuals who stand apart from each other or from the experience. Speakers, participants and organizers are all engaged in creating the experience and are all related with each other.

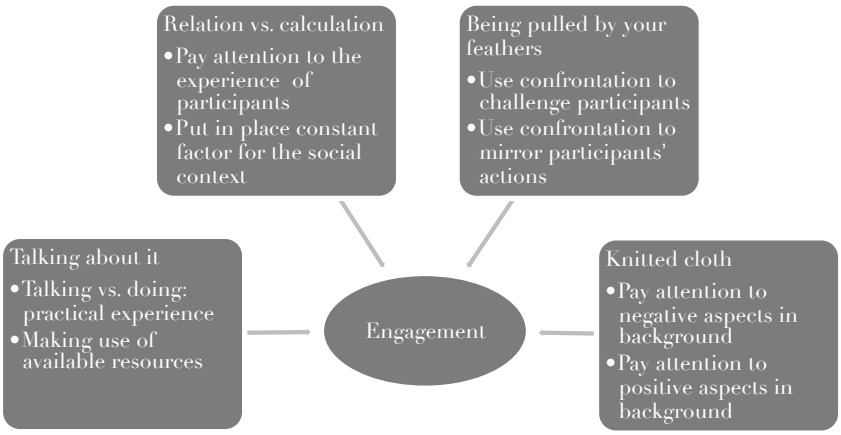

Figure 7.7 – Lessons to be learned in relation to Engagement

The first subtheme that was discussed in the context of Engagement, was 'Talking about it'. This subtheme referred to situations in which speakers were hired who spoke about certain topics although they had no or little practical experience with the topic at hand according to respondents. Of course, not in every experience there are speakers, but this insight can be valuable for other types of organizations too. If there is a preference for information that is closely related to reality, as the respondents express, then every organization can learn from this. Every organization communicates and distributes information, inside and outside, so by finding ways to keep this information concrete and related to reality, the meaning of it may come across much better.

'Talking about it', also referred to situations in which experts from outside were hired while there was much knowledge 'inside' the experience that was left unused. One can imagine that if more and more experiences are focused on attracting active participants instead of mere passive observers in an age of co-creation, the value that can be created by making use of the available knowledge and skills and talent of participants, can grow enormously. In co-creative experiences individuals are not

passive absorbers of stimuli provided by the organizers, but are expected to fulfil an important role in the creation of value. The more important this trend towards co-creation experiences becomes, the more important the lessons related to the engagement of participants are.

To be able to make use of the available resources within the experience, one has to know which resources are available. To understand how one could make use of the talents of the participants in the experience, one would have to make an effort to get to know them and find out what talents they have. This cannot be done by standing along the sidelines of the experience as a calculated transaction, as if one was an objective observer. An experience is not an objective transaction that one can observe and calculate from outside, but it is a system that one can only fully understand by being part of it. The perspective taken should therefore be more relational. After all, the organizers and participants are all engaged in the experience and are therefore involved in a relationship with each other. Organizers could thus make an effort to understand what kind of implications are experienced by participants because of the organizers' actions, or they could even make it someone's explicit task of getting in touch with the participants' experience on a continuous basis.

Especially when confrontation is or becomes a valued activity within the experience, organizers need to enter a relationship with the participants, to learn about how to confront them best and whether they even desire or need this confrontation. For participants who claim they need confrontation, to become more aware or to accelerate their learning process, this can become a very important function in the experience. Especially when organizations become more interested in co-creation and in shifting towards more active experiences, the importance of this function may increase even more. This development has even led some to claim that we are shifting towards a challenge economy (Lier, Heijblom & Waijers, 2009). However, not everyone will be ready or willing to be confronted since confrontation may be very painful, as was also argued during the interviews. Still, one should realize that what may seem painful experiences at a certain point in time, may end up being very beneficial experiences in the end. Some even claim that this type of seemingly negative experiences is needed for the individual's personal development, by causing experiences of 'positive disintegration' (e.g. Dabrowski, 1972).

By taking a more relational, instead of a calculative approach, there can also be an improved understanding of the backgrounds of people, which can be taken into account in the experience. The backgrounds of people can have serious positive but also serious negative consequences for how they experience events and situations, so an understanding of these backgrounds may be very important to understand how specific individuals will experience what the organizers have put in place for them. Obviously this requires not only more, but also different information on the individual, than the demographic information that has traditionally been collected by market researchers. Participants do not just have an age, profession, income, gender and other demographics, but they also have "expectations and motivations… a wealth of previously acquired knowledge, interests, skills, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences" (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p. 79). All of these affect what people will do during an experience and how they will interpret the experience. It would therefore be wise for organizers to look into ways of discovering the individual characteristics beyond the mere demographics, and to take these into account in the design of the experience.

7.3 Direction

The second of the three themes that emerged from the interviews is Direction. This theme is related to the role that the organization has in the experience. On multiple occasions during the interviews, respondents spoke about either the way in which they perceived the organization as being too directive, or situations in which they would have wanted some direction when there was none.

In this paragraph the questions, challenges and possible problems related to direction will be discussed. This theme has been subdivided into four subthemes (see figure 7.8). The first three subthemes have to do with the amount of direction: an excess of direction (7.3.1 – Not getting on that bus), reasons for being less directive (7.3.2 – The image of the sower), and a lack of direction (7.3.3 – Here's a bike and go). The fourth and last subtheme has to do with the content of direction or the two tasks that are seen as very important for the organizers of the experience: being clear about the context and the norms (7.3.4 – What movie you're in). Finally, in paragraph 7.3.5, lessons to be learned for experience organizations in general will be discussed.

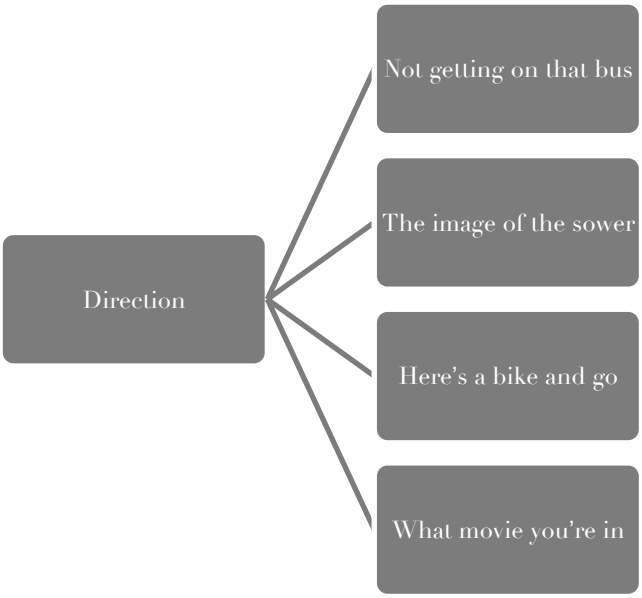

Figure 7.8 – Direction and subthemes

7.3.1 Not getting on that bus

"I don't get round to what I actually want. So on the third day I just said: I'm not getting on that bus anymore"

During the interviews, respondents often spoke about the way in which they felt they had no freedom or autonomy to give input and take action in the experience, because there was too much direction from the side of the organization. There were three issues that could be related to this excess of direction: too many activities that were planned in the program so that the program had become too full, there was too much sending and a lack of two-way communication, and things were directed where there was no need for direction at all (see figure 7.9).

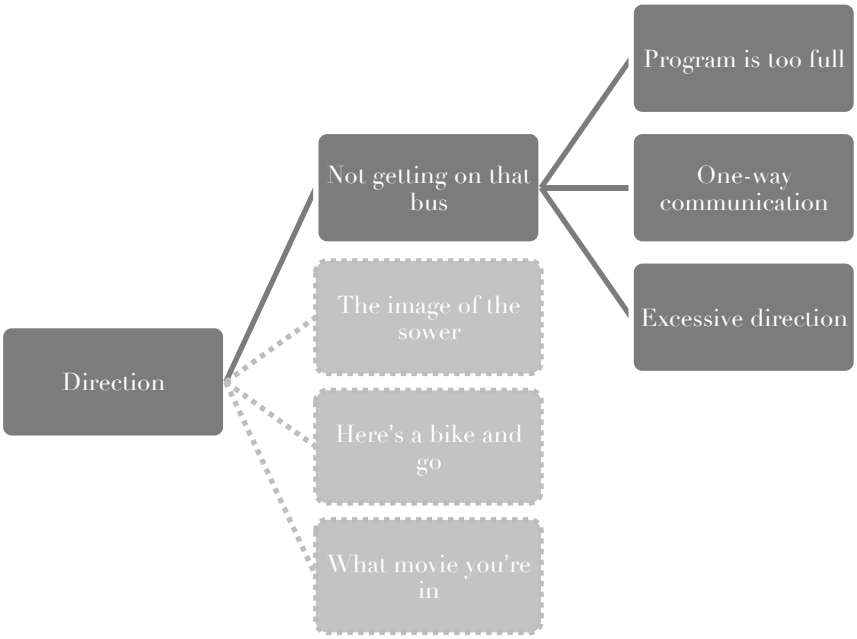

Figure 7.9 – Elements of subtheme 'Not getting on that bus'

PROGRAM IS TOO FULL

In the quote above for example, the respondent had very different ideas about what she wanted to do and accomplish during the trip than what the organizers had programmed for the participants. "For example we went on a trip. They had put together a program for the trip and I thought, well, that program just isn't for me. I'm just not going to do that. Because then I'm in a circus in which I don't want to be. Where we have one meeting after another with hardly any time to internalize those meetings and to connect them at all with what I actually want here. … And with all this hassle, where I'm put in a bus, running from one meeting to the other, I don't get round to what I actually want. So on the third day I just said: I'm not getting on that bus anymore. I refuse. …. So not just running from one place to another like an idiot…. The program was so full that we had no time at all for exchanging. Till late at night it was all meetings with people… I won't get on that bus again. I don't like it at

all". The program was so full that it even interfered with what this respondent had wanted to do, leading to her refusal to 'get on that bus' again. There were many instances in which respondents told about situations in which the focus of the experience seemed to be primarily on the side of the organizers and much less on the input and needs of participants.

ONE-WAY COMMUNICATION

"What I generally found was that the whole education was designed along a quite strict rational line. What in itself, content-wise, is a good thing, but look, at a certain point you have taken in like a basic amount of information and data". After having taken in this basic amount of information and data, there should be opportunity for participants to discuss and give their own input so they can learn also from each other. However, several respondents remembered situations in which this opportunity did not exist: "Actually I specifically didn't like it for just one reason, that he was like 'sit down and let me tell you,… I will tell you how it all works'. He sat down and just started talking. After 3 hours he closed his mouth and we could ask an occasional question, but then he left again… sending, I'll come and do my thing and then I leave, or something". One of the respondents remembered some "speakers that make you think, God, how do you come up with it? Who only deliver a speech, but who didn't wish to be disagreed with during their story… Who of course are not used to something different, and find it incredibly hard to enter a discussion, because it surpasses their way of thinking". As this last respondent believes, it could very well be that certain speakers are just not used or willing to enter into a two-way communication process with the participant and are more into "sending" or "playing a cassette tape". However, there are also situations, just like the example of not getting on the bus in the opening quote of this paragraph, where the program itself is the cause of the lack of two-way communication. "(W)e actually found that during the whole [education] the personal experience of people or the projects they had experienced, there was not so much time for that in the whole program. A certain trajectory has been thought out, that they want to walk you through… and really interesting projects or things that people had experienced at their work… that just was brought to the fore less. There is a speaker, and someone starts telling about his own personal experience in that area. And at some moment that is kind of cut off,

because the speaker has to finish his story within time. And then I think, that is a pity, because the main point is the combining of knowledge in the group. A speaker like that should provoke, but if something emerges, let it go, make room for that. Yeah, they're not yet playing that game in the right way".

EXCESSIVE DIRECTION

A restriction in the participants' own initiative can also take place out of fear for the impact of this initiative on the other participants. For example, one of the respondents was curious what would happen if she, as an experiment, without the other participants knowing, would "start behaving like a rat" in the group and "completely ruin something". She proposed her plan to the organizers who told her that there was room for experiments in the experience but that her experiment was "not possible, it is methodological, we can't do that". The experiment would possibly have a personal impact on people and would have an influence on the experience itself, and that was something that the organizers did not want according to the respondent.

When there was a lack of attention for the needs and input of participants, sometimes participants became rebellious and felt like "it just is not working for me like this, in this way. I am not getting what I want. Or let's say I have to do something of which I wonder is this me? Conforming to some system". For example, in one of the experiences the participants had to make appointments with people to speak with them on the topic of their assignments. To start things off, the organizers "had made some appointments with people, but the first thing I said is 'can those appointments be cancelled?' Why? I said: 'well, if we have to do it ourselves, then we are going to do it ourselves', I said, 'then I don't need a prefabricated program. That's so hypocritical'". This respondent even gloated a little bit when she told "What was nice by the way, was that at some point in time we were told by the coaches that the persons on their list… were practically never invited. So they had started to complain like 'we are not being invited'… completely different people were being invited … than the ones they had on their list. So that was kind of nice, that you saw that happening".

However, the fact that participants didn't like too much direction and even rebelled against it, does not necessarily have to be a problem from an educational perspective. The respondents complained about not liking the situations described above, but they did not say anything about whether these situations were obstacles in their learning processes. There are situations though, in which the excessive direction hindered the actual learning process of participants. A common element in the experiences that were discussed during the interviews was the working on assignments in small groups. However, respondents expressed some doubt about how these groups were formed and whether this couldn't be done in a different and hopefully more suitable way. For example one respondent described how groups were created during the experience she participated in :"We could choose from eight themes but there could only be four groups. So I said, well, I find this very peculiar. I said: so theoretically I could end up in a group that I don't like one bit… there were only four of them so that's why there could only be four groups. So those are very strange frameworks… So you might ask whether those were the people with whom I wanted to do the most, or who brought the best out of me". The framework of having to form a predetermined number of groups, in hindsight left this respondent in doubt about whether she ended up working with "the people with whom I wanted to do the most, or who brought the best out of me". Her thoughts about this, although again, the interview took place years after the experience so the respondent spoke with hindsight, were: "I don't think so, I don't think so". One respondent told that probably because of the way in which groups had been formed initially, six months after having been formed some groups "were not doing well". Because of this, the organizers "have taken the initiative to mix the groups up again. Causing a rupture in the line of development of people". Another example that was given was when participants in one of the experiences all had to organize a day based on a topic. However, because of time and money problems, people were paired up. "(B)ut that also meant that I for example was paired up with someone while our [topics] were completely unrelated. But you have to do something together. ….Well, I have subordinated my [topic] to someone else's [topic]". Because of the pairing up decision, participants also had to share the budget they had received for hiring an expert, which in the case of this respondent ended up in her partner hiring an expert and the respondent doing something herself. "so I explained something to them about [topic]. …But I would have liked to hire someone who would do something with it… I'm not an expert at all so I can at best share what I have learned. … Together we

had 300 or 400 Euros, or what was it? For that amount you can at best hire one expert….If I had really done what I had wanted to do with my [topic] … then I would have wanted to share more about that". In this case the pairing up intervention resulted in a participant who ended up not doing what she had really wanted to do because she subordinated her topic to her partner's topic. It is also very possible that the learning processes of the other participants in the experience for whom the day was organized were compromised, because of the budgetary problems and the resulting fact that this participant as a layman in the topic explained what an expert could have better explained, had there been one. The question is whether the implications of the decision to pair people up because of time and money constraints have been thought through sufficiently because the type of direction that was chosen had negative consequences for the experience of the respondent and perhaps also for the other participants. Perhaps a different type of direction could have been thought of, that had the same beneficiary results in terms of time and money, but not the negative effects on the experience. A different but similar issue related to direction took place when in one of the experiences, people were told that they had to form their own curriculum and that they were completely free in doing this. However, according to one of the respondents, they were absolutely not free in doing this. Implicitly it was made very clear which literature was suitable and which was not. She understood that this type of experience has to have a certain quality and that the level of the education is evaluated and accredited and so on, but according to her the implicit direction towards certain literature was completely unnecessary. Because the core literature on a certain topic, "whether it is being told or not, you will still come out at that. Because if I don't know something about a domain, then I start to sniff around and I will end up with those books. Why do I have to, did you expect me to end up with completely different things? And I would have been told: yeah, but what about (names of the authors that were deemed as essential for the topic at hand)? So I don't get that principle". Why was it made clear what the 'right' literature was, when participants would eventually have ended up with the 'right' literature anyway? The process leading up to finding that literature might have differed from person to person but the result would have been the same according to this respondent. By telling participants in advance what the result should be, it is very well possible that the organizers take a valuable lesson away from them related to finding out what the relevant literature in an area is. In this senses, sometimes an excess of control or

direction may have negative consequences. In the following paragraph more reasons are given for why one should sometimes make an effort to curtail one's need to control things.

7.3.2 THE IMAGE OF THE SOWER

"The image of the sower… you sow. And well, part of the seeds falls onto rocks and another part falls onto fertile soil. And you have absolutely no control over this. And actually it's also, it doesn't matter at all. You sow, and yes, that is such a mystery, that growth process… the seeds work in the soil, you don't see it, it's invisible. When it comes above the ground much has happened already, so you trust in this, you hand it over"

The image of the sower that is alluded to in the quote above, refers to this respondent's opinion that not everything is, or should be under control. When seeds are sown, you have no control over the growth process. If one would try to speed up the growth process by pulling at the plants for example, one could even do damage. Of course this lack of control also means that one doesn't know whether all seeds will end up in plants but one should therefore 'trust in this' and 'hand it over'. It is a process that is 'invisible' and takes place 'in the soil' so the only thing one can do is to support the process and wait for results to emerge. This trusting, handing things over, and waiting may become problematic when, as a respondent described: "People want a lot of control" but according to him there are many things that cannot be controlled completely: "you can't plan that in a blueprint. You have to let it emerge. You have to cherish it, you have to water it, you have to talk to it so to say, so I'm kind of a sower. And sometimes it emerges and sometimes it doesn't, but something emerges, things start happening". Which things happen and which things don't, is not under complete control of anyone. For example, in the end, neither participants in the experience, nor the organizers of the experience know what people will end up with, what they will remember or what will make the biggest impression. In this paragraph examples of this phenomenon and ways in which one can behave like a sower, like giving space to the ideas and insights of participants, paying attention to the individual goals that participants have, and allowing solutions and insights emerge (see figure 7.10), will be described.

GIVE SPACE TO PARTICIPANTS' IDEAS AND INSIGHTS

As one respondent told, the situation that made the biggest impression on him was a part of the experience on the one hand, but on the other hand it had not been directed.

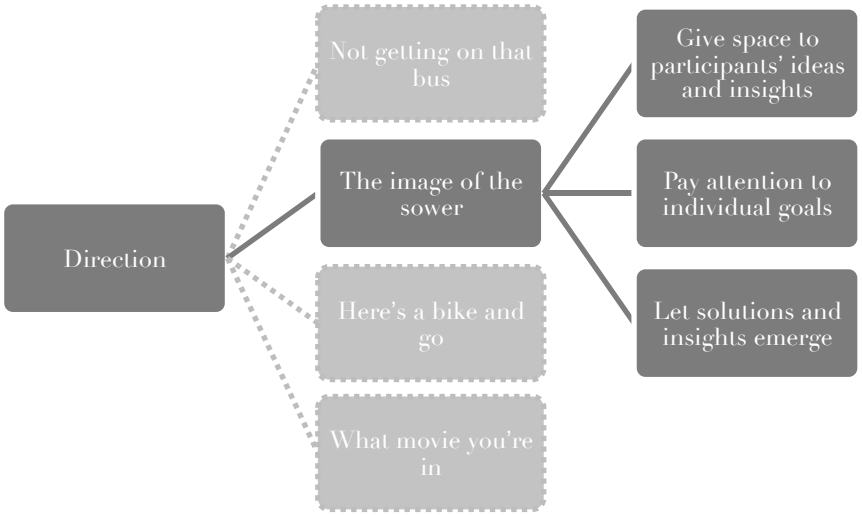

Figure 7.10 – Elements of subtheme 'The image of the sower'

During a study trip there had been a part of the program where all participants had had to visit "normal people" in their homes. The fact that the father of the family that this respondent had visited started to tell his life story was a very memorable experience that had made a deep impression on the respondent. Although the visit at home was pre-programmed by the organizers, the father telling his whole life story in a very passionate way was not. By providing the opportunity of visiting 'normal people' in their own homes, the organizers of the experience have, so to say, planted the seeds. However, what exactly happens during these visits and what effect this will have on the participants is undeterminable upfront and cannot be directed. Another respondent told about a study trip abroad where a visit to a water laboratory had been organized for the participants: "We had a wonderful contact with the ladies over there, ... and she told, it was completely unrelated to the water laboratory, but just her

stories about how she had to raise her children, who were almost Western in terms of their way of thinking, so who didn't want to do anything anymore for other people, and how she was raised, so for me, I have had completely different experiences, everyone has actually had that, to us it wasn't about the practical part. We all have those different contacts that we fully used, and all specific insights". When asked about what made the biggest impression during the experience, many respondents did not tell about the rational contents of the experience but more about events that made a great impact on them personally.

Personal impact is sometimes incorporated as a goal in the experience by organizing events that don't have an explicit link with the rational goals of the experience, but where the aim is to support the individuals in their general or personal development. Journeys to other countries with other cultures were described as having this effect on participants, but visits to people's homes and survival trips are other examples of events that can be organized to facilitate a possible personal effect. "There we have done a sort of survival trip and that was also very surprising. What happened there in a couple of occasions… there also was this guy … we had to abseil, and he was like I can't do it, I am not bold enough, and he eventually did (descend) that mountain, I still get goose bumps, yes, yes, and that you think: sheesh, you know, … someone takes a step that he by himself would never have taken, yes, he arrived completely 'yeeeh'! You know, big applause, yes, those are the things that stay with you". The mere memory of this event still made this respondent 'get goose bumps' and whisper when telling about it.

PAY ATTENTION TO INDIVIDUAL GOALS

Besides giving individuals space to express their own ideas, one could also give them space to express and reach for their individual goals. Especially for the type of educational experiences that have to deal with accreditation committees and so on, there will be common goals that are determined for all participants and that are managed and controlled centrally. However, participants may have additional individual goals that differ from one person to the other. "What is your goal to come here? With which goals are you here? And which goals do we have in common? And which goals are individual? The common goals… are easy, we can attain them easily,

but I want the individual goals to come to the fore, because those are a reason for you to stay here. And that is also what I find so important in such an education. To watch that very closely. … and I think those are things in the learning process that pull at you, to attain your individual goal, it pulls at you to work with that, it pulls like a hobby or like a challenge, to come back. That is what makes it so beautiful to pay much attention to it". Organizers of experiences could therefore try to find out what the individual goals are and make an effort to facilitate participants in attaining these individual goals. One of the respondents for example told how literature was dealt with in the experience he had participated in. Instead of the traditional model of building a curriculum and having everyone read the same material, in this experience books, lectures, case studies and workshops were used, "but you only do these things, you only add theory, if you will be working with a project where the content and some of these things can be applied". Not the curriculum and the central program were the core of the experience on which decisions were based, but the needs of a specific participant at a specific moment in his or her development.

LET SOLUTIONS AND INSIGHTS EMERGE

Besides the focus on the centralized control of what participants take in, attention should also be paid to their output: "it is of great importance to not be dealing constantly with that input, but to provoke output". Not only could the facilitation of knowledge sharing between participants cause them to have more access to valuable knowledge: "those people also had a lot of knowledge that had a lot of added value. Everyone who entered there brought a lot of knowledge with him, A. based on his individuality, personality, you name it, … but on the other hand there was also a lot of knowledge around (the topic)". Provoking more output from the participants could also have additional benefits in the form of getting "more insight in the roles that each has in the group… you can also attend someone to his role. By this you can also have people look at themselves much better". The sharing of information can in this sense function as a mirror in which people get a better look at themselves and learn more about themselves. The sharing of information and discussions amongst each other can help in clarifying one's perspective. "(A)lso this type of discussions, this sort of discussion that we are having now, those have to, those should already take place

much more often during the education itself. … it was focused too much on rationality". However, there were also examples given of how the level of 'rationality' could be decreased. For example, one respondent told about a problem that arose when participants had to divide the group into subgroups based on some topics they could choose from. He had been the only one who had chosen for a certain topic and first felt pressured to join another group. However, he didn't feel like changing groups since he had chosen a topic that had his interest. Then other people decided to join his one-person group but he said: "ho, wait a minute, those who are joining out of pity, those who are joining because they are superfluous somewhere else, as far as I'm concerned are not welcome. ... I choose this theme with my heart and my soul. If there are other people who by giving in or because they are superfluous somewhere else, they are not motivated enough to pull this theme together with me". Both options, him having to change groups and him having to accept other group members that did not choose the topic at first, did not take into account his perspective. In both cases he had to conform to the wishes of others, while he had come to the experience with the main reason to learn how to not conform to others. The problem was solved by someone in the group who suggested to let the solution emerge in the following way: "He said: '(name), do you want to tell us what (the topic) means to you? And why it was so interesting for you?' So I could kind of advertise why I found that. So okay, that was nice. And then someone said like 'now I think it's good to ask who, based on this story says that gets me going'. And then people joined. I said, 'well, then we have a deal. ...if based on this story you say I feel connected with it, then we have a deal'. And we have had the tightest group of all". The solutions that consisted of forcing the respondent to conform to others did not help the situation but when the situation was not forced and the respondent was given the opportunity to explain to others why the topic was so interesting to him, the problem was solved. Sometimes, not forcing people to do things or do things in a certain way, may actually help in the learning process. As one of the respondents for example told, he always made sure he did not take complete control over ideas he came up with in his organization, but rather made an effort to have ideas emerge collectively and flow freely, because "if I have an idea, I have to sell it. But if an idea emerges in a group then it is our idea". Instead of trying to convince everyone else of his ideas, he let go of complete control and claimed to give the individuals in his organizations the freedom to express their own ideas in the group. Another respondent told about a course she had done in the past that had been very important

to her. Students were given a large piece of paper and a special pen and were "given the assignment: 'just put dots on the white surface'. … I received no instructions at all, just 'do something'". At that moment the respondent thought it was a "very stupid" and "retarded" course, "(b)ut okay, of course you obey and you were given harsh feedback on what you had done, like 'what kind of mess is this?' And then you were looking at those little dots and you thought like, yes, I just did something, they are just small dots, but it is very difficult because where do you put that dot? Where do you put the first dot and the second dot, and well, one point in time, months later, you look back at your first drawings and you see, yes, that dot is not in the right place there, no. No, no, that is indeed a wrong dot. So what you have learned is to see dynamics, by placing small dots. The year after we could do a dot and a small line, really ... And I think I've done that for five years. At a certain moment it was a square, then it became a coloured square, well, like that… apparently it did something with me". The course 'did something' with the respondent, although the assignment had been very vague and she had 'received no instructions at all'. The freedom that students had in putting dots on the white surface, made that they had to discover by themselves what was a right or wrong dot, "and that is about relations. It is about seeing dynamics, and seeing dynamic and static differences. And when I walk into a company I see that. Then I see, and that's what I call 'incongruence', then something is not right… it can also refer to the relations between people, how people react to each other, for example". At the time of the interview, this respondent intended to start her own company based on this ability to see what she called 'incongruences,' so what she had considered to be a 'very stupid' and 'retarded' course without any instructions, ended up having a great influence on her professional life. By not directing the students in where and how they would place the dots, by giving them no instructions at all and by letting them 'just do something' and make a 'mess', this experience later appeared to have been very important to her. Of course, the large amount of freedom that was given to students may have worked very well in the context of this course, but this does not mean that it would per definition work equally well in other situations. In the following paragraph several examples of situations in which there was too much freedom will be discussed.

7.3.3 Here's a bike and go

"Self-discovery is very good, but well, you don't tell a child: 'here is a bike and go' either. You tell him there are the paddles, that is a saddle and this is kind of how you do it".

Based on the former two paragraphs, it might seem as if control and direction are always wrong and may cause many serious problems. A consequence could even be drawn that for these reasons it would be better to give participants maximum freedom and autonomy. However, respondents also described multiple instances in which it was a lack of direction that caused problems. For example, the quote mentioned above was derived from a story in which a respondent described how participants were presented with several topics during the experience. "I said, I experience that as a kind of system in which the responsibility is shifted upon others... you now expect me to form a view on the whole professional field, then I have to find out who are the inspirational writers or the exemplary figures in that field, and then I still have to read all those books. I said it would save me a lot of time and energy if you would give a personal anthology on how you view the field. Or something. So self-discovery is very good, but well, you don't tell a child: 'here is a bike and go' either. You tell him there are the paddles, that is a saddle and this is kind of how you do it". On the one hand the participants were required to look into the topic, but on the other hand they were free to decide where to look for material and what they would read about the topic. Since most of the participants in the experience had no, or at least no recent, academic experience, it took them much time to find out who 'the inspirational writers or the exemplary figures in that field' were. Had the organizers given a presentation of their perspective on the topic, this would have saved the participants a lot of time, which they then could have used to learn more about the topic. In this sense the respondent thought that they were given too much freedom and could have benefited from knowing where the paddles and the saddle were so to say. Of course, something can be said for giving people freedom to discover the relevant literature, since this process of discovery can also be a lesson in itself. However, in the eyes of the respondents, there seems to be a fine line between too much and too little direction from the side of the organizers. Especially when specific results are expected to be delivered by participants, when participants are not aware of what could be learned, and when participants are responsible for each other's learning processes through the sharing of information, more direction is preferred (see figure 7.11).

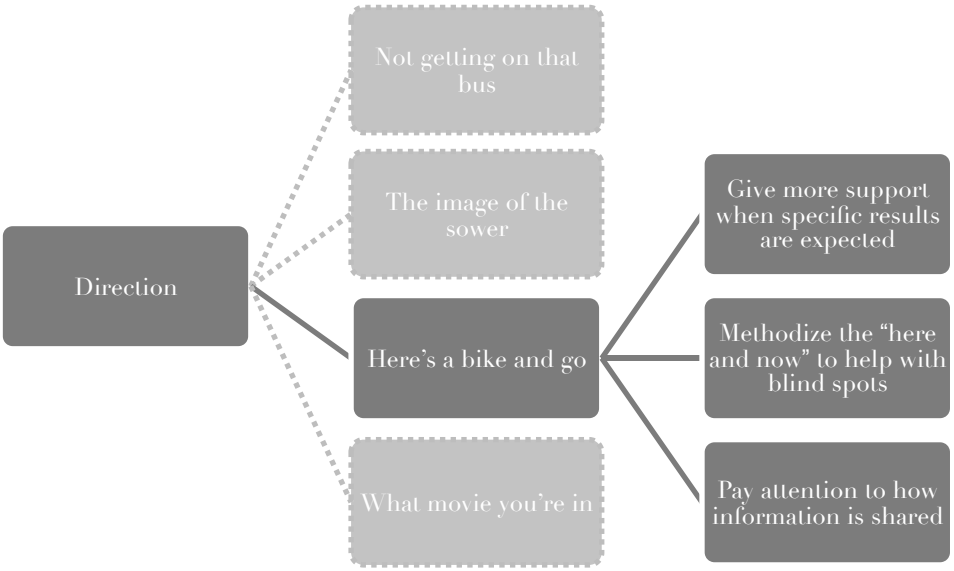

Figure 7.11 – Elements of subtheme 'Here's a bike and go'

GIVE MORE SUPPORT WHEN SPECIFIC RESULTS ARE EXPECTED

There is a point where participants don't want more freedom, but just want to be given a push to move on. One of the respondents for example told about when someone was

invited to help the participants with moving on with their research projects: "We then had a consultation of 15 minutes with him, one on one, because that was what people needed. (The organizers) wanted to do something plenary but we didn't want that at all, for once we just wanted some advice from someone, just content, just give me a push so I can move on. All that searching is very nice but it gets you nowhere. … Sometimes you just want an answer, like try doing this or that, so with a research proposal, I don't want an answer like well, then you can also read that book or that book, That is so not what I am waiting for … What (this person) did, was putting

down clear boundaries: you will not succeed in doing this. Period. And if you still want to do that, you should go about it like this. Well, then you can proceed". Although this respondent liked to have freedom in the experience, sometimes more direction was needed than was given by the organizers. In educational experiences, there is also a goal of obtaining a degree or learning something, so complete freedom may not be beneficial to attaining these goals. For example, in the beginning of one of the experiences "(w)e were sent to [place name] with an hour-long introduction on observation, followed by a half hour of instructions of a DAT recorder, and the program in which all appointments were written down and good luck! And at the end of that week a product had to be finished. …. And what do you end up with then? You have an individual process of people, you have a group process, and you have a production process. And those are all intermingled in the week. Well, that doesn't work. People are all communicating with each other on different levels…. You can see that there has been too little direction. (Concerning what?) Concerning the coaching. It is too open, and that doesn't have to be a problem, but it will be if at some point in time you also expect people to produce something, and to do this and that". As this respondent explained, there were three different processes going on at the same time. Especially for the production process, at the end of which the participants were expected to deliver a specific result, some direction was needed.

Methodize the "here and now" to help with blind spots

It was not only in cases in which the organizers expected specific results that more direction was wanted though. More direction was also wanted in situations in which the participants were not aware of what to do. The following respondent described one of these situations. She spoke about what she had termed "the methodology of the here and now". To explain what she meant by this she gave an example of how she had incorporated it in the experience. When she had to present a project that she had done on how people communicate non-verbally, she could have given a formal presentation on this topic. However, she decided to use the 'here and now' to explain how this kind of communication works by taking pictures of her fellow-participants and then using those pictures to explain some principles of non-verbal communication: "and I explained to them, using those pictures, that is a picture of

you and look, what can you see in it? And I explained: I took that picture in this context and because she sits like that and looks forward and opens her eyes very much, you can read the following in that...". By using concrete situations in the experience, she explained how this type of communication worked. Her advice for the organizers was "to also methodize what is happening in the here and now so you can work with it. To make someone grow". One thing that she had in fact really missed in the experience and that she thought might have been resolved by methodizing the here and now, was that during the experience "in my feeling there was little intervention on my blind spot". Blind spots are "areas in which one fails to exercise judgment or discrimination" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008). Examples can be character traits or behaviours that the individual does not notice of him or herself and that he or she is unaware of. Therefore it is very difficult to change these traits or behaviours if they are negative. In these cases the organizers of the experience could intervene in the process of becoming aware of the blind spots, and in the process of changing them if needed. By focusing on the 'here and now', the individuals could be made aware of how they behave and act in practice, which can be the first step towards change. When no interventions were made, individuals sometimes remained unaware of certain negative traits or behaviours: "experience-based learning happened because you initiate it yourself, but if you don't want to see it or if you're not able to see it, then you will not see it". By giving more direction in this area, individuals may become more aware of themselves and their behaviour and learn important lessons about themselves. One of the respondents for example complained about a lack of facilitation with regards to self-explanation: "someone who helps me to look for my own explanation, because nothing is as difficult as being able to explain yourself. And it's being asked of you but it's not facilitated. And I think, that is because, psychology of a layman, (the organizers) don't explain themselves in the research that they do. It's not about them, it's about a phenomenon. You can look at a phenomenon but you can't look at yourself. Yes, in a mirror, but then you just have the outside". She thus arranged for a fellow participant in the experience to interrogate her on how she acted and even after the experience she has continued the process, by asking her clients "why are you hiring me? And how do I do things? And how do you know that I can do it?... And then you get really nice answers, sometimes very disenchanting".

The need for 'mirroring' was described by various respondents. One of these had a background in psychiatry and he compared the experience of someone holding up a mirror to you to the experience of a trauma. According to this respondent, the psychiatric discipline makes a distinction between two types of change in people: change of the first order and change of the second order. To start with the latter, "change of the second order is adapted behaviour. People return to their old behaviour when they find themselves in a different situation". A different type of change is change of the first order, which is lasting change that is evoked by the experience of a trauma. This more lasting kind of change can also be evoked by holding up a mirror to someone, this respondent explained, because this confrontation can also be experienced as traumatic. And "only at the moment that this trauma emerges, or that that mirror emerges, only then do you have that change". It would thus be very useful to make an effort to facilitate this mirroring process in the experience by paying attention to how participants behave in the here and now, and to hold up a mirror to them to make them aware of possible blind spots.

PAY ATTENTION TO HOW INFORMATION IS SHARED

Besides the focus on the lessons that can be learned from the here and now, one should also pay attention to what has been learned by others. Instead of the here and now, one could call this the then and there: not what is happening right at this moment to the person himself but what has happened to other people, experiences that they can share with each other. To give an example, one of the respondents told about an element of the experience in which the participants were divided into groups that would all focus on a separate subject. At the end of the project all groups would come together so every group could share what they had learned with the other groups. However, this process was not managed well according to the respondent because "then you receive a big pile of material of which it is difficult to follow the line of reasoning behind it, because you weren't in (that group). So that kind of feels like a handicap". What the participants received was "a database or something, with books, interesting books, with summaries or something, like that". What the participants in other groups would do with these books and summaries was left up to them, this was not facilitated or managed. Furthermore, the groups were free in deciding how they would share their knowledge, which in some cases resulted in a flawed understanding

of what the group had actually done. For example, "for system dynamics we played the beer game… and that is about systems thinking. The game is a lot of fun only it doesn't tell me anything about system thinking that has an added value for me. So the quality, the transfer of knowledge, that's not managed. And that is, you have to structure that more. That in the end you have a document, that you can use, that you can have a good debate with each other about the ins and outs of something". This respondent actually quite liked the fact that the group was subdivided into smaller groups that all focused on different topics because this way more information could be gathered in a small amount of time. However, "the moment you choose for one (group), you also drop other things" so if the sharing process is not executed in the right way, the participants don't really learn from their fellow participants' lessons. The organizers could pay more attention to this process so the context of the information that is shared is clear, by having participants explain the 'line of reasoning' behind their work and the reasons why for example they see the beer game as an appropriate context for explaining system dynamics. Other reasons for clarifying the context of the experience are discussed in the next paragraph.

7.3.4 What movie you're in

"if you don't know the context, how much security do you then have for learning, because you have no idea what movie you're in... Had I been the boss of (the experience) I would have given that a much clearer place. Clarifying to participants, students, who enrol: this is the context, this is what we are going to do, this is what we intend with it, the storyline".

In the last paragraphs the degree to which the organizers should influence the experience was discussed. In some cases participants thought that there was too much direction from the side of the organization and wished for more freedom and autonomy, in other cases they experienced too much freedom and autonomy and wished for some more direction. However, besides the degree in which they wanted direction, respondents also discussed the role that organizers should or could play in the experience. In general, organizers should make sure that the context is clear for everyone and they should clarify what the rules of the game, or norms, are for the experience (see figure 7.12). In the words of the respondent quoted above: the organizers should make clear in which movie one finds him or herself.

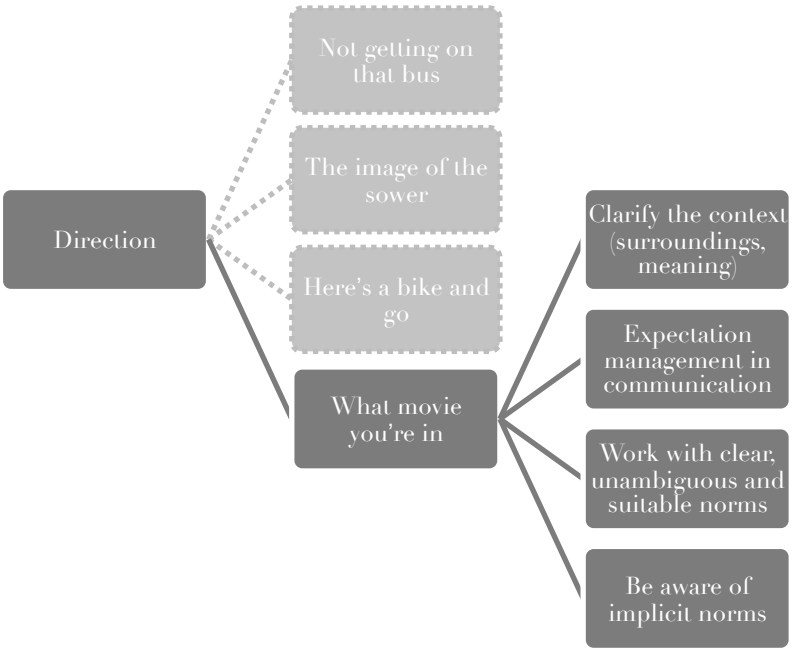

Figure 7.12 – Elements of subtheme 'What movie you're in'

Clarify the context (surroundings, meaning)

Not understanding the context in which things are happening makes people insecure. People are sense-making creatures and if they don't understand what is happening and don't feel safe, they will make up their own story about what is happening and why, as can be illustrated by the following story that one of the respondents told about a study trip she and her fellow participants had made as part of the experience: "all along during that trip I had the feeling now they will give me a report on what kind of person I am. It is sort of an assessment trip. All the while I was thinking that I was in some sort of assessment. 'And then someone will arrive, who...'. Also all sorts of things kept happening there. I remember at one point, at night we were having dinner… and a glass of wine was knocked over or the waitress knocked over a glass of wine and she went completely ballistic about that glass of wine…and you could hear the chef singing very loudly from the kitchen while we were at the table,… so all the time I was

thinking: these are all actors and they are just observing our reactions. They are just observing people here. How we react. They will give feedback on it later on like: 'well, these are the points you could improve, in the context of (the education)'. So seriously, right after that trip but also the time after that I kept on waiting for like when is that report coming and it wasn't until the third time that I felt like well, no, there will be no report. And I kept asking like 'gosh, were they actors?'. Well, no, it just was real… But this also means that I never ever have known in what context I was being placed… if you don't know the context, how much security do you then have for learning, because you have no idea what movie you're in".

Especially for an educational experience in which there is a clear goal that the participants have to attain, namely learning, clarification of context and norms is important. Like one respondent who herself teaches at an educational institution explained, at the beginning of a course you have to explain: "we're going to do this and this and this, the experiment consists of that and that and that, and I ask you to participate, because you can learn so and so from it. That whole piece, putting down the context, so that people experience safeness and think, this is not just doing anything but also understand what is going to happen and in what light".

Context can be given in different ways. One example would be to chose locations and venues based on the topics that are discussed. As one respondent suggested: "I could also imagine to make the surroundings interact much more with the learning process. Which would accelerate it. Why not in the library, if all of a sudden books are so important? Why not go to the Royal Library then? That sort of things". In the case of books in a library setting, the link between location and topic should be quite clear. However, some other connections that were meant to give context were less clear. For example, "those were all different conference venues and they had tried to make a connection between the theme and the place we were at. (in what sense?) Based on the topic that we were dealing with at that moment, they had looked for a location…. (because those were, I don't know those locations, but what was the connection then?) Yeah, well, you would have to ask them". This respondent indicated that she remembered that there was some sort of connection but unfortunately she had no idea what the connection had been. Other respondents told about a mill, a steam pumping engine, an art museum, a place for missionaries owned by a church and a

restaurant where the connection with the topic at hand was often hard to find: "I don't see the advantage of it happening in one place over another". If the respondent that was quoted above was right and the interaction between surroundings and topic indeed accelerates the learning process, the lack of perceived interaction may mean that opportunities for learning are lost.

Some examples given by respondents may show that possible connections between venues and topics are manifold. For example a connection was made between a visit to a museum of ethnology, in which the main themes were symbolism and power and the work environment of one of the respondents. As this respondent told: "of course there are certain populations and if you have like a village chief or something, who had decorated himself in a certain way… that was kind of an expression of power, it all has to impress others and so what you see here with the Board of Directors, that they all (have) a large room and a wonderful table". Another respondent described a session in a different museum, the museum for the tropics, in which one of the participants gave a presentation on the connection between his fascination for travelling and his work as an consultant. His fellow participants recognized the connection between the location and the subject of the presentation and asked him questions about whether in both areas he also had a specific interest in people and new things and whether he was easily bored with assignments. "There you make a nice connection". Another respondent had also chosen a venue for her presentation on the telling of stories and thinking differently that fitted the topic: "we did our (session) in a castle… and there we hired a female story teller… I think that such a castle is appropriate for that. Fairytales and knights". These respondents gave examples of connections with specific venues. However, one respondent thought that going "somewhere completely different" was the most important thing. Many of the developments and issues that are dealt with and discussed during the experience, are international or global developments and issues, and "I do think that you have to go there to experience it, to see it, live it. To feel what it means". "It is an enormous difference. You look at the world differently if you have just been in (your own country), or if you've also been travelling in the world. So if you look at working in a mind-expanding way, I think that travelling does that very much. So the fact that you are just somewhere completely different, that you experience other cultures, that you see other developments, that just is an experience. You just feel it".

Context does not necessarily have to do with just the physical surroundings that one finds oneself in. Context can also be symbolic. By clarifying and agreeing on what is meant by certain words, one can avoid lengthy semantic discussions on the meaning and interpretation of words, and save time that can be used for learning. “So if I say to (name) ‘I see a flying chicken’, then she knows exactly what I mean. So at one point she also said ‘There’s another chicken’, ‘Could you give me another chicken?’. Well, then you have, then you create a common language. The moment you don’t do that with each other… you have to place yourself in the other’s shoes every time. In what the language is… that doesn’t mean that there is less freedom, but you just indicate, this belongs in that quadrant and we have that word for it. And then it’s clear”. If there is a “common language” and “you (don’t) have to place yourself in the other’s shoes every time”, attention can be focused on the core of what is being communicated, which may again help in accelerating the learning process.

Besides the use that that clarification of the context may have in the acceleration of the learning process, it may also help participants in understanding how the various elements that the experience consists of, fit together and how they can be translated to the participants’ lives outside the educational experience. Especially when “all sorts of things are being dragged in, politics, emotions, and really a lot of things of which you think: what’s the use of that?” it is important to take into account that for some participants the connection between these things and the rest of the experience is not immediately obvious. “then we went to the (museum). (What did you do there?) Yeah, I still wonder about that too sometimes…. I think (name) took us by the hand and gave us a tour of the (museum). Yes. And afterwards we haven’t really discussed it or something,... so the deeper meaning of it was kind of lost on me. I’m still guessing”. A discussion afterwards to see whether everyone had understood the ‘deeper meaning’ of the activity could perhaps have helped this participant in understanding why this activity was incorporated in the experience and what he could have learned from it. However, the respondent did not remember having discussed the visit to the museum which caused him to remember the visit as having been ‘of no use’ and just ‘fun’. “Those are really the things of which I think I liked them very much but what has been the use of it in practice? Maybe the way of looking, the way you look at certain things, but I don’t have the immediate feeling that that has taught me something. No. But okay, others maybe have. But I haven’t... what’s the practical use of it? It was

great fun, nothing negative in that respect, only in practice it is of no use. It doesn't always have to be, it can also just be fun once in a while". Of course, the goal of participants at an educational experience, let alone of the organizers of the experience or the participants' employers who often pay for the experience, is not to just have 'fun'. The intention is often quite utilitarian, meaning that things happening during the experience should have some use-value. Indeed some participants experience the 'just fun' elements in a positive way, while still wondering what the use of it all was. "I sometimes wished that it had been a bit more professional, like I already indicated, the link with practice, with business in that sense, is sometimes hard to trace. … what's the use to me, you can't apply it in any direct way… during dinner someone came to play the harp… why a harpist at dinner? I found it wonderful, very beautiful, and I wouldn't want to trade it for something else, it's just, you don't expect it, and what's the use?" In fact, respondent s remarked that they experienced difficulty in finding or keeping track of the connection between what happened in the experience and their professional life. "(Y)ou really have to stretch your mind to make a connection to the everyday practice I at least work in. Yes, that's something I definitely experienced... There was a point where I was, and also others were completely loose, like guys, nice that we're discussing this, but what in heaven's name does this have to do with the work that we will be doing later on or that we are supposed to be doing later on?" The organizers of the experience could take up the task of helping participants understand the connection in situations like these. More attention could be paid also to how the topics that are discussed during the experience could best be translated and implemented in practice. One of the respondents in fact remarked: "I experience few connections between (the experience) and my daily work. ...I can use parts in my work but I always have to translate them...If you have to implement it, it's, sometimes that step is quite big". By helping this participant already during the experience with how the topics can be used in practice, it would perhaps be easier to make that step.

Of course the attitudes of different participants are different and not everyone experiences difficulty when something is quite abstract or cannot be translated into practice in a direct way. For example, one of the respondents told: "But our trip to the Ukraine, they say: what's the use of that? Here? Yeah, for my work: none. But you really enter a completely different world,… so as a human being it has really formed me. I am glad that I have seen that, that I know that, that I can tell about that, about

what I have seen". The type of educational experiences that were discussed during the interviews provides a 'frame of reference' for participants: "it creates a general framework and you can draw from that when you need it, but you're not dealing with it all the time. ...I think just some frame of reference, of a frame of thoughts maybe. I think that has been the most important contribution". A frame of reference or a frame of thoughts is of course a much more elusive result than practical skills or guidelines or other more explicit and applicable results. This is all the more reason for organizers to take into account the degree to which the context is clear for all participants so they don't get lost.

Expectation management in communication

Obviously, more abstract and elusive results are also much harder to communicate. For prospects who are perhaps thinking of partaking in the experience, it should be clear what they can expect, what type of movie they are getting themselves into in other words. Therefore, also in brochures and websites and other communicative means that are used to explain and promote the experience, the context should be clear. In fact, one of the respondents had some advice on the communication: "One should add something like 'the education is not just about the professional area of the (topic) but it touches on a couple of subjects that a (professional) in practice...' then I get stuck. Anyway it all boils down to the fact that the topics that you can expect in the education, that these, although they are not directly applicable, they are useful in your work as a (professional). Something like that. But in any case that the direct link with practice can't just be made that easily. That at least is something that I experience. (And that's not in it now?) That's not in it now. But I wouldn't put it in either if I were the organizer of the education, it's not advice. Well, in nicer words you should put it in perhaps. I think so… But how do you communicate that something like a cello-player during dinner, or a tour in the (museum), or a conversation with a miller about his profession, is absolutely useful for someone as a person, for me as a person, but cannot be related directly to the work I do here at (the company)?" By clarifying the context of what was happening in the experience, things could perhaps also be related to the respondents' professional lives. The answer to this question may

lie in stating clearly what the experience is about and within what context various elements take place.

WORK WITH CLEAR, UNAMBIGUOUS AND SUITABLE NORMS.

If it is difficult to communicate the effects of the experience, it is equally difficult to measure its effects. If the intended effect is something elusive like for example an improved frame of reference, it is hard to discover how one could evaluate the attained results of participants. An improvement in one's way of thinking, perceived from whoever's perspective, is very personal. For example, "if the goal is to stretch people's consciousness, then you will always succeed, each on his own level where he is in his development". This personal aspect of the effects complicates the process of evaluating and measuring the results of participants. If everyone incorporates his or her own personality in the experience, it becomes very hard to establish common standardized norms that are the same for everyone. "You clearly say is this the norm or not, because that's your task as (organizers) …I think they hadn't expected this much diversity, in what everyone was going to research. And also so personal. Which makes it very hard to put up frameworks for this". Also the fact that all of the experiences that were discussed during the interviews had a "shade of commerciality" makes that "you can, in fact you just buy, very often you just buy a title, because if you deal with it in a somewhat clever manipulative way, then you can reach the finish line resting on your laurels. …you have paid for it so they can't send you away without a degree. … I think that some have been free riders and they now have a degree of which I think: well, that has been really easy". This opportunity to free ride and to buy a degree, was something that caused some people to ask themselves what the norms had been in the educational experience: "maybe that also has to do with my feeling that some people should fail, because what is the norm then? If everyone passes? What is the value of an education if everyone can just pass?"

If people succeed in obtaining a degree "resting on their laurels" and "if everyone passes", something apparently is not going well with respect to the norms that have been established, with potential negative consequences for the quality of the education, "(b)ecause the common quality is the quality of the education so if the norm is too low… If that's the way they deal with the quality, how have they dealt with my

quality then? So I think you should be very clear in this". However, another problem that was indicated by respondents, was that in some cases where clear norms were available, the problem was that these were not always followed as strictly as they should be. "Clear requirements have been indicated with which the [result] has to comply, to be considered as sufficient, but you then also have to be able to recognize these. And it shouldn't be like that if something is lacking, it is still alright". Examples of situations in which this happened were also given: "they give you a deadline when something has to be finished. Well, it then becomes apparent that if you fail, they give you an extra assignment so the deadline is not so deadline-y at all… they don't stick to their own rules, the (organizers). (Concerning what?) Well, for example, it is required to involve some practical experience in (the session), in which you experiment with the things you have written about, and it's not in it. That's just not in it. It is clear to everyone but it is still considered to be okay… Then I think, hey, the rules of the game are changing". Or: "(y)ou were required to invite an X number of people from your professional field to the [end-session], who would provide feedback to you. That is easily measurable. Well, there has also been someone, he invited one person. So that is not according to the norm… so those are very quantitative measuring points. And that is noticed. And whatever reason the organization then has, to say, well, we will still let this person pass, it is noticed. By fellow students. And they will attach value to this, and you should be very careful with it I think". Also when participants are divided into groups where each group has its own coach, one should be very careful that each coach holds the work of the participants in his or her group to the same standards. As one respondent described: "at a certain point the people have been divided, the students were divided over the four (coaches)… Yeah, by doing that you also indicate, or you also let go of some common norm. Because (coach 1) has a different background from (coach 2) and from (coach 3) and (coach 4). So it's all very far apart from each other".

BE AWARE OF IMPLICIT NORMS

Norms are always established from some perspective on what is right and what is wrong and one should always remain conscious of this fact. Otherwise, there can exist implicit norms that may seem non-existent but that can have a great influence on the

experience. To give an example, one of the respondents told a story about one day at the beginning of the experience, when the organizers entered with a couple of suitcases full of books. The suitcases were emptied on a large table, and the organizers said: "we have no curriculum, you will make one yourself. And these are all very interesting things concerning (the topic)". The immediate reaction of the respondent was: "what is this? I just see, I don't see any books with pictures … so to me that indicated a lot about the (organizers), their view on reality. They were theoretical and dry books. There was no movie, there were no CDs, I saw no poetry on the table, I saw no trunk with clothes for dressing up, …so very one-sided, in my view very one-sided. And I found it, that moment I thought, hey, something is missing here". "There is a huge norm hanging over this… this is your judgment of what is right or wrong … otherwise you wouldn't have brought these books. Then you would have left things open". So where the organizers thought they had 'no curriculum' and that participants had to make their own curriculum, in the eyes of this respondent there still was an implicit norm that formed the basis of the choice of books. "There absolutely is an implicit norm about what is a good book and what is not, so everyone did something with (name author), because implicitly it became apparent that that was a good book. … And that is no problem I think, because everyone brings his own norms. But you can also just say: 'guys, this is what we think'. Like that. 'This is what we think', 'this is what I think': 'I think this is a good book, and that one and that one and that one', alright?" This way, the choice does not become the norm, but everyone knows "how the people who are going to evaluate you think, work, look". By making explicit that there is a subjective side to the norms, the seemingly universal validity of the norms is taken away and understanding could grow for disagreements on the norms between people. Because especially when the 'rules of the game' are not clear, disagreements can emerge between the participants and the organization. "I still have the impression that there were just some people who just really… Well, of course people also thought something about this in the education, let's be honest. There are also a couple of people who in the end graduated but of whom the group says: does not comply with the norm… there was some fuss about this. A lot of fuss actually... There were also people who didn't pass of whom the group said 'didn't pass? Didn't pass? Hey, wait a minute. We have seen that development, he has done this, done that, it was all good enough, and then to not pass?' And then there were people who did pass of whom the group said 'yeah, hey, listen up, what is this all about?'" If participants don't understand how the norms apply to others, as in the quote above,

there is a good chance they won't understand how the norms have applied to themselves either. Especially if there is little room for participants to speak their minds, as was discussed in paragraph 6.3.1, the dissatisfaction about the norms may persist, resulting in 'a lot of fuss'. One of the respondents remembered that in the past she had done another education, in which this problem did not exist, since students and teachers together decided what the norms were and how these were applied to the students' work. What happened there was that at the end of the year, all students handed in their work and all these results were presented together. "And then we debated about what is the norm? So there were thirty (results), what is the norm, what is a six? … and then we took the next and said is this above or below the norm? … So we made a kind of ranking and the ranking maybe was not so interesting but the discussion about it was. … Then you get into the essence of what you are dealing with". But during the experience "we never had that debate on each other's (end result). I was not present at half of the presentations because that didn't fit in the program, those were divided into two groups. So I would like to have a debate on that. To ask people about their (end result). Because I have an opinion about the ones of some people, for some people I sincerely think, well, they harm the quality of the (degree) but perhaps I am completely mistaken". Giving people the opportunity to decide on norms together and to discuss their work together, might be very helpful in overcoming the problems described above, but it might also help in getting "into the essence of what you are dealing with" and thus be a valuable lesson.

7.3.5 Lessons to be learned related to direction

This paragraph has focused on the role in the experience of the organizing party and the amount and type of direction that the organizers should exert according to the respondents. The subthemes related to Direction and some specific issues that came to the fore during the interviews, are presented in figure 7.13.

One task that was seen as important was the provision of clear norms and support for attaining the desired results. When there is too little support, context and structure, there may exist misunderstandings of which goals should be achieved and how to achieve them. By clarifying and communicating clear norms and structures and by giving enough support, these misunderstandings may be prevented. The Dutch

philosopher Arnold Cornelis (1934-1999) argued that structure and clear rules should in fact always precede freedom and autonomy. By giving individuals clear structures and rules to abide, one can prepare the individual for an autonomous life. Only if the autonomous individual has succeeded in internalizing these externally imposed rules, can he be a successful autonomous individual according to Cornelis (1995). In this sense, organizers of experiences should take into account that they cannot just give people unlimited freedom, since their first task is to make sure that the individuals understand what that freedom entails. One should ask oneself in which cases individuals need freedom and autonomy and in which cases this freedom or autonomy just takes up time. Looking at developments in the economy, like more attention for gaming and activity and initiative of individuals, more and more space for expression Is given to individuals, which makes it all the more important to also support them in using that space.

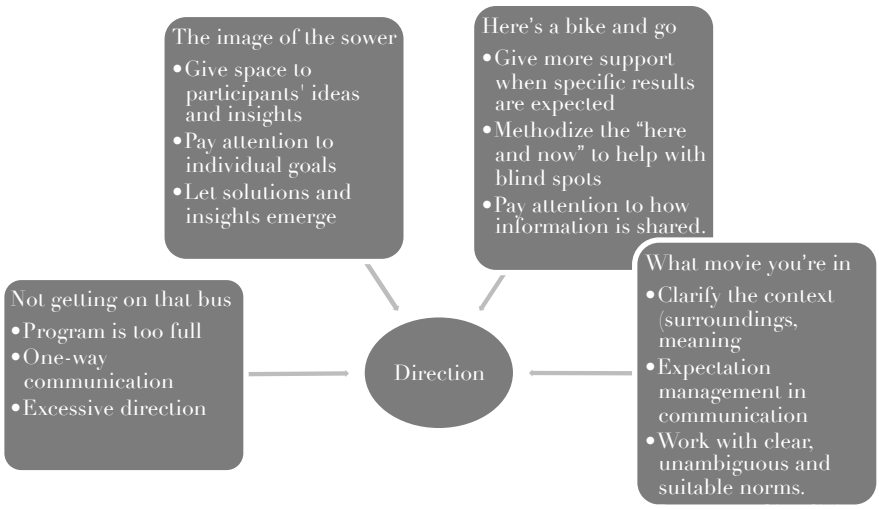

Figure 7.13 – Lessons to be learned in relation to Direction

After a certain point, when a basic level of support has been provided and the individual is able to act autonomously, it is important to leave ample opportunity for

self-direction and input from the side of participants in the experience. Excessive direction when no direction is needed can have a negative impact on the experience. In fact, a very important insight that has been derived from the interviews is the need for organizers to pay attention to their own role and how participants can experience this role. There were ample situations recalled in which the actions of the organizers had contrary effects than the ones intended. For example, full programs with many presentations and speakers may be intended by the organizers to give participants maximum value for their money. However, as was seen in the interviews, it may be experienced as too restrictive, leaving the participants no space for their own initiative and input. Also the direction of things that don't have to be directed and the implicit norms that exist in the experience, of which the organizers seem to be unaware, are examples that were given. Especially the example of how groups were formed in one of the experiences, clarifies what the problem can be related to direction. The problem is that participants in this case were given the freedom to choose a theme although their freedom of choice was curtailed at the same time by the organization that had only four coaches available. Because of this, it would be entirely possible that participants ended up in a group that was not their first choice. The participants had to adapt to the possibilities of the organization, which is quite similar to the more general 'gap' between individuals and business organizations that was described by Zuboff and Maxmin (2002). In what they call the 'standard enterprise logic', producers are seen as "central to the creation of value, while consumers could be regarded as a distant anonymous abstraction" (Zuboff & Maxmin, 2002, p. 180). The core of this logic is that there is one party in control over the interaction and another party that has to adapt itself to what the first party decides. A lesson that organizations in general could learn, is that this logic leads to a situation in which individuals may be forced to make suboptimal choices. The least organizations could do, is to discover where they restrict the individuals' choices and to see whether the consequences of this restriction are positive or negative. If there are negative consequences, they should try to adopt a different logic.

This process, of discovering which consequences the organization's actions have, is a process of becoming aware of one's actions and their impact. The same process could be facilitated for participants in the experience. By paying attention to the 'here and now' individuals can be made aware of their blind spots and perhaps supported in

changing what they feel should be changed. Of course these blind spots and how individuals behave in the here and now, are idiosyncratic, so it would be impossible to design a centralized program for this. Besides, if one is to notice how individuals act in the here and now, it would be wise to give them room for taking actual action, and not have them sit and passively take in whatever the organization provides. Individuals could for example be stimulated to share their ideas and insights with the group, to express their personal goals and how they hope to attain these and to find solutions and answers themselves, and share how they have found these. This way individuals can learn from each other. Obviously this process of learning together and sharing information should be managed, as was also observed by one of the respondents, but there are great advantages of having people learn together. First of all, the social aspect of a learning experience is usually the most important thing adult individuals will remember according to Falk and Dierking (2000). Second of all, research shows that the best way to learn is to teach (Ackoff & Greenberg, 2008). This is not just an important lesson for those active in organizing for educational experiences but for all organizations, because there are signs of a strong development towards more co-creation. In fact, more and more individuals become active participants instead of passive consumers of whatever organizations provide them with. Some of these active individuals are becoming so skilled and knowledgeable that they are named professional amateurs, or pro-ams (Leadbeater & Miller, 2004). The sharing of information can therefore even help the person who is doing the sharing. Third and last, when this process is managed well and the individuals are supported in a useful way, the individuals may also learn more about their own sharing behaviour and communication skills and learn how to improve these. Besides learning about the content that is being shared, they would also be learning about the procedural aspects of information and communication.

Of course, this highly active and personalized experience would have little to do with the passive and massive events that are staged and directed by many organizations. In the communication of the experience, organizers should be very clear about this difference. A reason for this is that because of the many events with a passive and massive nature, many people will perhaps expect to be entertained and not expect to really have to participate in an active way. Another reason is that it would be a way to differentiate from other experiences.

7.4 Investment

Investment, the last of the three themes that have emerged from the interviews, refers to the role that participants play in the experience. As was also shown in the last paragraph, Direction, participants often spoke about their dislike of too much control and direction by the organizers. The following paragraph will deal with how participants see their own role in the experience.

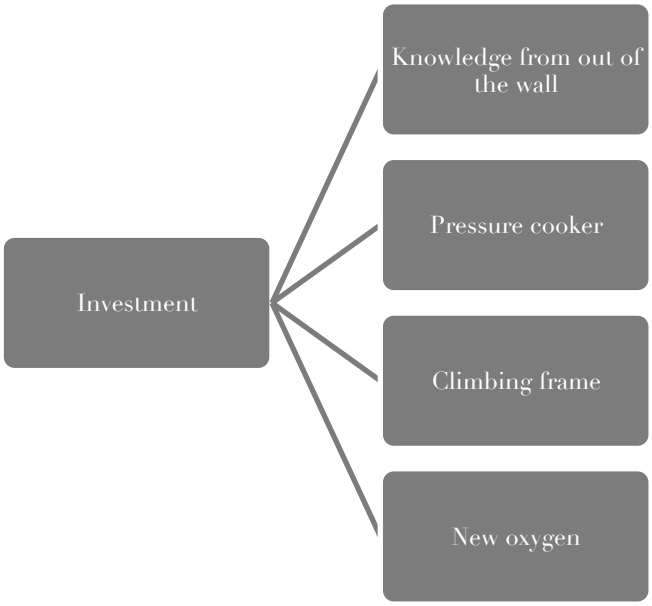

Figure 7.14 – Investment and subthemes

First of all, the results that participants attain in the experience are not mere facts that can be absorbed passively. Participants have a clear role in the outcome of the experience and some reasons for why this is, are described in 7.4.1, Knowledge from out of the wall. In 7.4.2, Pressure cooker, the catalytic function of the experience is discussed. Many speakers, activities, topics and events can be put together in the experience, but participants have a clear role in doing something with all of these elements. Of course, if participants have to play a role in the experience, it becomes of utmost importance to find out whether their intentions are also in line with this goal

and to construct innovative methods for evaluation that incorporate the participants' input. These issues will be discussed in paragraph 7.4.3, Climbing frame. In paragraph 7.4.4, New oxygen, excerpts from the interviews show what are seen as the success factors of post experiences. In these post experiences, participants can continue to develop the effects of the original experience. Finally, 7.4.5 contains a presentation of lessons to be learned for experience organizers in general, related to the effort invested by participants.

7.4.1 Knowledge from out of the wall

"It's not just 'I get a diploma because I happened to have the knowledge' anymore, but it's actually more like what's inside of you…. And I think that's what you get if you…. also invest in trying to develop your personality. Not just taking knowledge from out of the wall. I don't need any more knowledge from out of the wall".

The saying 'from out of the wall', or in Dutch 'uit de muur' refers to the automat vending machines of certain Dutch fast food chains. At these restaurants one can take food from out of a small heated compartment in the wall after inserting the right amount of money in a specific slot. The compartments are continuously backfilled by a kitchen. Like the fast food in these machines, other items that are described as having been taken 'from out of the wall' are perceived as being standardized, cut and dried, fully prepared and ready to be consumed. The interviews showed that not only was 'cut and dried' factual information seen as an insufficient result of the experience and was expected more of it, but also that the actual results and effects that were achieved because of the experience, were often much harder to describe and much less immediate and instantaneous than knowledge 'from out of the wall'.

Provide more than cut and dried facts

When respondents tried to describe their motivations for choosing the specific educational experience they had pursued, they often contrasted it with other educational experiences. For example, one of the respondents, who at the very moment that the interview took place was involved in a, as he himself called it: "conventional, traditional" education, explicitly indicated that there was a clear

contrast between this type of educations and the educational experience that was focused on in the interview. In the educational experience it's not just about participating in the "body of knowledge of a certain professional area", but also about "that which goes deeper, (participating) in the exploration, in asking questions, in amazement, in emotions, in opening one's self up… Well, that is a very valuable thing".

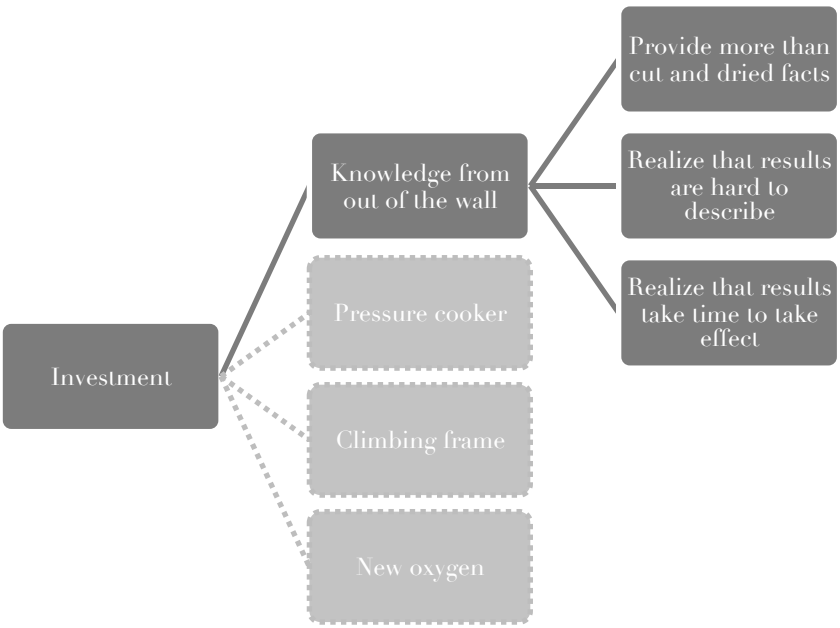

Figure 7.15 – Elements of subtheme 'Knowledge from out of the wall'

In the more conventional, traditional educations, though, "the bandwidth is just very limited… the textbooks are never more recent than from 5 years ago, because everything has to be proven through and through, the program and the curriculum, and the modules they offer. Because the people have to be capable of managing all of it on their own. So something truly cutting edge… is impossible. You can't experiment, because then you would send people into a dark forest and they will get lost. It has to be proven through and through". One of the advantages of this kind of

more traditional educations is that people with a more instrumental attitude and motivation, are "equipped with things that they can immediately apply operationally. Knowledge, that you can immediately… step into a role, and that you can reproduce all those frameworks and models, and that you can apply them", "so to speak you can apply it the next day".

Some respondents indicated that sessions in which depth was attempted to achieve, were "horrible". "Very technical, very detailed, and that was exactly not what we were looking for. We expected, and that was also the strength of the experience, that you would be confronted with many topics, and that they were presented in all breadth, so you could put it into the context, so you would know what you could do with it. But to actually apply it, yeah, that required some more effort, while (name) was someone who actually was very much about the depth, very much detail". This sort of depth and detail was actually expected from other educations, which were described as being "bookish", "rather instrumental", "where you mainly get answers and no questions", "quite, let's say linear, causal, quite blue… the memorization of how-to guidelines". The contrast with the perception of the experience was in fact big. The experience was described with terms like "you can create your own environment", "it provides you with many questions", "much more abstract, so you can connect a much larger area to it and trace more movements" and "the multiplicity in solving tough problems".

However, the experience is "much more mature, in the sense that it wants to inspire you in such a profound way, which makes that operational translation very easy. You can pull a couple of all-nighters and then you will have read all those books too, you will know them by heart". It thus seems to provide some sort of a basis or "foundation" where it is not about the factual information and knowledge that is transferred, but where people are being equipped to advance on their own and to make themselves familiar with the knowledge and information if in the future this would appear to be needed.

REALIZE THAT RESULTS ARE HARD TO DESCRIBE

In the descriptions that respondents gave of what they had gotten out of the experience there was a high level of abstraction. Often the difficulty of indicating concretely what they had learned was expressed. "I don't know whether I can say that in such a concrete way, in the sense of, hey, that's what I've learned and so now I do that differently from before, or something. The most important thing to me is, what I've ended up with, is that I now know more of various subjects, that it all has become wider, my view is broader, … and related to that perhaps also more self-confidence. … but that's also why I find it hard to say something like, hey, that's really what I have learnt there. Yes, it's quite broad, like I have kind of gained a broader experience that has made me stronger as an individual, with a wider perspective and so on, than that I say like, hey, that is something specific that I now apply in my work. Yeah, that probably is also the case, but I can't reproduce it like that". "Things that (the experience) has brought or stimulated. I have also come to be in more of a learning mode in that sense… so something has been stimulated… Pfew, I find it a difficult question. I would have to ask my partner".

Also the fact that the result was not tangible but more 'a complete package' caused great difficulty in expressing what had actually happened during the educational experience. As respondents indicated: "there are certainly also a number of topics that are not directly applicable. But that doesn't mean that they are useless. But if you say 'give me some examples of topics that are hard to directly translate to practice, which are however useful', that's very difficult. Because it's more like a complete package that they give you, and that forms you as it were, you start dealing with things based on that framework", and "also the learning in itself, … it's more like the complete package that has formed you in a certain way. I can't really approach it in a very concrete way". "I can't describe it very well, but that's what I truly experience. … awareness, but of course education is always a matter of awareness.... It is just very hard to specify it, shall we say it like this?"

The effect or result was often described in a rather metaphorical way. For example "I call it: 'your skull gets stretched out very much'", "I have felt like the … education had woken me up from sort of an intellectual hibernation", "it all comes together now,

it has been sort of a catalyst, the education", or "some sort of a process of growing awareness, in which, I claim, such an education causes you to make an enormous leap". One of the respondents told that the immensity of the effects that the experience she had participated in was often jokingly described by participants as "at the end of the road you either have a different job or a different wife".
The nature of the experience also made it difficult to clearly describe what exactly happened in the experience. One of the respondents in fact told: "then I would clearly indicate what he can expect. And I actually think that if you, I have also read this year's brochure again and then I think, in itself it is actually true what is written there, but still, I have reread it later, from the perspective of someone who has done the education and it is all true, so there is not one lied word in it, but still, if you haven't done the education you will expect to get something different, like what I also expected, when I started the education". As this respondent indicates, it can be very difficult to communicate in a clear and correct way what the experience entails. Apparently, sometimes the communicated facts about the experience can evoke faulty expectations.

Paying attention to communicating in the right way about the experience is even more important, since one remarkable theme that emerged from the interviews was the contrast that was made by many respondents between what they saw as the result of the educational experience and the result that was perhaps in their eyes implicitly expected. Over and over respondents spoke in a very positive way about the effects that the educational experience had had on them, while at the same time speaking in a quite derogatory manner about the perhaps conventionally expected results. For example, one respondent told: "What do I do with it? Well, that's actually quite disappointing. Because you actually don't do much with it. But my idea is: that's not the point. Because something happens during the education because you develop". One has to focus beyond applying the lessons in practice, since 'that's not the point', and focus more on the development of the individual. Another respondent indicated that learning purely professional facts and knowledge, "that's not exciting. You can teach that to anyone, that's all very mechanistic. But to touch people in a very deep way…". Again, one has to go beyond the mechanistic level, towards deeply touching people. Other respondents expressed: "I think it is more about the (tapping and touching) of things, that kind of suits this phase I think. I don't need it anymore, I don't go to instrumental educations anymore, no offense, been there, done that. I

have done enough of those", "solving questions in organizations is more about getting people around a table and being able to find a solution that way, than it is about saying 'I would do it like this', because that doesn't mean anything in a large organization, so it's much more like a process that you have to go through with a couple of people… Then it's not about the instrumental things, because by now we already understand how you can arrange those things… we get that…", and even: "whether it has been valuable for (the topic), I don't know, I don't even ask myself this question, but in terms of nourishment, for me personally, … I don't know whether they really were so revolutionary with reference to (the topic) … it was more about all that other stuff, that's where the insights were located". However, as one respondent told who described how she made the choice for the experience, the difference between the more instrumental stance of certain educations and the more visionary stance of others, can also be recognized in the communication: "well, what was remarkable when I received all those brochures: the story of (the experience) was the most content-laden. That was very funny. Those others were all about the money, the criteria, the teachers who worked there, about, well, I felt like everything was important except for what their vision was of what you should learn… I got an overview of the courses that I was to follow, but what those courses were about, what books were involved, what their ideas were on why that course had to be in the education, you just couldn't put your finger behind it".

REALIZE THAT RESULTS TAKE TIME TO TAKE EFFECT

Besides the difficulties that people have with describing the effects or results of the experience in general, also the fact that the effects of the experience take time causes great difficulty in determining the results of the experience. As one respondent told: "I would say there are some very, maybe some concrete things, benefits, or things you've learned, that you will know when you just graduated. it also has to do with that people will grow, you know, on a personal level. And so, it focuses on the development of personal competences, and this is, we know, it's a long, it's very process orientated. It takes a lot of time for things to be 'eingefleischt', or integrated in you and your behaviour, because it is like, it's a change of human behaviour …I feel that now, almost 10 years after, I realize what some of it was all about. Or at

least what I got with me. At that time, I could say on a tool level, things that I had learned, that I could do, but now in terms of things being integrated, in my thinking on a value level, and what I want to be involved in, …I feel I have kind of a platform now. A kind of core that I reflect from when I choose. And I believe it must somehow come from there". What has been learned in the experience and all other things that have been learned in life "are all things that are part of your history after all, and that shape you as a human being". This makes it difficult to make explicit what exactly has been learned during the experience.

Another respondent told that she had created two documents at the end of the education, while only one was required. "So I had two separate [results]. That actually was kind of special, because those two, in my eyes, had nothing to do with each other. Because one was about me, and the other was about analyzing a professional question… that was more like a master's thesis. And so I was given the assignment that I had yet to connect those two with each other. They say… I think you still have to take a leap to integrate those two one way or the other.… Well, it was not before two years after the educational experience that I was able to do that, actually I'm only now at a stage that I can do that, I have also had to distance myself from the topic and now I can start to write something about it". With the passing of time, some issues that were highly personal and emotional for this respondent, became more distant to her so she could now deal with the two theses in a somewhat more distant way and try to connect them, as the organizers had suggested her to do. This way, there are effects that don't happen during the experience but that happen because of insights later on, that may have been inspired by the experience. The experience may then boost several other phenomena when times goes by. In the next paragraph more examples are given of this boosting role of experience.

7.4.2 Pressure-cooker

"It was all too much to take in at once... It is actually like some kind of pressure cooker, in which all sorts of things are put and you have to finish cooking them yourself. And I'm still in the process of doing that, finishing cooking the things that have been put in there".

The respondent who was quoted above, described the experience as a 'pressure cooker'. In a pressure cooker, ingredients are cooked under pressure and therefore

much faster than if a normal pan would be used. Many ingredients, the participants themselves, their knowledge and experience, the teachers and organizers and their knowledge and experience, speakers, activities and so on, were all brought together, which accelerated the learning process.

FACILITATE THE CATALYTIC FUNCTION OF THE EXPERIENCE

Although the respondent who was quoted above, was the only one who used the term 'pressure cooker', many other respondents spoke about the same aspect of the educational experience they had participated in. Often they used the term 'catalyst', to describe the experience. The idea of 'pressure' in the experience as a pressure cooker was, although in different terms, described by a respondent who told about a situation in which a negative atmosphere arose among the participants. Although "(y)ou could interpret all of this in a negative way, you could also say like gosh, this is a very

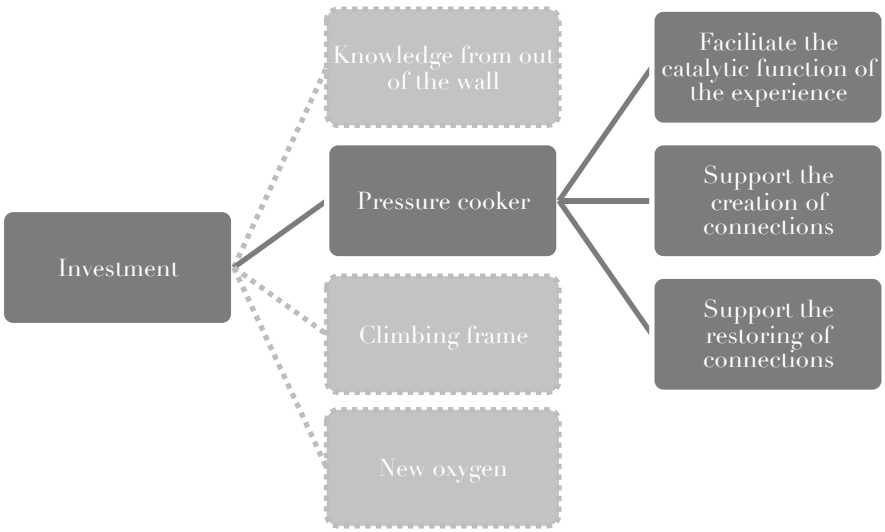

Figure 7.16 – Elements of subtheme 'Pressure cooker'

interesting learning process … That whole group thing, that has remained a mess up until the end. However, we see each other every year… and there is also a lot of contact… so the question is: doesn't it also have to do with that struggle, that because of that you become much more conscious of yourself, much more conscious of your surroundings, of what you expect of your surroundings… I actually expect to be challenged by my surroundings… really getting into the contents of a piece you made, discussing it in depth and judging it or putting other perspectives against it… that can help you on your way, that can be some sort of a catalyst, and I have missed that kind of catalyst". For this respondent the catalyst function was especially found in the 'struggle' and the 'challenge', which made her 'much more conscious' of herself and her surroundings.

SUPPORT THE CREATION OF CONNECTIONS

One of the respondents for example described how his many lines of interest, which he had always perceived as standing apart from each other, actually came together in the experience, and how "different perspectives... come together and how (the experience) deserves to be an important catalyst in (this process)... To me it has been the catalyst for my whole way of thinking". He felt that for him, the experience had been a catalyst in the process of connecting the different interests and perspectives on reality. Another respondent expressed this effect in almost identical words when she told about the great variety in her work: "those are actually all little pieces that have sprung from the study, if you think back. Of course it also has to do with my interest, all the things that happened before, ... but it all comes together now. It has been some sort of a catalyst, that study". What both these respondents describe is how the experience has helped them in connecting and becoming more conscious of the connection between the separate elements that they had been dealing with and thinking about prior to the experience.

An increased consciousness was also described as "the pieces of the puzzle have been put together" by one of the respondents, because "it is as if you see the pattern right up to the moment that you started the study. There already was a pattern, ...but you're not conscious of the fact that there is some order". The catalytic function of the

experience had made this respondent discover that in fact there had always been an orderly pattern. Many respondents remarked that the experience had been like a clearly marked period or point in time, which is why people were able to make a very clear distinction between 'before the experience' and 'after the experience'. Like in the quote above: a pattern was already present but the respondent came to notice the pattern only after the experience. This respondent spoke about the experience as a "breaking point" in her life, in the sense that she had never realised before the experience that there was a pattern in everything she did and wrote and the studies she had done. After the experience she had also discovered that she maybe had always hurt herself by conforming to other ways of thinking, but because of the experience, things had become clearer and "the pieces of the puzzle have been put together". Another respondent found that an education that he had done had been "a turning point" in his life, since it brought many things in his life together and it changed his way of looking at the world and his relationships with people.

SUPPORT THE RESTORING OF CONNECTIONS

One of the respondents told that he had felt that he had been neglecting his own knowledge and expertise, and copying the behaviour of his colleagues, which for him had been one of the main reasons to participate in the educational experience. Because of the experience he was able to take his own expertise, knowledge and concepts "out of the closet" and develop these into an organisational competence. Another respondent intended to find herself in a different way. She had certain ideas about how to do her job, but "if they keep telling you the same things over and over at a certain point you start to doubt yourself a little, like am I in the right profession, am I not doing things right?... Also for these things it was kind of a test… Yeah, in itself it might not matter at all, but if you're in doubt, about yourself, then you're also like I would like an indication of, well, what I know, how smart I am, where I could go. And what I could do with it". For this individual the experience was intended to find an answer to these important and personal questions about whether she as a person could be compatible with the knowledge in her field. Coincidentally there was another respondent who seemed to have the exact same question but from an opposite perspective. This person wanted to know how the knowledge in her field

could be compatible with her way of working. She had a certain way of working that she had developed for the greater part in practice. What she lacked however was a theoretical framework. "For me it actually was more like how do I work? What do I actually do?" So by hopefully recognizing her way of working in theory she hoped she would be better able to express what she did and to reproduce her way of working. "At (the education) I was able to find words for it, because I have always known it, I just had no words for it. So now I have words for it…(the education) has kind of been some sort of an awareness-year, at least for me, of how do you actually do things? And can you make something out of that that is transferable?"

From this and previous quotes it becomes clear how personal the effects are that respondents sought from the experience. Of course it may be quite difficult for organizations to deal with these expectations of people. When people desire to find their own expertise or themselves or to recognise their way of working as in the last two quotes, it becomes very hard to say what the organisation could offer to be of help. Instead of situations in which the individual would just receive whatever the organizers wanted to provide him with, in these experiences, the participant plays an important role himself. Both organizers and participants put the ingredients in the pressure cooker but it is the participant that has to finish cooking the dish. In the following paragraph the role that the individual plays will be discussed.

7.4.3 Climbing frame

"Some sort of learning space is created, like a playground where you can choose in which climbing frame you want to climb, …. If I don't want to learn, then it's useless of course".

As can be seen from the quote above, the topics and information were presented to the participants but they had to do something with it themselves for it to have value. The organization offers "a playground where you can choose in which climbing frame you want to climb". But of course the choice whether to climb or not was left up to the participant himself. "You listened to things, … but you had to process it yourself. And also do something with it by yourself. Only what you did with it was not checked or something, that is kind of always the case, you make or break the education for yourself". "If I don't want to learn, then nothing will happen. And if I see it as an obligation, because I want to attain a (degree), for whatever it's worth,

then I can free ride". The intentions of the individual thus have a big influence on the effects that he will attain from the experience, which is why it is very important to pay attention to his intentions during the selection process and to see whether the ways in which the effects are evaluated are suitable for evaluating the effects that are aimed for (see figure 7.17).

PAY ATTENTION TO PARTICIPANTS' INTENTIONS DURING SELECTION

Instead of seeing the experience as a means to a piece of paper, by many, the experience was seen as an investment, "not just an enormous investment of money, but also of time. Look, if you want the time that this requires, it means that you have to take that money from other things. At a certain point in time I made the radical choice of having no more hobbies, quit doing sports, put a halt to my social life, and also work less for some time. I negotiated with my former employer and took on a construction of parental leave because otherwise I just felt like, then I'm running from work to here and I do everything half and nothing gets finished". If one wasn't prepared or able to invest in it, this was seen in a negative way by some: "I always tell people that you shouldn't think of just doing this, that you don't get the return on investment. … you really have to want to invest and if you don't want to invest, then you could better go to (another education)...if you can't invest in it because you're in a job that also requires 40 hours a week, then it's just not feasible. And then you arrive at the finishing line, and you have a piece of paper, so if you're in it for that piece of paper then you might as well do (another education) or something. But what the difference to me is between those educations and (the experience)… if you don't invest enough time in it, then you won't get the results".

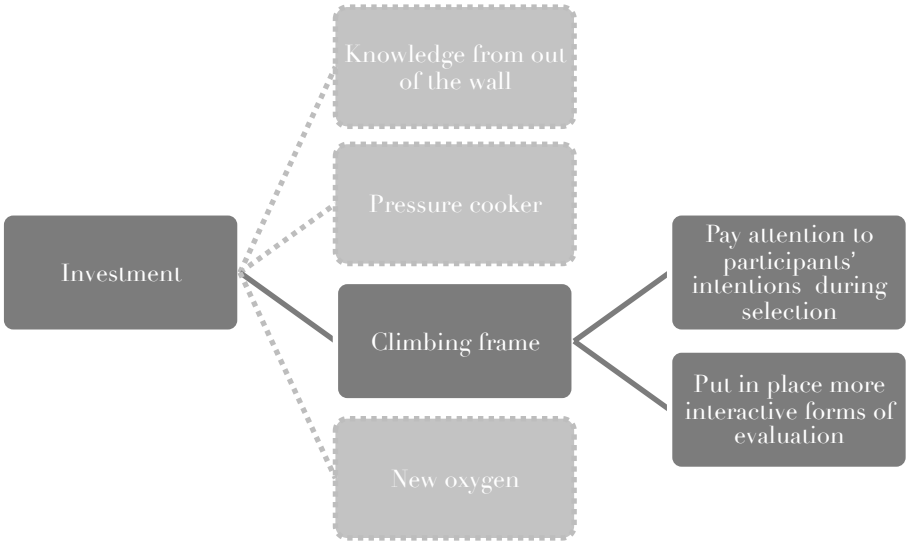

Figure 7.17 – Elements of subtheme 'Climbing frame'

More respondents spoke about the focus of some people on 'a piece of paper' and people with another motivation. One of the respondents told about an assignment she had done and for which she was asked to send her end-thesis to the client. Coincidentally "he had sent two of his own people to the same education, and he says, there is so much difference between the end-results". According to this respondent this was not strange since some of the participants "didn't show up a couple of times, and they have made minimal (end-results). You can just see it. But they still get a piece of paper at the finishing line". However, participants also saw the dilemma that faced the organisations. "That, I think, is also the problem of the education, of this type of paid-for educations… cause then the content is not the goal, but the goal is that piece of paper of course, and of course the company thinks that with that (piece of paper) it has bought the content… You can buy those massive pieces of paper without doing anything for it… it becomes almost charlatanesque if you are not careful".

PUT IN PLACE MORE INTERACTIVE FORMS OF EVALUATION

These situations in which participants can receive a degree without doing the work, indicate that it is sometimes difficult to judge the work of participants on its quality. If the methods for evaluation would work properly, in theory it should be impossible that someone would obtain a degree without doing anything. However, there are also other situations that make the evaluation process complex. The results respondents see as the goal of the experience do not consist of facts and guidelines that are taught by teachers and absorbed by students. The dry knowledge is something that people can learn from books, but according to the respondents it's not about the facts. "It's the translation…that's the art and skill", and for translation there is a clear role for the participants themselves, which makes it difficult to decide who has learned to translate well and who has not. One of the respondents had an idea for how these results that go beyond the superficial factual level could be evaluated in a way that those who do not have the intended results "quite rapidly have to own up": "you can have (students) reproduce everything, like what are the characteristics of (X) and so on, but you have to take the test in this way. Of course it is a test in this (interview) form, not a preformed questionnaire, that you have them translate what (X) looks like from the inside. Well, then they have to own up. How do you experience that, what are your emotions? If they are not (X), then cerebrally they can reproduce the list they have memorized, but if you ask them to translate that from the inside out, then it becomes clear where one really is". Individuals can memorize facts and figures for an exam, but if tests would have the form of an interview like the one this respondent participated in as he himself suggested, then one could really get an understanding of whether the participant had merely reproduced what he had memorized, or that he truly understood "what (X) looks like from the inside". In fact, another respondent who had participated in an experience that in fact tested its students in a different way, told: "you can in no way take any … student (of this experience) and say let's test this person's intelligence and study 2000 pages and go to an academic exam interview. Because that won't be what comes out of it. It will probably be an examination where the students will ask a lot of intelligent questions. Why is this relevant? …That's probably what would come out of that". Where one can test students' factual knowledge by asking them questions and having them provide the right answers, with the kind of results that are expected from the experience, the participant does not just have a role as the provider of right answers, but also in the process of asking questions

and entering the discussion, which can for example be done in the form of an open interview or assignments or so. In fact, the fact that experiences worked with assignments instead of exams, for some people had been an additional reason to partake in the experience. The system with assignments "to me was something like, okay, then I learn to build up the discipline needed to sit behind my desk, read texts and have an opinion on those. I don't mean in the context of work, but just reading articles and writing down your reaction on these". On the other hand, the more traditional system with exams was seen as a matter of going "back to the school benches" and as being "bookish" in the sense that there is no free choice. "I did not experience it as bookish. It was very much about development and awareness, that sort of things and of course it was very much up to you whether to read a book or not, so that is something, I did not experience that as bookish".

One can imagine that if a participant has the sole intention of passing exams and obtaining a piece of paper, that after having obtained it, the experience is perceived as finished and done. However, many respondents spoke about the fact that "there are quite a few people of our group still working together after (the education). (The education) has formally stopped but informally it actually has not… All sorts of things are still going on, it doesn't stop". However, one respondent saw a clear relation between the people for whom the experience had continued even after it had "formally stopped" and the investment that people had done in the experience: "there are a few people for whom it has not continued. And my assumption is that those are the people who have not invested sufficiently in (the education)". Not only does the investment by individuals have certain benefits for them as described in this paragraph, but it may also have indirect benefits because of the higher chance of continuing the experience even after the formal ending. Some of the benefits of this 'post experience' are discussed in the following paragraph.

7.4.4 New oxygen

"These really are people who need new oxygen so to say. To stay up to date, to get new ideas"

The educational experiences that were discussed during the interviews, were all temporary events ranging from 2 to 3 years. Some participants however chose to continue the learning process after the official ending of the experience and in this

sense to prolong the experience and stay up to date. Elements that were discussed in this context during the interviews, were the fact that oftentimes initiatives by participants to organize a post experience failed and a clear role for the original organizers of the experience was perceived here, and that the original experience was actually not seen as a finished product but more as a basis or foundation on which one could continue building knowledge and as a place where one could find social resonance with other individuals (see figure 7.18).

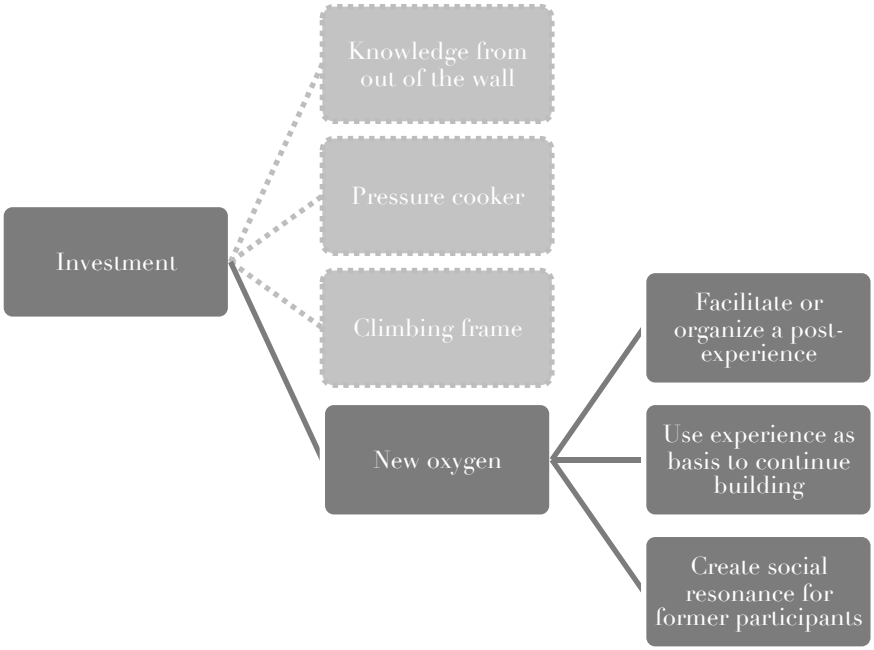

Figure 7.18 – Elements of subtheme 'New oxygen'

FACILITATE OR ORGANIZE A POST-EXPERIENCE

If the organized version of a post-experience already has to emerge, step by step, one might wonder how spontaneous, more autonomous post-experiences will do. The organized version of one of the post-experiences, was intended to also bring forth a more autonomous version. "The intention of the (post-experience) was like (inviting) speakers, but after that groups have to emerge that continue working together, on

certain themes or subjects", so "part of the formula of (the post-experience) originally was that we would also meet outside of the regular meetings with a small group of kindred spirits, kind of what we are doing at this moment, to explore a certain subject in depth. To work out something, give form to it, that can be anything". However, this plan "turned out to be non viable" and it "has never really taken off… some topics have been considered, that people have started working on, but then they met once or twice and it blew over. So that didn't really take off".

"We were like well, we'll just organize it for ourselves. We don't need (the organizers) for that, you know, that tone, if we are with so many people, we can better organize that for each other. But what you see is that nobody does it. Even reunion days are difficult… we have organized a reunion day… but actually after that never again…. It disintegrates. … also because of a lack of time I think". In fact in some cases there was a start with self-organized reunions but after a couple of times "you don't see them anymore. We sometimes had some sort of a reunion once a year like having dinner with each other… and that actually hasn't happened anymore. And then you lose them". What the reasons are of people to continue going to these reunions or to not go there anymore is a guess but one respondent thought that "apparently we live in such a volatile world that for most people that just isn't possible… everyone is so busy with their own lives that that doesn't happen… You need some sort of a catalyst or something, for such a group". There thus has to be a person that tries to keep the group together and that is the instigator of a continuing post experience. Another solution that was proposed to solve the issue of disintegrating post-experiences was: "what you need is just a concrete problem, of which you say: quite irritating that that still hasn't been solved. Let's all look into that. Shall we solve it? Can we arrange that? … I think you just need to have something really irritating that has to be solved. Or something very beautiful of which everyone says: yes, let's do that. So there needs to be energy".

However plausible these solutions may seem, even without these elements some post experiences organized by former participants themselves, functioned fine. One of the respondents told that the group she still was in contact with although the actual experience had been finished years ago, consisted of "Four people, actually we'll see each other again tomorrow… and then we make appointments with professors… and

we participate in workshops and I don't know what else, we have written an essay together… so yes, that is a lot of fun". From what she told about the activities that she participated in with this group, there was neither a sign that there was a specific 'concrete problem', nor that there was someone who had the role of 'catalyst'. However, these former participants still did things together, without interference from the organizers of the original experience. One group took it upon themselves to organize a reunion day about nine months after the ending of the experience and at the end another group volunteered to organize a reunion day. Now there exists something like a relay race system that one person from the preparation team of this year also participates next year so all the experience and knowledge that has been built up during the preparation phase does not go to waste.

What the exact requirements are for a successful post-experience, remains to be seen. One of the respondents in fact asked herself: "I don't know. I have to say, suppose that I would do another education next year, something similar, would you substitute one thing for the other or would things continue? I don't know… would one thing stop and do you have that replaced by something else? Because also with those people you will experience and encounter things. Yeah, that's a complex process, I don't know. Because I also know, there are groups of classmates that continue and that still see each other once in a while, and that still do all sorts of things with each other. That put an ad in the paper together when one of the classmates dies. And you also have groups of classmates that are ending, sometimes already after three years. Yes, that's a complex story. Why does one thing continue and another not? And also the implementation, of what the classmates do together can sometimes be very different. That of course is a comparable story…. But you should be able to do research on it." Research on this phenomenon would be in fact be interesting given the importance that respondents give to the existence of participating in a post experience. Or as one respondent described it: he had decided to get involved in the actual experience "to keep ahead of the rest", and without the continuation of the experience in the form of a post experience, he told that he "would have fallen asleep... they would just about now be hot on my heels".

USE EXPERIENCE AS BASIS TO CONTINUE BUILDING

In some cases the reason for continuing the experience in one way or the other, was the opinion that the experience in itself was not enough and that it would be 'an enormous pity' to leave it at that: "You have to stay involved with it… the (education) is the foundation. And because you stay active in the (post-experience) you keep on developing that foundation …. Well, that's how I've experienced it. I think that should you only do just (the education) and leave it at that, I would find that an enormous pity. It lays out a foundation on which you can keep on building". "(I)f you wouldn't do that, so if you would leave it at doing just that education, yeah, then perhaps it is somewhat too ephemeral. But because you partake in that (post-experience), and are still busy with it and try to develop it further like that, that makes it very fascinating". It seems as though this respondent sees the experience itself as a necessity for what comes after it, 'a foundation', since the experience itself is perceived as 'somewhat too ephemeral'. Another respondent shared this opinion and told that she saw the sessions of which the experience consisted as "small dots", as short moments in time so to say, in which "something is being sown and you have to continue with it". During these moments all sorts of things may happen, but the participant has to continue doing something with these. This is also a reason that is given for participating in post experiences: "how do I prevent that in 5 years I will have to do another (education), because I will have completely fallen asleep again?"

The experience in itself, as an event, has a clear beginning and a clear ending. "if you've finished the education, ...then you are done and then, well, then it's over, right? And then all of a sudden you don't do anything anymore", "you're participating very intensively for a certain amount of time and then you're done, and you have your degree and then, well, okay, then it's finished, the learning". Although objectively the experience can be over, finished and done, this does not always mean that people also experience it like this. "I have to say that I'm still stimulated. And not that I think like, well, I have the degree in my pocket, done. Title after my name and I continue on the same old road. No, it has really brought about a change… I wanted to continue it". The degree may mark the objective ending of a successfully finished experience, but with some participants, it has brought about a change process that they want to continue.

CREATE SOCIAL RESONANCE FOR FORMER PARTICIPANTS

Some people also saw the social aspect of the experience as a reason for why the finished experience did not feel as being finished. "(Y)ou know, it has been a very intense (period). You have seen each other a lot, you have met many people, it is not like two days and then it's over. All sorts of things happen. ... So, pursuing such an education with each other for (such a period) makes that you all go through a group process, which does not just stop according to me". Yet another respondent thought that the reason for him still being in touch with his former fellow students in the experience was that "we are very, very close, but also, we spent three years together, 24/7, knowing each other, getting to a level of knowledge of each other and sharing emotional moments". This group process did not just stop when the experience formally stopped.

In fact, one of the main benefits that respondents named of the post-experience, was this social aspect and the continuing existence of a group process. One of the respondent s for example told that he experienced difficulty in finding people to discuss with about the topics that were dealt with in the experience. "I experience that sort of resonance very little. I have to be satisfied when at night I'm reading in Erasmus, that's of course a sort of surrogate, because it's not so alive as the real dialogue, as getting deep into that intellectual adventure or that spiritual adventure together". With other former participants of the experience that participated in the post-experience, he did find this 'resonance', which was "why that (post experience) is kind of like an oasis in the desert for me...I also think that at this moment, many people struggle a bit with that loneliness". This feeling of loneliness, of desiring more 'resonance', was also expressed by another respondent, who would have liked it "if more initiative would be taken, to also do something with it. It all stays in my head now and it doesn't go beyond that, or you should meet someone by coincidence or a friend should ask you how you are doing, with whom you can talk on a certain level. With them you share this, but after that it becomes disintegrated again". Of course it is not just a matter of putting some participants together in a group and the resonance will emerge spontaneously, because "it grows. You actually see each other for too short periods of time. A basic group is starting to exist now, at least that is my feeling... we are getting to know each other a bit better… and that is starting to grow

now, something is starting to emerge I think. But you don't put that in place in one year… that has to take shape some more. But well, step by step".

7.4.5 Lessons to be learned related to investment

Just as paragraph 7.3 was focused on the role that respondents thought that the organizing party should play, the theme of this paragraph was investment, or the role that respondents saw for themselves as participants in experiences. In this paragraph, four subthemes that are related to investment have been discussed, together with some important points of attention that emerged from the interviews (see figure 7.19). Participants told that they saw themselves as having a clear role in creating effects for themselves, in working through everything that happened during the experience, and in keeping the learning process alive.

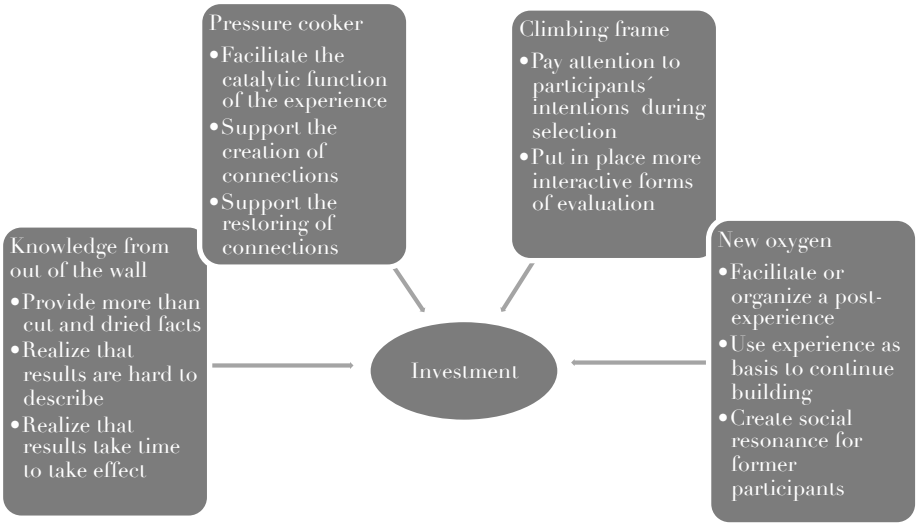

Figure 7.19 – Lessons to be learned in relation to Investment

Lessons that organizers of experiences can learn from the theme Investment, have to do with how to deal with participants that play a role in the experience. When passive absorption of stimuli is not the goal of participants anymore, it becomes more and more important to think about how organizers can deal with the more active participants. Of course, not everyone will always want to have an active role in experiences, an issue that was also discussed in the interviews. However, if an organizer decides that he wants active participants, something that will happen more and more if the economy is headed towards more cases of co-creation like Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue, then he will have to make sure that he has an understanding of the participant's intentions, and perhaps select participants based on their willingness and ability to take an active role in the experience. After all, actions taken by participants, or lack thereof, do not only impact their own experience but also that of the other participants.

If one realizes that an experience is not a simple transaction between two or more loose parties, something that has already come to the fore in previous chapters, then one also understands that the role of individuals in experiences is usually much bigger than when they buy products or services. In experiences one deals with results and effects that are not 'from out of the wall' or standardized, but that are at least in part created by individuals themselves. Furthermore, experiences become part of the individual's life (see figure 3.7) and they can catalyze other experiences in life, but it is and always remains the individual who decides whether to continue to do something with the experience or not, and if so, what he or she will do with it. Respondents for example described how the experience can function as a catalyst in the creation or restoration of connections between different parts of the individual's life. Which connections will be created or restored is of course not known beforehand and cannot be managed by the organization (Falk & Dierking, 2000). However, organizers should be aware that connections can be created or restored during or after the experience, since they can have a great impact on the individual. One just has to think of terms like for example an 'Aha Erlebnis', a 'eureka moment', a 'revelation' or an 'epiphany' to see that the manifestation of the connection between things that were not seen as connected before, can affect the individual on a deep and personal level.

The insight that experiences are part of a human being's life also prevents one from considering the experience as something with a beginning and an end that stands apart from the rest of life. For example the effects of experiences don't necessarily emerge immediately. It may take a long time for the final effects to come into existence and because of the personal nature of experiences one may never know which aspects of life will be impacted by the experience in the end. Every experience from the past has become part of the individual's background that influences future experiences. This way relations are made that cannot be predicted upfront, let alone be controlled. This influence of life on the experience and of the experience on life should be taken into account, if one is to understand the impact that experiences can have. Experiences are part of life and should not be perceived from an outside perspective as events with a beginning and an ending that stand apart from the rest of life. Therefore, when studying experiences, one should take this matter into account. In the context of services, the service process usually starts with the first encounter and ends with the last. For example, the process begins when the individual enters the store and ends when he leaves. A service chain or map could then be drawn, which shows all the relevant encounters and how the individual evaluated them (Hume & McColl-Kennedy, 1999). When dealing with experiences that can have a vast impact on various areas in the individual's life, this evaluation is not that simple. The experience does not necessarily begin when the individual of the abovementioned example enters the store and it does not necessarily end when he returns home. In the end, it is the individual who decides which events he considers as part of the experience and which he doesn't. Although an organization may think in terms of the activities that are executed under its own roof, there should be a growing awareness that from the viewpoint of the individual, the experience can be perceived in a much more extensive way. Where an airline may think in terms of its service, the transport of people and luggage from point A to point B, an individual may think in terms of his or her summer holiday to Italy. Where an insurance company may think in terms of remunerating the costs of a funeral service, an individual may think in terms of the loss of a loved one. These hypothetical experiences are much more extensive than the services that are provided by the mentioned providers. This also means that other service providers have a potential role in the experience, so no one provider has control over the whole experience. This makes it difficult for organizations to describe what the experience is exactly. One has to take into account much more than what takes place within the boundaries of the own organization.

Organizations can try to manage their own stake in the experience, their service, but the quality of the complete experience may be dependent on what the other providers have done. Of course this also affects the way in which one can evaluate experiences. Every organization can evaluate its own service, but only individuals can judge the quality of the experience. Also in the method of evaluation the individual should have the opportunity to express his or her thoughts and feelings. A centrally produced standardized preformed questionnaire, made by the organization, if usable at all, will have to contain questions that evoke the true and complete opinions and experience of the individual.

A different issue regarding the evaluation and study of experiences is that experiences can have a catalytic effect. In time they become internalized and integrated into one's life and it is difficult to see which effects have resulted directly from the experience and which have not. In the individual's memory, these experiences seem to have become entangled with other experiences. Asking the individual to disentangle the experiences by asking questions about the separate events then becomes a quite unnatural act that pushes the individual in a straitjacket that does not do justice to the nature of the experience. It is doubtful that one will obtain useful information on experiences in this manner.

The fact that the perceived impact of the experience on the individual may change in time is a third issue that one should take into account when evaluating or studying experiences. In the context of services, one can ask the individual's opinion during and immediately after the last service encounter. This service legacy of organizations may result in the practice of asking individuals to evaluate experiences before or immediately after they have formally ended. Organizations should think about ways in which the long-term effects of experiences could also be studied. For organizations that see experiences as transactions, this will be very hard to do, since they will break the contact with participants after the experience has ended. However, organizations that understand that the experience may continue in the eyes of the individual can support and facilitate this continuation by organizing post experiences for the individuals. In principle, these post experiences could continue forever, which would make for a very long-term relationship with former participants of the original

Category	Lessons	Subtheme (Theme)[18]
1 – Knowing the individual	Pay attention to participants' intentions during selection	C (I)
	Pay attention to individual goals	T2 (D)
	Making use of available resources	T1 (E)
	Pay attention to negative aspects in background	K1 (E)
	Pay attention to positive aspects in background	K1 (E)
2 – Taking the individual's perspective	Pay attention to the experience of participants	R (E)
	Clarify the context (surroundings, meaning)	W (D)
	Excessive direction	N1 (D)
	Be aware of implicit norms	W (D)
	Expectation management in communication	W (D)
3 – Giving room to the individual	Program is too full	N1 (D)
	One-way communication	N1 (D)
	Give space to participants' ideas and insights	T2 (D)
	Let solutions and insights emerge	T2 (D)
	Provide more than cut and dried facts	K2 (I)
	Facilitate the catalytic function of the experience	P (I)
	Support the creation of connections	P (I)
	Support the restoring of connections	P (I)
4 – Supporting the learning process	Talking vs. doing: practical experience	T1 (E)
	Give more support when specific results are expected	H (D)
	Work with clear, unambiguous and suitable norms.	W (D)
	Methodize the "here and now" to help with blind spots	H (D)
	Use confrontation to challenge participants	B (E)
	Use confrontation to mirror participants' actions	B (E)
5 – Supporting the social context	Create social resonance for former participants	N2 (I)
	Put in place constant factor for the social context	R (E)
	Pay attention to how information is shared	H (D)
6 – Continuing the experience	Facilitate or organize a post-experience	N2 (I)
	Use experience as basis to continue building	N2 (I)
7 – Evaluating the experience	Realize that results are hard to describe	K2 (I)
	Realize that results take time to take effect	K2 (I)
	Put in place more interactive forms of evaluation	C (I)

Table 7.1 – Seven categories of lessons for organizations dealing with experiences

[18] (E): Engagement - T1: Talking about it, R: Relation vs. calculation, B: Being pulled by your feathers, K1: Knitted Cloth. (D): Direction - N1: Not getting on that bus, T2: The image of the sower, H: Here's a bike and go, W: What movie you're in. (I): Investment – K2: Knowledge from out of the wall, P: Pressure cooker, C: Climbing frame, N2: New oxygen

experience. The original experience would then be the basis for all the activities that are explored together afterwards.

7.5 Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to provide an answer to the question "Which themes emerge from the existential phenomenological interviews on individuals' free choice learning experiences?" In the previous paragraphs three themes that have emerged from the existential-phenomenological interviews have been presented and discussed. In this paragraph I will conclude by giving a practical categorization of the main lessons to be learned. The three themes that have emerged from the interviews, Engagement, Direction and Investment, are connected in various ways. For example, one can imagine that the amount of engagement that organizers want to achieve affects the amount and type of direction that they can use. Engagement and investment are quite similar, in the sense that engagement is about trying to engage people in the experience and give them a role in the experience, and investment is about how these people in fact take their roles upon them. A possible connection between direction and investment is that the amount of direction determines how much freedom is left for individuals to play a part in the experience.

In total, thirty-two lessons to be learned from the interviews have been presented in this chapter. For practical reasons, these lessons have been grouped together, resulting in 7 categories (see table 7.1). The first category, Knowing the individual, consists of lessons that organizations should take at heart, to make sure that they know what the individuals want and expect, and also that they have insight into what the individuals know and are capable of. Especially when organizations want to focus on more active, co-creation experiences, it is important to know how the individuals can contribute to the experience. Lessons in this category may have many consequences for how organizations deal with their selection process. The second category, Taking the individual's perspective, contains lessons on how to focus on the way things are experienced by individuals, including the actions of the organizers. By imagining how

individuals may experience everything and by focusing on how the organizers' actions can be interpreted, a deeper understanding of the experience can be achieved. Lessons in this category may seem simple and straightforward, but since they deal with a change of perspective of people, it may be quite difficult to incorporate the lessons. The third category, Giving room to the individual, contains lessons on providing individuals with opportunities for reflection and expressing their input. This space for reflection and input can support the catalytic function of the experience, causing the experience to have more enduring effects. Instead of the content remaining locked inside the temporary Erlebnis, it may then become part of the individual's Erfahrung. The fourth category, Supporting the learning process, consists of lessons related to how the explicit, as well as the implicit, learning process could be improved. Providing clear norms and a link between theory and practice may help the explicit learning process, whereas mirroring the individual's actions and using the here and now may improve the more implicit learning process that takes place. Although not every experience has to be an educational experience, every experience contains opportunities for learning. Especially when individuals are expected to be active in the experience, there is a potential for learning, which can be supported by the organization.

The fifth category, Supporting the social context, consists of lessons related to how the individuals learn together. Since the social context is often the most important memory that adults have of experiences, these are very important lessons.

The sixth category, Continuing the experience, consists of lessons on the importance and the value of providing subsequent experiences for individuals, to keep their knowledge fresh and alive. The lessons in the seventh and last category, Evaluating the experience, are focused on issues that should be taken into account when evaluating or studying experiences. Traditional methods that were very useful for the evaluation and study of services, do not necessarily have to be useful, and may even be harmful, for the understanding of experiences. The lessons to be learned that have resulted from the analysis of the interviews, are all based on insight into the respondents' lived experience. In the following, and last, chapter, I will combine these insights with the spectra of experience-concepts, -effects and –values that have been constructed in chapters 3 to 5, to arrive at a sound and integrative theoretical foundation for the experience economy from the individual's perspective, with the intention to offset the current bias in the experience economy discourse.