Abstract

**Purpose** – Induction is the process of newcomers entering and becoming part of an organization. In one sense newcomers represent an opportunity for organizations to learn and change, but in another sense newcomers are instigated into an existing institutional order. The purpose of this paper is to explore how induction of newcomers can be understood as both organizational renewal and the maintenance of status quo, and to develop ways of describing this in terms of learning.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper is designed as a qualitative study of induction practices in two branches of a Danish retail bank and a Danish management consulting company. The data are based on 30 semi-structured interviews and on some observations in the case companies. The data have subsequently been analyzed phenomenologically and thematically in light of a pragmatist understanding of learning.

**Findings** – The paper provides two main findings. The duality of induction, in terms of organizational renewal and the maintenance of status quo can be conceptualized and meaningfully discussed through the metaphors of organizational rhythm and generative dance. And if this ambiguous dimension of induction is recognized, organizational idiosyncrasies, ways of doing and taken-for-granted aspects can be thrown up for discussion and thus potentially change or stabilize organizational practice based on persons and institutional order.

**Research limitations/implications** – The paper adds to the growing academic debate of the complex nature of practice in general, and induction in particular. In addition, the paper has implications for practitioners involved in induction, as the paper highlights the need to rethink induction as both an opportunity to create organizational renewal and a way of maintaining status quo.

**Originality/value** – Seeing the duality of induction and exploring it through the metaphors of organizational rhythm and generative dancing is original and potentially enriching for researchers and practitioners.

**Keywords** Induction, Learning organizations, Banking, Pragmatism, Management consultancy, Denmark

Newcomers are recruited to enterprises every day all over the world. Some newcomers are required to participate in more or less formal induction programs, such as introduction courses, but all are going through an induction process. All newcomers are upon arrival to a new enterprise entering the process of becoming an old-timer in
a pre-existing institutional order. This social order is always also disorder as there is no such thing as a social standstill. This is not possible given the sociality of the institutional order (Holland and Lave, 2001). To maintain status quo is to be in a continuous process of actively aligning the institutional order. Nevertheless, a disturbance like a newcomer’s entrance will always provide an extra chance to deliberately (re)-consider the institutional order and hence alter the “way things are done around here.”

We think that the meeting of newcomers with institutional order is interesting because it is a possibility for both the newcomer and the institutional order to allow for renewal as well as to reconsider the status quo. The challenge is, however, to not just view newcomers as persons in an ahistorical, asocial, essentialist way (Holland and Lave, 2001, p. 9) as well as to view enterprises independent of their history and context. It is an easy and tempting trap to fall into thinking that already formed persons are “affecting” already formed institutional orders as this speaks to our common sense understanding of individuals and organizations as united, but separate entities. Then we, however, miss the ability to see how the two are in a mutual relationship creating and recreating each other in a continuous way.

Our interest in the question of whether induction may lead to organizational renewal or the maintenance of the status quo is the mixed discourses and contradictorily voices that we have met in our study of induction. Thus, in the enterprises we have studied, there appears to be a verbal stress on the importance of the induction process but not always an induction program that follows from this inscription of importance. We have also listened to management’ stories about their wish to learn from their newcomers but, nevertheless, initiated an induction program that did not leave much room for that.

We do not want – and are not in a position – to claim that some induction processes are “better” than others or that some managers and employees involved in induction act “wiser” than others do. We, however, do want to illustrate the fruitfulness to approach induction in ways in which it is understood as mutual formations of persons and organizations as well as to take into account the social and historical character of both. This is what we aim for with presenting our cases.

We begin by telling our empirical stories, which take their point of departure in two enterprises from, respectively, the retail banking and the management consulting industry in Denmark. Then we introduce our theoretical ideas and concepts which have helped us rethink and understand induction as learning in which not only skills and knowledge is acquired or conveyed but in which learning is viewed as mutual transformation of persons and organizations, i.e. as a continuous reconstruction of identities and institutional order. Before doing so, we need to say a few words about our methodology.

Methodology and introduction to empirical cases
Qualitative data were collected and analyzed over a period from August 2005 to June 2008 as part of an international comparative research project. The data from the two enterprises are based on a total of 30 semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996) lasting approximately one hour each, several hours of observations, for example of the formal induction program and ordinary company life to get “a feel” of the organization. In addition we had informal meetings with management before and during data
collection and we had access to internal documents about induction and introduction programs.

In the interviews, we asked question about induction – the program and the process – and we interviewed and observed managers, old-timers and newcomers in both enterprises. We also asked questions about the interview persons’ education and work history as well as their perception of the enterprise. In order for us to gain an understanding of the enterprises, we read different kinds of documents including available internal records, training documents, corporate websites, business reports, etc. We also deliberately used our emotions to get a feeling for the atmosphere as well as looked upon the physical outline of the enterprise from an aesthetic perspective (Strati, 2003).

We followed an interview guide based on the international projects’ overall research questions and themes, but amended it to fit national and business specific contexts. All interviews were recorded and made available as texts as well as were our observations. These texts were read several times in order to make sense of our data. This sense making process is partly inspired by a grounded theoretical approach (Clarke, 2003) and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) as well as a phenomenological text interpretation (Giorgi, 1975). We used this kind of data interpretation in order to avoid being too focused upon enforcing a specific understanding of induction but to rather “let the data speak to us” in order to listen to the voices of and in the field. Which stories did it tell us about learning and the organization? How was induction used as a possibility to renew and maintain the status quo?

This way of interpreting data also seems more in line with our wish to understand enterprises and identities in an evolutionary and historical way, as we believe that we can follow traces and trajectories in the data more openly in this way rather than when data are framed in a specific theoretical framework. We are, however, well aware that we as researchers do not begin with a clean slate but we try to keep our pre-understanding of the field on this overall ontological level and let that serve as a “sensitizing device” (Vaughan, 1992). In the following, we first present our two case stories from the field of banking and consultancy. Then we rethink induction to explore the double potential of induction as a process of renewal as well as maintenance of status quo. We finish this paper with a brief discussion of the perspectives of this particular approach to induction in terms of theory development, as well as development of induction practices in the enterprises.

Retail banking
The first case study company is in fact two branches of the same retail bank corporation. Major Bank is a large Danish retail banks with more than 3.5 million customers in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Northern Ireland, and Ireland[1] Major Bank was founded in the late 1800s, and has almost 300 branches nation-wide and several corporate regional banking centers.

Major Bank offers a wide range of financial services and products: insurance, mortgage finance, asset management, real estate and brokerage. The development of Major Bank follows the same trends as the sector as such, which is described in the literature as increased concentration (Andersen, 1996; Regini et al., 1999; Finansrådet, 2001; Smistrup, 2003).
In addition, an increase in competition has sketched out the development in the last decade. New and specialized discount banks have emerged and internet banking is increasing. Foreign banks are entering the Danish market and it is anticipated that they will play an increasing role in the future (Andersen, 1996; Finansrådet, 2005). Combined with a growing ability and tendency amongst customers to compare prices and chose between different products, focus is now laid on the personal relationship and the experience of personal service (Pedersen and Aagaard, 2005), e.g. customer orientation has become a primary competitive factor.

In order to obtain a more customer oriented approach and thus meet the competitive demand of the sector, the branch management seeks to employ personnel with an explicitly service-minded approach to certain functions in the bank, which is reflected in two recruitment strategies carried out in the branches. One strategy is to recruit people with backgrounds in other parts of the service sector in order to have a diverse selection of staff that is able to relate to all types of customers. Another is to recruit younger people with an outgoing profile in order to change the image and attract younger customers. These are new policies, as the banking sector has a strong tradition for only employing people with a financial background primarily from within the corporation, or has recruited apprentices with a mercantile upper secondary education to follow a structured financial training. The branches still recruit and train new employees through apprenticeships, but a growing number of employees are recruited with no prior banking experience.

**Induction in Major Bank**

Although there is no formally instigated procedure for introducing newcomers into the bank, informants readily describe certain procedures, which are associated with the way induction of newcomers is done in the branches.

The inductees are welcomed on their first day with an informal gathering, including breakfast, a short welcome speech from the manager and a round of presentations. The inductee is given a bouquet of flowers and is asked to introduce him or herself. This is rather similar to all newcomers. Also e-learning courses and a general introduction to the corporate headquarters are reported as part of induction into the bank. Newcomers are issued lists of items and actions to learn, e.g. how to open check accounts, safety procedures regarding money handling, and navigating in the complex computer systems. Introduction to corporate policies and structures are also part of the introduction. However, the induction process is not only a matter of acquiring knowledge about banking as well as knowledge of the corporation. The newcomers also state that a more informal kind of knowledge acquisition is taking place. Newcomers report how they begin adhering to a dress code and start to dress differently despite the fact that no explicit dress code applies in the branches. They also report how they adapt to the jargon and organizational culture in the branches, and through this learn how the subtle hierarchies work between colleagues.

This suggests that the institutional order, i.e. formal and informal “ways of doing” in the bank branch, is “talking” to newcomers through planned and unplanned events and making them change their appearance, and adapt to their surrounding organizational environment. In addition, one of the newcomers states that she does not question things as much anymore, pointing to the fact that she is becoming more
and more socialized into the routines and self-evident truths of the institutional order of
the bank. This adaptation is evident in the following quote:

No, I wonder less and less now. I have been here about a year, so I have learned how they see
the world. And I have started to adopt a little. When in Rome, do as Romans do, you know.
So I try to blend into avoid being the one who came from outside and continued to be outside
for years.

IN: How? Do you dress differently, talk differently, or do you keep quiet more?

Yes, all of that, I think. Yes – everybody started to wear jewelry at some point, and then
I started to wear them, too (Newcomer at Major Bank).

The institutional order of the organization, however, was also renewed by the entrance
of newcomers. Newcomers have for example brought about altered smoking
routines, new ways of counting money, and have suggested new places for gifts and
merchandise to optimize some daily routines. Also reaching out to new customers
through the use of new media as well as setting up different product displays are noted
as visible signs of the changes being brought about by the newcomers asking
questions and pondering upon the existing routines. But renewal of the institutional
order is not only concerned with the practical sides of the everyday life in the branch.
The organization is also adapting to the newcomers in more subtle ways, e.g. the pace
and dynamism change due to newcomer’s entering the branch. One example of this is
expressed in the following quote by a manager:

I think that it [newcomers entering] affects them [the old-timers] positively, [...] just the way
they move is faster than many of those who have been sitting her for 30 years – it hopefully
causes them [the old-timers], [...] to think that: those youngsters should not believe that they
are anybody, so we will make an effort [...] I really think that the young people create
dynamics in the branch (Branch Manager, Major Bank).

The manager in this quote feels that newcomers contribute to create a more dynamic
atmosphere, with a faster and more energetic pace, that urges old-timers to make an
effort to keep up. Another important feature of the benefit the management of the bank
perceives it gets from newcomers is the ability to “take the outside temperature,”
e.g. inform the old-timers about new trends, people’s perception of banks and other
relevant information. The branch manager has recognized the tendencies of being
lulled into sleep by having been in the branches for too long. Newcomers with no
prior banking experience are thus considered valuable in terms of being non-bankers,
and represent a challenge to the existing norms and routines just because they are
“outsiders” and as such not socialized from education and training into the bank.

When asking questions, when changing work routines and when forcing old-timers
to work in new ways, old-timers are required to reflect upon their current practice
which sparks off debates of how to handle certain situations or initiates reflection on
the nature of banking.

These changes can be seen as a reconfiguration of the institutional order, and can be
described as changes in the “organizational rhythm” (Boje, 2006). The concept of rhythm
connotes the dynamics and pace of everyday practice that is affected and changed in
subtle ways upon a newcomer’s arrival. The concept of rhythm is related to a music
metaphor where the employees all play a different instrument. When a new “instrument”
starts to play, the other musicians automatically “tune in” and the tune changes,
even though it can be very difficult to trace exactly where and how the changes appears (Cook and Yanow, 1993). The branches are still performing their core tasks, but the way this is done is reconfigured through new impulses and questions, through new types of employees and new views on things. The old-timers are challenged in their way of thinking and acting, and they are forced to “tune in.” The way things are done, the unquestioned rules and regulations are changing due to the new line up of musicians, which is made explicit in this case by the perception of branches that are more dynamic, unfolds livelier atmospheres, faster service and a faster pace in general.

Management consulting
Consul A/S is a relatively new player in the Danish consultancy market. It began in 2000 with three founders and expanded rapidly since then. Consul has been awarded Gazelle of the year, which is a prize awarded by the Danish Federation of Industries recognizing rapid growth, both in terms of size and revenues. This development is expected to continue in the near future. It is a medium-sized management consultancy firm with approximately 70 employees[2], where the majority is employed as consultants. Consul provides traditional management consulting services tied to process development and strategizing.

Although difficult to define and delineate the consultancy sector, several Danish reports (Erhvervsfremmestyrelsen, 1999; Pedersen and Wammen-Jensen, 2005) describe a rapidly growing sector which is characterized by many smaller firms and a few large consultancy firms, which account for the majority of the turnover. The same rapid development is found internationally (Poulfelt et al., 2005, p. 3), and the consultancy sector is characterized as unique in comparison to most other industries. The rapid growth poses some challenges for Consul because the growth is challenged by difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of experienced employees.

Induction in Consul A/S
Despite the fact that induction in Consul is still not standardized, induction consists of some recognized patterns as well as identifiable and agreed upon routines. There are a number of identified consultants involved in the formal part of the induction process.

On the newcomers first day, he or she (primarily he!)[3] is greeted with a short gathering around breakfast and a small talk. The social gathering is followed by a full day of introduction to the internal computer systems, how to register company related expenses like driving and hotels, as well as project management tools and other developed materials and consultancy tools. The prime reason for this rather thorough presentation is described by the senior consultant in charge of the session:

It is central to us to share knowledge. Instead of being on a project and invent the wheel yourself, you might be able to take the wheel from a colleague who just used it at a competitor, and almost reuse the knowledge. Therefore, it is important for us to tell people something about how they document this knowledge that they naturally acquire on projects.

So this is a part of the starting here (Senior consultant, Consul).

Also more subtle signs of newcomers adapting to the “ways we do things around here” are found in the data. Informants report how they slowly incorporate a certain normative approach to consultancy, which are described as the “Consul-Way,” as well as adapt to the individualistic Gang-Ho[4] mentality of the company.
One way of passing this “Consul-Way” on to newcomers is to assign them to projects with experienced colleagues from the outset. For instance, one newcomer reports how remarks and corrections to his performance help him to adjust and to align with the company expectations:

I would probably say, that the biggest eye opener was the one I got from Eric after the first meeting we had with XX [customer], where he called me afterwards and said to me: “You have to be a little more sharp around the edges. It is what they buy us for […] not as consensus seeking, and you know, going with the flow […], and I am rather ambitious, so that hit me hard and I have thought a lot about that afterwards (Newcomer, Consul).

Even when newcomers in Consul are experienced consultants, with good and reputable track records from elsewhere, the institutional order is difficult to escape also in instances where the “Consul-Way” seem counter intuitive to what the consultants have succeeded with before. One experienced newcomer states:

And I can see, that some of what Consul preaches and some of what Consul claims to work and create enormous improvements, conflicts more or less with my previous experience (Newcomer, Consul).

The newcomers’ experience of what works in other situations is, in other words, challenged by the experience built up in the methodological apparatus advocated by Consul and reified in templates, agendas, and materials found in the databases. The newcomer, then, is caught between his own knowledge and experience of what works and the established knowledge base in Consul.

These examples are seen as ways of instigating the institutional order on the newcomer, formally as well as informally. Introducing the new employee to the procedures and administrative routines of the company as well as to the “Consul-Way” from the outset sends a clear signal of what tools to apply when, where and how. Also the institutional order is conveyed to newcomers either explicitly by old-timers giving advice and guidance, or implicitly by newcomers working together with old-timers on projects.

However, as with Major Bank, the institutional order is also constantly challenged by the entry of newcomers. For instance, one newcomer mentions a specific example of how a presentation of how to minimize tensions and frustrations associated with mergers and acquisitions, which proved successful in a previous job, has been modified and transferred into the new setting by reusing PowerPoint presentations:

I have a PowerPoint presentation about mergers and change management that I have used previously, and some of the slides about what you need to be aware of, different reactions in a change process were used in a modified form (Newcomer, Consul).

Also pinpointed actions directed towards specific businesses or sectors which newcomers with specialized knowledge challenge the institutional order by offering new ways of approaching certain sectors. One newcomer explains how his knowledge of the public sector has caused a change in the way estimates and proposals are written and presented to potential public clients because this has to be different from private clients. One manager explains that it is part of their recruitment strategy to hire people with sector specific knowledge, and newcomers are described to take with them knowledge from specific industries where Consul has had no projects previously. Such experience is subsequently incorporated into the existing framework in the
business area and informs other methods used. Besides, contributing to develop a new area of expertise, the newcomers’ contributions are said to benefit the organization in terms of creating a base for future discussions and synergies in other projects. Even in cases where the consultant is not fully booked on projects outside the house, the following quote illustrates how newcomers are expected to actively engage in the company, and thus contribute to change the organizational make up:

You shouldn’t just be here to [. . .] you mustn’t just be a trailer, right, not just be coupled on and ride along. You can do that, but that is not someone you want to have hanging around, right? You can be as good as it gets, but we want someone who steps up to the plate and do things, develop some competencies, do stuff, do something [. . .] our internal systems. Do something on our internal procedures. Do things that others don’t (Senior consultant at Consul).

Other examples of the existing frameworks being extended or challenged by induction newcomers into the organization count the integration of knowledge, templates and methods from other consultancy houses into the organizational knowledge base.

Rethinking induction
The two cases presented may be said to represent two different ways of inducting newcomers but with the same background, namely to induct new kinds of newcomers out of necessity due to labor shortage, either because of rapid growth or because of the need to rethink the company profile. In the bank, there is a sense of the usefulness of recruiting “outsiders” by recruiting employees from the service sector in general in order to help change the internal and external image of the bank. However, the meeting between the new recruits and the firm institutional order does not make an easy renewal of the banks. The status quo, however, is also challenged to some degree as the organizational rhythm is beginning to swing through new beats and new ways of working and new routines are slowly entering the branches. In the consultancy company, the institutional order is in the making due to the rather young organization, and although induction seems to be an important means in this process as new methods and sector specific knowledge is readily accepted into the organization, newcomers report how they in the so-called Consul-Way meet a strong organizational culture and a strong sense of right and wrong in relation to performance. The strong normative approach to consultancy along with a strong sense of “we do things this way” in the company, provides the frame against which all new ideas and initiatives are measured, which points to the simultaneous maintenance of status quo.

When rethinking induction, metaphors can be useful, as with the rhythm metaphor. Another metaphorical way of seeing induction, is as a generative dance (Sprogoe and Rohde, 2009). Building on the understanding proposed by Cook and Brown a generative dance within the doing of work “[. . .] constitutes the ability to generate new knowledge and new ways of using knowledge – which knowledge alone cannot do” (Cook and Brown, 1999, p. 394). When we coin induction as a generative dance, it is a way to describe how the social interaction inherent in induction (the “dance”) leads to something else (is generative), in this case learning. However, the dance metaphor allows us to understand the renewal as well as the status quo of induction. On the one side, the dance is not static as the dancers and their performance constantly adapt to a specific context as it is continuously influenced by music, other couples on the dance floor, the size and composition of the floor, the dancers’ experience, and whether the partners know one another, etc. (Feldman and Rafaeli, 2002). On the other side,
the dance is highly recognizable and is performed in rather uniform ways. Copeland and Cohen (1983, p. 1) define dance as “any patterned rhythmic movement in space and time,” and point to the repetitive and recognizable nature of dancing by emphasizing that dancing is patterned and present in time and space. Although bounded in the actual performance, dancing is embedded in a historical and cultural context that guides the way the dance is carried out. Using the example of ballroom dancing, the dance can be seen as made up of certain steps and movements, which is informed by certain conventions and rules around this particular dance type, which makes it possible to recognize ballroom dancing as ballroom dancing and delineate this type of dancing from other types of dancing, for instance freestyle dance, Latin dance, formation dance, etc. Still it is hard to claim that ballroom dancing is done the exact same fashion every time (Rohde and Sprogøe, 2007), as dancers, music, rhythm, and a variety of other factors constantly generate new steps, new twists and turns while dancing. At the same time, a dance metaphor emphasizes activity and social interaction (Spencer, 1985), elements that are constitutive for (learning in) practice as well (Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini et al., 2003, p. 8), as well as keeps our attention to the recognizable patterns given by rhythm, culture, dance style, etc.

Applying this notion to the case, we see that the informants of both Major Bank and Consul were able to describe induction as series of actions somehow staged in specific and recognizable sequences. Induction “consists” of different steps and movements, and “comes about” through the performances of these movements. These series of actions were performed with some variation from iteration to iteration, and as such generated new ways of performing and new ways of understanding. Using this dancing vocabulary to analyze processes found in the induction practices in the two cases sensitizes us to the constant reconfiguration of practice as a result of the interplay and interaction between newcomers and organizations in induction.

Seeing induction as a generative dance allows for incremental changes stemming from the constant interaction between the people and artifacts involved in induction to be understood as learning by organizations (Cook and Yanow, 1993), and gives us a language to speak about induction as both an opportunity for organizational renewal as well as maintenance of status quo. One the one side, the dance provides a frame to move within, and a specific rhythm to adapt to. The dance stays more or less the same, as dancers are unable or unwilling to expand or escape the given rhythm. This is what we see as maintaining status quo, i.e. aligning the institutional order. On the other side, the generativity designates the constant adaptation to each other, the renegotiation of what constitutes a “proper” way of dancing through the adjustments of the organizational rhythm, the “pushing” between other couples on the floor, etc. These changes have the potential of being incorporated into the dance, e.g. being incorporated into the organizational culture and the organizational setup, and as such challenge the existing institutional order. New steps are invented and some steps are consolidated and continued, but most importantly, focus is laid on the constant movement and interaction between newcomers, old-timers and organizations. This part all constitute what we see as the potential for organizational renewal, i.e. the reconsidering of the institutional order.

To elaborate on this metaphorical view on induction as a dance we find that a pragmatist understanding of learning offers (at least) two relevant strands of thinking though which to open up what happens in induction (Elkjaer, 2000, 2004).
First, pragmatism alerts us to the importance of the meeting between subjects and worlds as the point where things happen. This meeting may trigger the renewal and maintenance of status quo of experience and in turn learning. This is a meeting between a historical and socialized individual and a world with an existence marked by history and tradition. When the meeting is between a newcomer and an organization – or an organized entity like a workplace – it is a meeting with already existing organizational structures and processes; fellow human beings who are also framed by – and who have been instrumental in framing – the organizational structures and processes; and artifacts like the physical layouts of buildings, machinery, etc. This meeting is by no means solely cognitive but emotional and aesthetic (Vince, 2001). A crucial element in this meeting is that the newcomers as well as the old-timers are all able to interpret and reinterpret what they experience and how they experience what they do. This is sometimes called sense-making (Weick et al., 2005) but we think that a better way is to talk about reconstruction of experience. The use of the term experience in the pragmatist sense is to connote that we are not only using cognition and words in this endeavor but also experiences that we are not able to express verbally but nevertheless are part of our interpretation and reinterpretation processes of this meeting (Dewey, 1917, 1925). This is in line with the dance metaphor, as dancing is by no means only cognitive and verbally expressed, but also a highly emotional and bodily experience bound up in the meeting between dancers, music and rhythm.

However, and second, words also matter. Although most experiences are not verbal, but bodily and hard to put into words, verbalizing experiences bring them into a new realm. The attempt to put experiences into words take us into the social sphere of verbal communication and of the possibilities to use language to form and reform interpretations and to exchange these with fellow human beings. Thus, in a pragmatist understanding of learning, ideas, concepts and theories are important tools to help construct, reconstruct and communicate experiences, and it is this form of communication that is instrumental in order to rethink, to renew and to transform not only the what and how of subjects’ experiencing but also the process of experiencing. This ability to interpret and to reinterpret is particularly human, and this interpretation is what can be questioned and re-questioned in an infinite number of ways. In the pragmatist understanding this endeavor is the deliberation leading to learning experiences. Applying this understanding to the metaphor of induction as a generative dance, the reinterpretation and the constant negotiation of the moves, the frames within which they take place, as well as the deliberate adaptation to one another, can be understood as learning as defined above. In this definition of learning, body is included alongside mind as well as identity and a growing sense of organizational belonging that develops through the numerous meeting points between subjects and worlds. Learning is in other words both a bodily experience as well as a verbal one, and it is both adaptation and (longing for) belonging as well as possible new insights through questioning the taken for granted. This is what constitutes the generative dance as an individual and organizational learning experience.

In short, we propose to see induction as both renewal and the maintenance of status quo not as an either-or but, nevertheless, weaved together in the same process. This process can be understood through the dance metaphor in which there always is a rhythm but also room for (some) improvisation. In order to further open up the understanding of induction as both a continuous unfolding of the past and with the
possibility of anticipating the future through moving in slightly different directions, we propose a pragmatist understanding of learning. This theoretical framing includes body, emotion, and aesthetics as well as verbal language, concepts and ideas as tools for deliberation. Having a pragmatist understanding of the learning inherent in induction as well as having coined our dance metaphor help us understand that if management want to use recruitment of newcomers as renewal of the enterprise, it is necessary to take the organizational rhythm into account and also to work with induction beyond verbal language and communication. Body, emotion and aesthetic is included in individual as well as organizational experience and needs also to be part of the induction to an enterprise.

Conclusion and discussion

We began by stressing the historicity of both persons and enterprises and the importance to understand the two as weaved together in mutual creation and recreation. We wanted to throw light on the apparently contradictory voices of wanting organizational change through recruiting newcomers but inducting in ways in which there is little room for change. We followed two cases both of which were led to recruit “outsiders” due to labor shortage in banking and a consultancy industry. We showed that only incremental changes were the outcome of induction in both industries and that this could be understood through a dance metaphor and, in turn, opened by a pragmatist understanding of learning. We believe that the incremental changes point to both a pull towards organizational stability and a pull towards change – the result being stability and change as two sides of the same coin. Further, the dance metaphor alludes to the necessity of following a rhythm with only little room for change and the pragmatist understanding of learning elaborates the metaphor through inclusion of body, emotion and aesthetic as important ingredients in the experiences of persons and enterprises.

In both cases, it is possible to see induction as learning by interpreting the meetings of newcomers with institutional order. In both Major Bank and Consul there are meetings between persons and enterprises doing induction that can be interpreted as organizational learning in which it is possible to trace both organizational renewal and maintenance of status quo. The dance metaphor helped us understand how the constant moving in and out of couples on the dance floor change and challenge the dance. This is in line with the argument by Cook and Yanow (1993, p. 385), who argue that “[…] when a new member’s actions ‘fit in’ to group activity, the institution’s concerns are thereby confirmed and sustained; that is to say, the organization has reconstituted itself.” This reconstitution is considered as a fundamental form of organizational learning, and this view is consistent with our case studies where induction is found to be potentially transforming organizational practice in the bank branches and the consulting company as well as to sustain it. This leads us to conclude that induction in fact holds renewal potential that organizations could benefit from, given that they develop a conscious strategy to “extract” and facilitate such renewal. For example, why not allow for more time for formal meetings between newcomers and old-timers in the bank branches in order to exchange experiences and maybe do so in experimental ways including bodily as well as cognitive ways of learning? In consultancy a similar suggestion could be made, in relation to loosening up their tight grip on the creation of an institutional order by way of the induction program. In other words; why not allow for the intake of new experiences to challenge the institutional order?
At the same time, the maintenance of status quo in induction has a stabilizing function, providing a sense of unity and recognizability to old-timers as well as newcomers in search of a corporate identity. As such, the maintenance of status quo is an important part of the creation of coherence and handing down historical and social givens, e.g. providing an institutional order in which it is possible to reflect upon self and others. However, if status quo is uncritically maintained, organizations risk stagnating and lose the opportunities to capitalize from any potential development and learning induction might invoke. But if induction is used to critically assess and discuss the cultural givens, the organizational habits and ways of doing, the maintenance of status quo might represent another powerful instance of learning (Cook and Yanow, 1993).

This duality touches upon opposing movements and the complexity of induction. Induction is seen as a place or a period of time, where newcomers have full opportunities to discuss, comment and influence the prevailing frameworks, both in terms of methods and culture, e.g. challenge the institutional order. Some organizations even expect this to happen. The organization is open for suggestions, so to speak. But induction is also seen as the first and last opportunity for the organization to impact the newcomer with cultural norms, values, work ethic, expectations and the like, and thus make sure that the institutional order is delivered to newcomers in order for them to fit into the existing framework as smoothly as possible. If this ambiguous dimension of induction is recognized and used actively to critically anticipate future and reflect upon past, organizational idiosyncrasies, ways of doing and taken-for-granted aspects can be thrown up for discussion and thus potentially change or stabilize organizational practice based on persons and institutional order.

Notes
1. After this research was conducted, Major Bank acquired another foreign bank.
2. In 2006, when the study was conducted.
3. The vast majority of consultants in Consul are male; a distribution the management is wanting to change.

References
Andersen, T. (1996), Organisatorisk forandring i dansk bankvæsen om udviklingen af nye ansettelserelationer [Organizational Change in the Danish Banking Sector in Regards to New Employment Relations], Handelshøjskolen i Kobenhavn, Frederiksberg.


About the authors

Jonas Sprogoe, BA, MA, and PhD, has previously done research within the fields of adult learning and comparative education, but his recent research has been within the fields of organizational and workplace learning. His dissertation research was about induction and organizational learning processes. He has contributed to articles and books, which have been published nationally and internationally. Jonas Sprogoe currently works as a management consultant. Jonas Sprogoe is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: jonas@argo.dk

Bente Elkjaer, BA, MA, and PhD, holds a chair in organizational and workplace learning at the Department of Learning, School of Education, Aarhus University of which she is also the current head. Bente Elkjaer has within her research taken a special interest in developing a theoretical perspective on organizational learning inspired by American Pragmatism (particularly the works by John Dewey), which she has called the “third way.” She has published her work both within the educational research community in for example International Journal of Lifelong Education and within organization and management studies in journals like Human Resource Development International and Management Learning. She is also Emeritus Editor of the latter mentioned journal, Management Learning.

To purchase reprints of this article please e-mail: reprints@emeraldinsight.com
Or visit our web site for further details: www.emeraldinsight.com/reprints
This article has been cited by: