

Emotional Abuse and Neglect in the Workplace



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Emotional Abuse and Neglect in the Workplace:

How to Restore Normal Organizational Life

Preface

1 Parenting: A Source of Inspiration for Leadership

1.1 When Change Fails and Leadership is Lacking

1.2 Emotional Neglect in the Workplace

1.3 Metaphors and Narratives

1.4 Structure of the Book

2 Amsterdam Public Transport: A Tough Nut to Crack

2.1 Context: GVB's 20-Year History of Failing Transformation

2.2 Traffic Control: A Mix of Planned-Change Strategies

2.3 Second Case Study: Line-Bound Operation

2.4 A First Attempt to Explain

2.5 Conclusions

3 Emotional Neglect and Child Development

3.1 Defining Neglect

3.2 What Constitutes Neglectful Parenting?

3.3 Characteristics of Neglected Children's Behavior

3.4 Good and Bad Parenting Styles

3.5 Effective Treatment of Neglect

4 Neglect in the Workplace: Definition and Diagnosis

- 4.1 Defining Neglect in the Workplace
- 4.2 Signs of Neglect
- 4.3 Diagnostic Method
- 4.4 Who To Involve in the Diagnosis
- 4.5 How to Make a Diagnosis

5 Recovering from Neglect

- 5.1 Why Classic OD Strategies Fail
- 5.2 Preconditions for Normalizing Daily Organizational Life
- 5.3 The Recovery Process: Who Needs to Do What?
- 5.4 Interventions to Restore Normal Organizational Life
- 5.5 Duration and Phasing of the Recovery
- 5.6 The OD Consultant's Role in the Recovery Process
- 5.7 How to Deal with the Inevitable Backlash

6 Good and Bad Leadership Styles

- 6.1 When Management Neglects to Take Responsibility
- 6.2 Leadership Styles and Organization Development
- 6.3 Good and Bad Leadership Styles in Neglected Organizations
- 6.4 Laissez-Faire Leadership and Destructive Leadership
- 6.5 Change of Leadership Style: Interventions
- 6.6 Practical Examples of Leadership Styles in Neglected Organizations

7 Recovery from Neglect: Coping and Intervening

- 7.1 How to Cope in a Neglected Organization
- 7.2 Case Studies in Intervention; Organization A
- 7.3 Interventions in Organization B
- 7.4 Interventions in Organization C
- 7.5 Overview of Interventions and Their Effect
- 7.6 With Hindsight: Interventions at GVB

8 Lessons for OD Practitioners

- 8.1 Personal Experience and Tested Solutions
- 8.2 Match Expectations with What the Organization Can Handle
- 8.3 Avoid Large-Scale and Organization-Wide Change Projects
- 8.4 Personal Style: OD Professionals' Self-Awareness and Self-Reflection
- 8.5 OD Professionals' Basic Attitude: Inquisitive and Skeptical
- 8.6 'Neglect in the Workplace': A Loaded Phrase
- 8.7 Practical Suggestions for External Consultants
- 8.8 OD Professionals' Suitability
- 8.9 How Change Agents Can Hold Their Own

9 In Conclusion: A New OD Concept

- 9.1 Arrested Development in Organizations
- 9.2 Similarities Between Parenting and Leadership Styles
- 9.3 Back to Basics: Normalizing Daily Organizational Life
- 9.4 Change Agents' Basic Knowledge
- 9.5 Lessons for OD Guidance

Notes

Appendix I Leadership Questionnaire

Appendix II Organizational Trust Questionnaire

Appendix III Diagnostic Checklist: Signs of Neglect

Appendix IV Preconditions for Recovery: Checklist

Bibliography

2 Amsterdam Public Transport: A Tough Nut to Crack

The case studies I describe in this chapter are based on a series of organizational development (OD) projects at GVB¹, Amsterdam's public transport company, where I worked as an external organizational development (OD) consultant for over a decade. Resistance to organizational change at the company was rife during my time there. This is exemplified by two case studies in particular. The first of these concerns an organizational change aimed at improving the efficiency and efficacy of traffic control's management. The focus was mainly on redesigning work processes within traffic control. I will describe the change strategy I used based on the characteristics of planned-change strategies (Chin and Benne, 1970).

The second case study concerns a transformation in the management structure and workplace culture of the tram, bus, and metro line divisions; this change was dubbed Line-Bound Operation. The objective was to modify the attitude and conduct of drivers and ticket inspectors by increasing supervision and face to face contact with their direct supervisor. I will describe this change strategy in terms of the distinction between positional organization and transactional organization (Wierdsma, 2004). I will then assess and explain the successes and failures of both case studies, using recent OD literature.

2.1 Context: GVB's 20-Year History of Failing Transformation

To provide some context for the organizational reality described in these case studies, I will first sketch a brief history of the transformations the company underwent in the 20 years prior to my assignment. I have opted for a narrative approach (Czarniawska, 1997) to bring the OD process to life and for easier reading. The anecdotes set apart in text boxes are symptomatic of the problems the company faced.²

In 1996, interim manager Max de Jong described GVB as 'out of control' (Van der Zwan, 1997). He contended that management had lost its grip on the company years earlier. The media depicted GVB as a communist bastion where hardcore unionists called the shots. In March 1997, a committee charged with exploring whether GVB could be privatized published a report tellingly entitled 'Make or Break Time'.³ The report provides a reconstruction of the political and administrative developments at GVB starting in 1978. In preparing the report, the committee had analyzed every available financial report and overview and heard testimony from every director, manager and workers' council head who had been in a position of responsibility during the period studied. The record of these hearings reads like a thriller, a real page turner.

GVB's problems began in the 1970s and steadily worsened from 1986. On the period from 1986 until 1990, the privatization committee reported:

<quote>Michael van der Vlis's 12- year term as Amsterdam alderman must be regarded as a factor that added to the compounding of problems at GVB.

He was aware of those problems and had a vision, but lacked the consistency to supervise the implementation of his own plans, showed fickleness and was too quick to pass off responsibility to GVB's managing director. One telling example is the introduction of line-bound managers. This was Van der Vlis's idea, but managers were appointed based on years of service rather than their competence. Similarly, operations were restructured according to geographical area, another of Van der Vlis's ideas, but this radical intervention in the organizational structure was implemented without proper preparation. ... Smit, the managing director, had far-reaching discretion, but no interventions were made in GVB's power structure. Van der Vlis's conviction that the managing director was ultimately responsible blinded him to the seriousness and depth of the problems rooted in GVB's organizational culture (Van der Zwan, 1997, p. 47).<end quote>

In 1990, Ben Smit, GVB's managing director, planned an ambitious reorganization. He contracted McKinsey management consultants to analyze GVB's management and operations and recommend an organizational model. McKinsey recommended a group model with four integrally responsible transportation divisions: Tram, Metro, Bus and Ferries. This advice was only partially adopted; the group model with separate divisions was implemented, but the overarching support departments were kept in place.

<quote>Managing Director Smit only became aware of the lack of grassroots support and the extent of GVB's problems when he started working there [on 1 July 1989]. The difficulties he faced were large and numerous. There was the administrative chaos, the geographical structure that had to be dismantled, and the lack of business information, all of which could only lead to the conclusion that the company was 'beyond repair' and a new company had to be built from scratch. Building a new company required major investments at a time when the company had to prove it could cut operational costs. It was a Catch-22 that Smit could not find a way out of.

In 1992, losses amounted to 38.6 million guilders (about 20 million dollars) per year. The company was operating at a weekly loss of 400,000 guilders (about 206,000 dollars) and it was untraceable how that money was leaking away.

The task he (Smit) faced, was compounded by the lack of interest from the city council in GVB's operations and management. 'It was Smit's job to deal with that,' the council felt, but at the same time he had to contend with a constant stream of new policy directives from the council. This left the company too little time and space to finish any reorganization that was started. ... Smit's main error of judgment is the way in which he initiated and implemented measures meant to support council policies. That aside, it must be concluded that Smit's mission, under the circumstances, was an impossible one. ... The

accountant had said as much in the clearest of terms in a management letter accompanying the 1987 financial statement (Van der Zwan, 1997, p. 50).<end quote>

By 1996, the accountant had already been withholding approval of the financial statements for ten years. On 1 September 1996, André Testa replaced Smit as managing director. Previously, Testa had worked at NZH, a regional transportation company, and had privatized the Dutch Pilotage Services. Testa's appointment caused great commotion, as newspaper articles from that year show (Jacobs and Bosma, 2011). The unions saw his appointment as a sign of the imminent privatization of GVB, which they strongly opposed. In 1997, Amsterdam city council set GVB's management the task of restoring the company's financial, organizational and social health. Coordination of the improvement projects was left to the financial director.

The following two sections discuss two OD projects at GVB: a restructuring of traffic control (Section 2.3) and a culture change in operations (Section 2.4). These case studies are examples of positional strategies and transactional strategies, respectively.

2.2 **Traffic Control: A Mix of Planned-Change Strategies**

At the onset of the period studied here, 1991 to 1998, the company was organized as a group of four individual transportation divisions (tram, metro, bus and ferries) which ran their own operations, maintenance, preparation and directly related human resources and financial control departments. In addition, there was a headquarters that housed staff that worked for Group Finance, HR and Central Transportation Planning, as well as General Facilities Management. GVB had separate traffic control units for each of its modes of transportation: Bus Traffic Control, Tram Traffic Control, and Metro Traffic Control.⁴ Because cuts in operational costs were necessary, management looked to combine similar operations. Management believed it could cut costs in traffic control – staff costs in particular – by merging the bus and tram traffic control units and integrating their modes of operation.

Merging the crews would mean fewer operating consoles, a single roster and hence more efficient staffing. According to the reorganization plan, the bus and tram traffic control units would be merged first and then Metro Traffic Control would be integrated later.

Before the reorganization, bus and tram traffic control were two separate units, each with its own management. Both were housed at GVB headquarters in the historic Shipping House near the harbor of Amsterdam. Tram Traffic Control reported to the managing director of the Tram company. Bus Traffic Control reported to the managing director of the Bus company.

The two traffic control units were merged into a new unit called Service and Safety, whose manager would report to the Group Financial Director.

Organization Development Strategy

The OD strategy chosen back in the day can be characterized as planned change, using the general strategies for effecting changes in human systems described by Chin and Benne (1970). Their notion of planned change refers to the implementation of change with an intended effect. It involves using a consciously selected strategy based on scientific knowledge about system changes and the human behavior that manifests during these changes. The human behavior that must be dealt with in a planned change involves resistance, fears, norms, conflicts and disrupted interpersonal communication patterns.

Chin and Benne (1970) distinguish three change strategies:

I Empirical-Rational Strategy

This strategy presumes that people are rational, thinking beings who are 'guided by reason and that they will utilize some rational calculus of self-interest in determining needed changes in behavior' (Chin and Benne, 1970, p. 35). When people understand that an intended change is in their own interest, they will be prepared to accept that change. Therefore, intended changes must be substantiated by facts that clearly show what benefits the change will have for the stakeholders.

Examples of this strategy are: putting the right person in the right place, employing staff specialists to make the organization more efficient, and training people to change their behavior. Imagining the future is part and parcel of this strategy. As Chin and Benne (1970, p. 42) put it: 'If the image of a potential future is convincing and rationally persuasive to men in present, the image may become part of the dynamics and motivation of present action.' Organizational sociologist Mayo questioned rational organizational thinking and pointed to the dynamics of the informal organization and the need 'to deal with the realities of organizational life' (Chin and Benne, 1970, p. 51).

II Normative Re-Educative Strategy

This strategy is based on the assumption that the way to motivate people is by getting them to commit to collective norms and methods. The implication is that people need to be given an opportunity to part with old commitments and develop new ones. In other words, change involves not only a rational evaluation, but also a change in attitude, values, skills and significant relationships. People are assumed to be actively looking for incentives and job satisfaction. Chin and Benne described this as follows: 'Men are guided in their actions by socially funded and communicated meanings, norms, and institutions, in brief by a normative culture. ... And man must participate in his own re-education if he is to be re-educated at all' (Chin and Benne, 1970, p. 42-3). In a normative re-educative strategy, consultants use interventions aimed at changes 'in the life of a client system, be that system a person, a small group, an organization, or a community'(Chin and Benne, 1970, p. 44).

This has five practical implications:

- consultants must start a dialogue with their clients about how the latter see themselves and their problems;
- organizational problems are never just a technical matter, they also involve attitude, behavior, values and norms, as well as internal and external relationships;
- consultants must learn to work reciprocally with clients;
- subconscious patterns that are at play must be made explicit and interpreted;

- and this strategy requires application of methods and techniques from the social sciences.

Openness, trust, elimination of barriers between organizational units and reciprocity are considered essential preconditions to the re-educative process.

III Power-Coercive Strategy

This strategy's underlying assumption is that change is not always readily accepted. Those with greater power in the organization must support the desired change so it can be effectuated through the legitimate power of authority. One type of coercion is economic sanctions. An appeal to moral values or feelings of guilt or embarrassment is another. Political coercion involves enforcing rules and punishing transgressions. The exertion of power by legitimate decision-makers is usually accepted. However, when people in an organization realize their interests are not being taken into account, they begin to question any decision's legitimacy. They may take steps to organize their dissent and turn to a power base outside the organization, such as a union.

My Mix

I implemented a mix of these three change strategies in this case study. Initially, my approach was primarily normative re-educative, as I actively encouraged the involvement of both management and staff in the OD process. We organized the project under a steering group and working groups. The steering group was led by the Service and Safety manager who reported to the Group Finance Director. Members of the working parties were chosen based on proportionality and skills. The objective of this intervention was to arrive at a written description of the business processes and then to ask all stakeholders 'Why do you do things this way?' in order to compare this to the department and organization's goals. This was intended to bring all sorts of ingrained habits and personal perceptions of responsibilities to the surface, where they could be set off against the desired situation. At the same time, it made stakeholders aware that change was imminent and that they were not immune.

My role consisted of drawing up a project plan, assisting the chair of the steering group and leading working group meetings, informing the staff and workers' council and interviewing the managing directors of the Bus and Tram companies. I believed that jointly devising a clear organizational design, followed by a phased implementation under the leadership of the new senior manager of the merged traffic control units, would improve its chances of gaining acceptance.

In addition to my initial normative re-educative approach, I later included empirical-rational elements in my change strategy. I designed the organizational change as a system with input, throughput and output. This enabled me to characterize traffic control as one cog in the gears of the company as a whole. Describing the work processes allowed me to analyze the mechanics and logic of the system and to measure it against effectiveness and efficiency criteria. One consequence of this empirical-rational approach was that the new organizational structure provided for a broader role for central transportation planning staff, which afforded more variation in the job and hence more opportunities for staff's personal development and training – a move presumably in the employees' interests. The accompanying move of defining competency profiles was a way to put the right person in the right place; a list of the competencies needed to satisfactorily carry out the work processes resulted in a comprehensive training plan to ensure employees could acquire these skills.

My approach also included power-coercive elements. By committing the work processes to paper I became less dependent on the information provided by staff. To achieve this, I had to approach employees as experts whose input I could convert into a business process. I could then assess this process from a business point of view and propose changes informed by my own organizational expertise. This was a case of 'knowledge is power'. Another example of power-coercion was my decision to name the new unit the Traffic Communication Center, avoiding any association with either Bus or Tram and emphasizing that they were a single, integrated support department. I also sought backing for my plans from the managing directors of the Tram and Bus companies. Staffing decisions also had a power-coercive element; I used them to select people

based on their competencies, breaking with the pattern of self-evident reappointments of the same people based on years of service.

Discoveries about Organizational Reality

In the course of the project, I discovered that several of the planned effects of my OD interventions did not materialize. I gradually came to see 'how things actually worked' and 'what was apparently lacking'. For example, neither the Tram nor the Bus company had any written working procedures. True, employees' duties, responsibilities and powers had been laid down in role descriptions, but only in order to link the role to a particular pay scale. In practice, traffic control staff only passed on knowledge verbally. Only a few of the central transportation planners in the working groups had any idea how things might be improved. They believed they would be better managers than their current supervisors, because of their knowledge of how traffic control worked. The technical systems had been 'patched together with strings and a paperclip' and lacked proper documentation. Specifications, procedures and protocols were often outdated or ignored. Newly hired staff was given no formal introduction or training; this was done informally and on-the-job by co-workers. Traffic control staff was not given any opportunity to maintain and update its knowledge. The air was thick with personal opinions on how traffic control ought to function. Traffic control was staffed round-the-clock, but rostering was organized around employees' private lives and was arranged so that everyone would receive the maximum amount of extra pay for weekend and late shifts. Basing the rostering on peak and off-peak hours would have resulted in a 35 per cent reduction in costs.

The workers' council chair and secretary regularly came over for an informal chat with me. They appeared to be familiar with many unwritten details of the work processes. It was unclear what they wanted to achieve by having these chats. They did not express an opinion on the proposed changes.

Meanwhile, the direct supervisors at Bus and Tram traffic control barely communicated. They even remained quite aloof from their respective transportation divisions. The process of traffic

control seemed not to be managed at all and no one seemed to mind. Traffic control was run by people with no professional training in operations. They were technicians with a highly-developed, informal network within the organization: people who knew how to get things done through their personal relationships.

These traffic control supervisors lacked support from their respective senior managers and were barely tolerated by their subordinates. The Bus and Tram drivers were extremely negative about their co-workers in central traffic planning, who they felt were far too authoritarian. Drivers and ticket inspectors maintained many informal relationships with central planning. Whether a driver got help when he reported operational problems depended on that driver's personal relationship with central planning. If the relationship was not good, the driver was out of luck.

<text box>Freight Tram

I was invited to join traffic control to experience the return of the trams and buses to the terminus on a Thursday night. Those were peak hours for central planning and ensuring that things ran smoothly was a top priority because all drivers and ticket inspectors just wanted to go home as early as possible. When the very last tram and bus had returned, at 1:45 a.m., I stayed to talk to the central planners on duty.

At 2:20 a.m. a blinking light appeared on one of the computer screens displaying the tram network. The planner on duty checked whether this could be a maintenance crew, but found no scheduled maintenance on the eastbound line in Amsterdam. Yet there was clearly a tram on the rails, and it was moving. The planner called the tram on the intercom, but there was no response. After several tries, the planner sent a co-worker in a car to go check out the situation. Fifteen minutes later, that co-worker called in via the intercom:

'You know what I'm looking at?'

'The suspense is killing me,' the planner responded.

'It's Jopie. He's moving everything he owns to his new house in East. I'm looking at a sofa, two bookcases, a king-size bed and loads and loads of junk. That's Jopie for you. And he brought his whole team along to help.'
<end text box>

Everything that needed writing seemed to land on my desk, as if no one else in the organization knew how to write. The Group Finance director, who was to be responsible for the new unit, regularly lent me his ear when I presented my oral reports, but did not really engage with me. He acted like he approved of everything I suggested. The managing directors of the Bus and Tram divisions neither actively supported the project, nor resisted it; instead they seemed to ignore it. Though Tram's managing director expressed appreciation for being kept informed about the project's direction.

I formally concluded the project by presenting my organizational development and implementation plans. Decision-making had gone much smoother and faster than I had expected – as long as the changes did not violate the redundancy scheme for employees who were to lose their job in the reorganization, the workers' council did not object. In fact, they did not even feel the need to make a recommendation for or against the plan.

The Group Finance Director and the managing directors of the Bus and Tram divisions considered neither of the current traffic control supervisors suitable for the role. After a protracted internal application procedure, a new manager was appointed from the ranks of the Tram division. The new man, it turned out later, was a confidant of the Tram division's managing director. Management gave the new manager the task of gradually implementing the changes. There was little resistance or unrest in the divisions. Everyone just continued to do their job.

At first glance, the project appeared to be a success. I was proud that I pulled that off in what was reputedly such a difficult company. The unit's new name – Traffic Communication Center, abbreviated in Dutch to CCV, which I purposefully designed not to refer to either bus or tram – seemed to stick. The name even adorned every emergency brake handle in all Amsterdam trams and

buses. Yet later, when I happened to be talking to some tram drivers about an accident they had witnessed, the name did not feature at all in their stories. Instead, the drivers consistently referred to 'Central Command', which was what traffic control had been called two decades earlier. The drivers seemed unaware, unimpressed and uninterested that there had been two subsequent reorganizations since then. Obviously, the drivers and ticket inspectors' reality differed dramatically from the reality of headquarters, management and myself as an OD professional. There was a new organization, but only on paper. In reality, it was ignored, just like the results of previous reorganizations.

The Effectiveness of OD Strategies

Although the combination of OD strategies I had introduced was deliberately thought through, it failed to produce the desired results. Where I applied a normative re-educative strategy, it was because there was no explicit knowledge available about the business processes and because, in practice, many different procedures and processes were followed. By involving management and traffic control in the process, I persuaded them to share their knowledge and created an opportunity for them to learn from each other. The stakeholders cooperated, but did not support or truly own the plan.

The empirical-rational approaches I employed did not work. I had expected people to want to commit to the plan once they realized their job would become more varied, but they did not. They stuck to their routines.

Likewise, the power-coercive elements I used, such as committing working procedures to paper and having the Group Finance director make the ultimate decision, did not get the response I had hoped for. Curiously, these elements did not meet much resistance either, even though the changes would clearly have consequences for all the stakeholders.

In short, expected responses to the OD strategies failed to materialize. My normative-re-educative strategy did not elicit ownership. While my empirical-rational strategy raised the

stakeholders' awareness of the wider business process, it failed to persuade them to change their attitude. And my power-coercive strategy regarding hiring was met with neither the expected acceptance nor the typical resistance. I concluded that not one of these planned-change strategies worked, either on its own or in combination with others.

2.3 **Second Case Study: Line-Bound Operation**

The second case study concerns a change in GVB's culture that took seven years to implement. Line-Bound Operation reorganized the management and work processes of tram, bus and metro drivers and ticket inspectors. At the same time, its aim was to change the attitude and behavior of these employees.

Background

GVB had a long history of unfinished reorganizations, most of which had been intended to make improvements at the strategic and tactical level of the organization. Since 1990, managing directors and department heads had frequently been replaced, the main structure of the organization overhauled, new support departments established, and operational and administrative IT systems introduced or replaced. In 2000, the rolling stock itself had been replaced. Throughout this period, very few changes had been made at operational level and the culture had remained the same.

Operational management duties had been divided among several supervisors' roles:

- team coach, who was responsible for staffing;
- operational supervisors, who stepped in to coordinate in case of delays, accidents and emergencies;
- duty roster managers, who rostered people and shifts;
- central planners (see also traffic control case study above), who could both grant drivers permission to deviate from the timetable, and deploy substitute buses or trams;

- the HR advisor, who coordinated employee leave of absence;
- the company social worker, who provided support for employees experiencing problems at work or at home;
- the company doctor, who determined what type of duties an employee with a work disability was fit to perform.

This diffusion of management duties left drivers with numerous doors to knock on to get what they wanted. They could literally 'shop around' to arrange things to their advantage. Each of the supervisory roles was a natural extension of the work process it had originated in. There was no common focus on performance and behavior. Managers who had been around for a while grew close to people who were willing to do their bidding or whom they got along with. A key aspect of these informal relationships was 'give and take.' Staff used personal relationships to trade favors: 'If you work four Sunday shifts in a row, then I'll make sure you're off on Christmas.' When people could not get their way with their superiors, they used informal networks to trade shifts, days off and vacation time.

<text box>Entitlement

A bus driver from north Amsterdam told me it was quite common for employees to take a six-week vacation in Spain. They could formally request four weeks of vacation, and then they'd arrange the other two by trading with a co-worker. This driver was told by his co-workers that 'newbies' weren't allowed to ask for such favors their first few years, but once they had proven themselves loyal to their co-workers they would be 'entitled' to a six week vacation too.

The same bus driver also told me how uneasy he felt when he got into an accident, because this brought to light the fact that his co-worker, who was scheduled to drive, was away on vacation. He told me he was afraid he would be shunned by his co-workers.

Management, which was aware that employees frequently traded shifts, just looked the other way, relieved that they could roster enough drivers to keep a decent number of buses running through the summer.<end text box>

For two decades, from 1978 to 1998, few changes had been made to operational management and all direct supervisors were former drivers. Extensive training programs were set up for these managers, but application of newly acquired skills was optional. Until 2000, the direct supervisors' main duties consisted of staffing and coordination in case of incidents and emergencies. In daily organizational life, drivers and ticket inspectors' attitude and conduct went unchecked. The most important criterion for being promoted to direct supervisor was whether you understood and had extensively operated a bus, tram or metro. Additional criteria, which were never explicitly named, included age, years of service, having an amenable attitude towards superiors and an informal network.

Sometimes troublemakers were promoted to the position of supervisor in the hope they would no longer cause problems. This led to considerable differences in leadership style, which were also exacerbated by the great influence of personal preferences on the selection committees that chose direct supervisors, as well as the personal idiosyncrasies of the various managers.

Direct supervisors were usually swamped with day-to-day problems: dealing with people calling in sick or reporting back to work, granting or denying leave of absence, filling in time sheets, and making sure daily operations, that is the buses and trams on the street, kept running. In a way, the supervisors were stuck between the mobile top layer of the organization and the immovable foundation of drivers and ticket inspectors with its idiosyncratic culture and dynamics. The organization's senior managers viewed operational management as a 'buffer zone,' while the lower-ranking employees saw them as senior management's errand boys. Another remarkable feature was that bus drivers never crossed over into Tram management or vice versa. Even at management level, no one ever crossed that line. The supervisors leaned heavily on their personal knowledge,

experience and network. Moving from Bus to Tram would have meant leaving for an entirely new world where it would take years to learn the ropes. So everyone avoided this.

Senior management never inducted newly appointed supervisors or coached them in their new jobs; they were unable to do so because they lacked detailed knowledge of the transportation process.

The Tram division was characterized by a strongly personal, hierarchical structure, which led to a great deal of socially desirable behavior and ducking of responsibility. Guidance and directives were invariably expressed in terms of 'do this' or 'do that'. Negative stereotypes abounded. The Bus company was like an old-boys-network: 'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.' In the chasm between senior management and staff, operational management identified most closely with the drivers. Direct supervisors' treatment of drivers was similarly based in personal relationships: 'He hates my guts' or 'He's a good guy. He can count on me, because he gives me a day off when I really need it.' It was also a one-way street: drivers who had worked in management were forever 'one of them'.

<text box>One-Way Street

In 2001, one direct supervisor was looking back on his time as a driver and told me he'd once had ideas on how to improve things. He applied for a management position because he wanted to be a better manager than his own superiors were. Not only did he know what needed improving, he also knew all his (former) co-workers' tricks. They told him in no uncertain terms that he'd better forget that knowledge as quickly as possible ... <end text

box>

At the time, GVB's operational management had two main weaknesses:

- a fragmented structure with no collective sense of responsibility for performance and results;
- a lack of leadership, particularly regarding drivers and ticket inspectors' attitudes and conduct.

An added problem was the gap and mutual distrust between operational and senior management. Operational managers were given ample education and training, but did not put the acquired skills to use and senior management neglected to ensure they did so.

Proposed Changes

Based on this analysis, the board of directors decided on three interventions at the operational level, introducing:

1. a new performance-oriented management structure at the operational level of each transportation division, aimed mainly at helping supervisors get a grip on their workers by increasing the amount of face-to-face contact between supervisors and their subordinates;
2. a selection and redeployment procedure in which people-oriented leadership (both in attitude and behavior) was the most important criterion;
3. a learning track aimed at improving personal leadership in attitude and behavior.

Line-Bound Operation was both about changing GVB's organizational structure by introducing the concept of performance-driven units, and about transforming its culture by tackling direct supervisors and drivers' attitudes and conduct.

Every tram line or bus line unit was turned into a performance-driven unit led by a Line Manager (LM) whose overall responsibility included operations, staffing and resources. A 'small' line or unit consisted of some 75 people, while a 'large' one employed approximately 190 people. To keep the average span of control to about 30 people, Assistant Line Managers (ALMs) were appointed. Hence, a line or unit management team consisted of three to seven direct supervisors. ALMs were assigned two main duties: staffing and operations. LMs worked day shifts and rotated to be on call as duty manager in case of emergencies. As ALMs were responsible for operations, they were expected to work in a 24/7, four-shift roster, alternating between early, day, late and night

shifts. They were expected to take care of their staffing duties primarily during day shifts, but were also free to work on them during quiet hours on evenings, nights, or weekends.

All other departments with coordinating or managing duties were assigned the status of support staff to the LM and ALMs. Drivers and ticket inspectors reported to a single supervisor, so they each had a single point of contact with management in their line or unit.

The structural and cultural changes in operations were implemented gradually and interactively. My intervention strategy in implementing Line-Bound Operation was one of transactional organization (Wierdsma, 2004).

My Intervention Strategy

Based on my earlier experiences with the Traffic Control reorganization (see Section 2.3), I deliberately opted for an interactive intervention strategy so that changes would be developed and implemented gradually and step-by-step. Wierdsma (2004) calls this 'transactional organization' as opposed to 'positional organization' which emphasizes consensus, rationality, timelessness and programmable behavior. As we saw in the first case study, a positional change strategy had already failed. Structural changes had not improved the effectiveness and efficiency of operations. Educating and training direct supervisors had not prompted different leadership behavior. The new procedures and systems had not given senior management a firmer grip on the company. The key to the success of positional organization – agreement on the organization's objectives – was lacking at GVB.

Operational management focused on day-to-day operational problems and appeasing their subordinates, while senior management focused solely on getting a grip on operations and reducing costs. In short, the two management levels were not working on a common goal. Neither management nor staff was acting rationally; their behavior was far from programmable by rules and regulations. Both supervisors and employees showed great creativity in bending the rules to their own advantage.

Transactional organization

The key assumption underlying the concept of transactional organization is that people are connected through the activities they share. This creates a mutual dependency, which in turn leads to a network of relationships. Transactional organization is about organizing work processes. Operational units are considered the core of the organization – in GVB's case the tram, bus and metro lines. Transactional organization foregrounds action, with an emphasis on the interaction between thinking and acting: action, reflection, adaptation.

Developing transactional organization requires a three-stage learning process: single-loop learning (problem solving), double-loop learning (identifying and removing the causes of problems) and triple-loop learning (learning to learn), which Wierdsma (2004) calls 'cocreation of change'.

The aptest metaphor for a transactional change strategy is 'the hike', while positional organization is best symbolized by the 'all-inclusive package deal'. On the hike, the route and pace of change are developed along the way, but must remain within preset parameters of freedom and direction. At GVB, those parameters were determined the organizational structure and the organization's stated aim of providing reliable public transport to its customers. The hike is a step-by-step process during which the route can be adapted to specific circumstances. The aim is to reach the ultimate destination.

The Hike at GVB

Line Bound Operation was spearheaded by the managing director of the Tram division, who had installed a steering group consisting of the following permanent members: the senior transportation manager, the Head of Human Resources and me. There was also one rotating seat, filled by the manager of the specific tram line where Line-bound Operation was being implemented at the time. The change strategy was implemented line by line. We started off by conducting a pilot project on two tram lines, and subsequently applied the lessons learned there to the other lines.

The conversion process was roughly as follows. Over the course of a year, the line management team introduced changes in steps. The first was to meet with staff so both sides could express their expectations. Step two was normalizing working relationships on the line. In the new situation, supervisors would be present at the terminus and – for a change – call employees out on their conduct. Their presence also meant they were available to listen to drivers and ticket inspectors who wanted to talk about their day, problems they encountered, unpleasant passenger behavior, unacceptable conduct from co-workers or complaints about the organization. This year was also used to catch up on work backlogs like the pile of unprocessed defect reports or the more people-oriented issues such as overdue performance evaluations and measures to counter frequent absenteeism.

Every employee on a given line was invited to a full-day session called 'Line-Bound Operation: "What do we consider normal behavior?"' These sessions were prepared and attended by both senior managers and the line's direct supervisors. Each session was also attended by two consultants.

In the first year of a line's conversion, three extra sessions were held exclusively for the line management team, whose members were asked to reflect on the strategy, their personal perceptions and their own management skills. At a later stage in the company-wide change process, another intervention was added: personal coaching sessions in which the line managers and assistant line managers could reflect on their personal leadership.

Line-Bound Operation was first implemented at the Tram division, followed by Bus and Metro. The whole OD process took seven years. For the first two years, the managing director of the Tram division was personally involved in steering the OD project. After two years, this responsibility shifted to the Tram, Bus and Metro transportation managers.

Discovering 'Real Life' at GVB

The first story (see box 'Career at GVB') is about Jan, who is an amalgam of stories I heard in informal chats with GVB drivers and ticket inspectors at the terminus.

<text box>Career at GVB

In 2001, GVB had 1,900 tram drivers on the payroll. Of them, 30% had started out as ticket inspectors and had been promoted to driver after a few years; 65% had been hired as drivers from the outset. The remaining 5% switched to driving from other jobs within the company (GVB, 2001). The following hypothetical bio was typical of someone working at GVB:

After graduating from trade school, Jan started working for a contractor. The job was physically demanding, but he was able to earn a pretty good income by taking on extra construction work on the side, in the evenings and on weekends. He met a girl, got married and they had their first child when Jan was 23. His father-in-law, a bus driver at GVB, told him the company was hiring tram drivers. Jan sent in a letter of application and, to his amazement, was invited for a job interview the following week. The day after the interview, he heard he was hired. The job paid well: 300 guilders (about 155 dollars) per week more after tax than he was earning in construction, plus he got to work a fixed schedule. This allowed him to put the odd jobs on a back burner for a while and spend more time with his family.

Jan was given three months' training. Aside from driving skills, he learned Amsterdam's tram routes by heart and acquainted himself with the many types of tickets GVB sold. After his training, his name was added to the standby crew: drivers deployed mainly to fill holes in the schedule when co-workers called in sick or took a day off. Jan drove many different tram lines. He enjoyed the variety. He got to see the entire city and no two days were the same.

Two years into the job, Jan was invited to take part in the line-crew selection system, meaning he got to pick which line he wanted to be his primary line. Because he and his family had moved to Almere, a commuter town for Amsterdam, he preferred to work a line that operated out of the Lekstraat terminus in South Amsterdam. A year later, his choice was honored. Jan still liked his job. He'd gotten used to how things worked at GVB. He now knew a few people in Planning who were willing to help him out when he occasionally needed a day off. He worked a lot of overtime to earn more. His friends in Planning could always count on him.

Gradually, Jan grew more savvy about the relationships on 'his' line. He realized that more years of service meant greater privileges. Co-workers with more years under their belt got first dibs on the most in-demand vacation days (Fridays and Mondays off for longer weekends). They almost always got to drive their 'own' line. Jan's co-workers taught him how to deal with the many rules at work, and particularly how to take advantage of them. The general atmosphere at work was good, although people did complain a lot about 'all those foreigners' who, they claimed, turned the tram into a pigsty.

Jan hardly ever saw his direct supervisor. When he was given a permanent job, his supervisor was there to congratulate him. But since then, he'd never had a job performance evaluation. Just as well, as far as he was concerned.

Meanwhile, Jan's wife was pregnant with their second child, but this time there were complications. His wife needed a lot of rest, but someone had to bring their 4-year old daughter to school in the morning and pick her up in the afternoons. Jan's mother-in-law wasn't always able to pick up the slack because she had a part time job. Jan asked his direct supervisor if he could temporarily work shorter shifts so he could help out at home. That was not an option, he was told: there were too many people out sick and swapping shifts was only possible if his co-workers were willing to make a deal. Jan decided to see whether he could help himself. One of the planners he knew told him certain co-workers were usually

willing to swap shifts. Jan struck a deal with two of them. He would work their Sunday shifts – when his mother-in-law was available for babysitting – and in return he got to leave work early during the week. It was a deal that left everyone happy.

Two years later, late on a Sunday night, a drunken British tourist suddenly crossed the street and ended up under Jan's tram car. The man was killed instantly. It took 20 minutes for the ambulance and the police to arrive. Central Command told Jan that the duty manager had gone home early because it was his wife's birthday. Jan sat staring in shock as police and EMTs dealt with the dead man's body. In the week following the accident, Jan's direct supervisor was away on a training course. The next week, the supervisor left for a four-week vacation. By the time Jan saw him, it was six weeks after the accident, and Jan felt it was not worth raking the whole thing up again. 'Besides,' veteran drivers told him, 'management doesn't do shit about that sort of thing.'

Two years later, Jan bought a house in Almere. As a first-time homeowner he was dying to turn it into his castle, so he asked his supervisor if he could take some time off to remodel the house. Jan's supervisor – his fourth in two years – told him he was sorry, but no. Senior management was demanding higher productivity. It was out of the question. For Jan, this was the straw that broke the camel's back. He'd always been there for the company, but when he asked for something in return he was refused. His story struck a chord with many co-workers. Jan decided to call in sick and start renovating his home. He was surprised that it took ten days before a letter arrived asking him to make an appointment with the company doctor. He called and was slotted in a week later. The day before his doctor's appointment, Jan reported back to work and asked the supervisor – a stand-in for Jan's own supervisor who was away on vacation – for a few days off later in the week. No problem. As it turned out, the trick with the company doctor appointment was easy to repeat and it worked every time: Jan's direct supervisor never called to hear how he was doing.

Meanwhile, Jan had learned other things about GVB as well. For example, there was no point reporting technical defects or damage to his tram because nothing would be done about them anyhow. So he'd simply stopped reporting problems. Jan had also noticed how lax his co-workers were about their working hours. For example, if you wanted to leave work on the dot, all you had to do was call in a defect on the next-to-last run. Your tram would then have top priority on return and you wouldn't have to wait your turn to enter the terminus.

Jan was growing annoyed with some of his co-workers, who had immigrant backgrounds, for talking among themselves in a language he didn't understand. He was also getting fed up with the arbitrary decisions of traffic control and the inaction of the workers' council when he would report this. But then again, he knew that was because traffic control were friends with the workers' council. Jan also resented co-workers who were constantly complaining. But he didn't feel it was his job to call them out on their attitude; that was management's job.

Jan had been employed at GVB for 15 years when, one afternoon, out of the blue, a teenager spat in his face. Jan lost his cool and literally kicked the kid off the tram. The police got involved, as did the duty manager of course. Jan knew he'd gone way too far, but those little scumbags were getting away with murder. They showed no respect, and were always mouthing off when asked to show their tickets.

The next day, Jan was called in to his direct supervisor's office. There was an HR representative there too. Jan was given a stern and lengthy lecture about how important customers were to the company. He felt betrayed and abandoned. When he heard the Human Resources girl tell him he'd been enrolled in a training course called 'Dealing with Difficult Customers,' something snapped. Go f*ck yourselves, he thought.

As he left the office, Jan saw a memo on the notice board: his tramline was one of the first to be converted to 'Line-Bound Operation'. Jan shrugged. 'Whatever.'
<end text box>

The story about Jan, a typical tram driver who you might meet at the terminus coffee corner, demonstrates a disconnect between management and staff. In fact it highlights two chasms: the one dividing drivers from management and the one between operational and senior management. It also sheds light on how the informal organization functioned: you needed a personal network to get things done. The narrative reflects the apathy, perhaps even the helplessness, of operational management and staff: 'Don't look at me, I only work here.' Any link between job performance and reward is gone. Employee working hours and entitlements dictate the company's operations. Management is unavailable. All employees fend for themselves.

My second narrative (see text box 'Nothing's Changed') illustrates how GVB's operational managers play the game of pretending to go along with changes:

<text box> **Nothing's Changed**

The line manager in charge of Line 3 was late for his appointment with me, so I joined the drivers and ticket inspectors for a cup of coffee. I introduced myself and told them why I was there. After a while, I asked them what they thought of the newly introduced Line-Bound Operation. Their responses left no room for misunderstanding. 'We haven't noticed a thing. They're never around. Nothing's changed'

This contrasted sharply with the picture sketched by the line manager and his team during our progress meeting the week before. There, the line management team had spoken the language of the reorganization. A striking discovery: the new operational management was

placating senior management and me, pulling the wool over our eyes with our own, new vocabulary. <end text box>

The third narrative (see text box 'Staff Meeting') is based on notes I took during the staff meetings held under the banner of 'Line-Bound Operation: "What do we consider normal behavior?"' This story typifies the relationship between management and staff.

<text box> **Staff Meetings**

Before the staff meetings on 'Line-Bound Operation: 'What do we consider normal behavior?', the drivers and ticket inspectors' direct supervisors provided me and my co-consultant with a brief profile of every employee who would attend. This memo characterized the employee in a few words and mentioned any special circumstances, such as 'has back problems, needs to stand and walk from time to time'. We soon discovered that the profiles tended to jibe with neither our own observations nor the driver's behavior at the meeting. Someone, for example, who was described as a 'quiet type, with a positive attitude towards the company,' constantly interrupted others in the meeting, was out to defend his own interests, and made extremely cynical remarks about his direct supervisor. This made me wonder how well operational management actually knew its own people.

During the meetings, my fellow consultant and I also witnessed the drivers and ticket inspectors' reactions to the senior transportation manager when she had the floor: some were disrespectful, while others ignored her altogether, became outraged, refused to engage with her message or looked for any opening to score points. They exuded sheer antagonism toward all things managerial. Another thing we observed was a lot of socially desirable, insincere behavior. Some meetings were different though; on those occasions there was room to have a realistic talk with employees about their concerns. More often than not, however, employees turned out to be deeply prejudiced and would sometimes even

discuss beforehand how to act during a meeting, as we discovered. They constantly put us consultants to the test and did the same with the senior transportation manager and, to a lesser extent, line management.

The senior transportation manager was frequently asked very specific questions that she couldn't answer off the top of her head. These were intended to show that she did not know what she was talking about. People even expressed a denigrating attitude towards her in explicit gender terms: 'Oh c'mon, honey!' She learned the hard way that, as a senior manager, she had to know all the ins and outs of operations. The only way to earn the respect of drivers and ticket inspectors was by showing a thorough understanding of the operational processes in the operation, a lesson we consultants also learned.

The participants in the meeting were also frequently impolite: they did not listen to one another, constantly interrupted, bluntly dismissed other people's opinions and ignored those who were quieter. They tended to state their position rather than ask a question.

When we enumerated examples of how people behaved, those present at the meeting would sometimes deny everything. 'We're not like that.' Alternatively, they would say they were 'not responsible for someone else's actions'. When asked about their own job performance, they would typically respond with statements like: 'Get lost! How dare management even have an opinion on that. They don't know the first thing about my job.' It has to be said that the drivers were often absolutely right about this. Some, however, had a taunting attitude, as if to say: 'I'm always on time and I never call in sick, so you can't touch me.'

We also observed more serious types of misconduct, such as typically working class bigotry, racism and sexism, which staff tended to make light of. Supervisors who called their staff out on this were told: 'You have to understand, Amsterdammers don't mean any harm.' Another justification for this attitude was: 'You have to be able to call a spade a spade. If people can't handle it, that's their problem.'

We encountered many who expressed a general sense of dissatisfaction that sometimes stemmed from gripes going back thirty years. The most common response to the senior transportation manager's speech about the need to get the business process on the rails and generate a profit, was blatant rejection. Catcalls and aggressive jeers to 'just burn the place down!' were no exception. Staff showed little respect for senior management and said things like 'those were your own words, honey' to the senior transportation manager. An even worse remark was that 'two female managers make one man' – a reference to the Tram and Bus divisions' senior transportation managers, both of whom were women.

Drivers and ticket inspectors did not think much of their immediate supervisors, the assistant line managers (ALMs), either: 'You can ask your ALM, but don't expect an answer from that dimwit!' Staff's poor communication skills could be summed up as a propensity for making underhanded comments, sweeping generalizations, and for black-and-white thinking, speaking 'on behalf of' others, or simply repeating hearsay. Consider the following example.

During a meeting, a driver expressed outrage at the fact that supervisors were never available when incidents took place on a bus. When I asked how long ago the incident he was referring to occurred, the driver answered: 'Three years ago.' When I expressed sympathy – saying it must have had quite an impact if it still bothered him after all this time – he added: 'Oh, it didn't happen to me. It was one of my co-workers.'

We also observed that co-workers never called each other out on misconduct. That was management's job, staff felt. They took this 'loyalty' to extreme lengths. Even conduct that personally affected co-workers, such as calling in sick at the last minute, was not brought up.

Drivers expected their supervisors to be 100% considerate and trusting. At the same time, they distrusted everything their supervisors did or suggested, and justified their co-workers' misconduct. This often involved lying, but they appeared to have little problem with that.

Staff also harbored all sorts of suspicions about senior management's plans. This led to gut-level outbursts like: 'You're out to fire any supervisor who ever drove a bus' and 'You're getting rid of the only good supervisors.' After hearing the latter statement, I wondered who these good supervisors were. Over the course of the project, I saw many of them in action, including the so-called 'good ones'. These were the supervisors who had not dared to lay down the law and had instead become the drivers' best friends. Maybe that was why they were 'good'.<end text box>

The change strategy we used to implement Line-Bound Operation was originally aimed at changing the drivers and ticket inspectors' attitudes, but in the process it also became an aptitude test for operational managers. For many, managing a change process at a line or unit turned out to be a daunting task. Many ran up against their own limitations; they found it hard to change their leadership behavior. Their shortcomings, which they might have been able to conceal or deny until then, came to light in the supervised implementation process. This was embarrassing and threatening. Many were unable to see the process of changing their leadership style as an improvement or a contribution to their personal development. Many reacted by resisting the changes. Hence the change process served as an aptitude or diagnostic test of their leadership, and in particular of their competency for behavioral change. No wonder the senior transportation managers and the managing director were keeping a close eye on this quality assessment. It showed them how well their operational managers functioned in their roles and how hard it was to achieve bottom-up behavioral change. Senior management concluded that 50% of the line managers and assistant line managers lacked the required skills and would need to be replaced.

My fourth and final story (see text box 'Informal Leaders') deals with informal leadership. When people hear the term informal leaders, they tend to think of union representatives, workers' council members or employees with a lot of seniority: in short, people who put themselves in the spotlight and who have a good reputation or longstanding position. These are figures who have

done something that others might shy away from. GVB had such informal leaders too, but they were not the most influential. Far greater power rested with figures who stayed out of the limelight.

<text box>**Informal Leaders**

How do informal leaders attain their influence? Clearly, there's no job listing for this position; informal leaders take a different path to power. Based on my experiences at GVB, I came up with a description of an inconspicuous figure who nonetheless wields great influence. What is the source of this figure's power?

These non-descript people do not hold senior, or even co-coordinating, positions. They have neither the skills nor ambitions to be a leader. They have been with the company forever and have seen dozens of people come and go. Somehow they have survived all the layoffs during previous reorganizations. Their longevity and unique position have given them the status of an oracle: 'Just ask him, he knows why things are organized that way.'

In a bureaucracy, informal leaders never openly show their true colors about changes, but are keenly aware of what is going on. They have learned to discern whether a new policy stands a chance of succeeding or is doomed to fail from the outset. These informal leaders have a wide network of people in positions of power, such as members of the workers' council and senior managers. They know what procedures ought to be followed and monitor whether this happens.<end text box>

Did My Transactional Organization Strategy Work?

The change from positional to transactional organization worked to some extent. The process did indeed take on the nature of a hike. Along the way, we were able to incorporate the lessons learned, to adapt the pace and to readjust our focus on the most important goals. Gradually, we had to let go of the idea that we could fully control the transformation process to Line-Bound Operation. Our

discoveries ranged from 'the problems are always worse than you think' to 'it always hits closer to home than you think'. We ran into many obstacles to learning.

Double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1972) never got off the ground because of the unwillingness of supervisors and employees to reflect and learn, a lack of reciprocity in relationships, and a general suspicion that there was a hidden agenda behind the changes. Our hypothesis that people in an organization connect with each other through the activities they share, was not borne out; people connected with each other based on self-interest and a need to survive in the organization by sticking together. The existing informal networks among employees and supervisors constituted more powerful bonds than any shared activities.

We found that a majority of drivers and ticket inspectors and a considerable number of supervisors were unwilling to participate in the process of sharing meaning to establish common ground. When dysfunctional patterns were made explicit, this met with denial; attempts to collectively change direction on an issue were thwarted by concerted efforts to 'ensure nothing got decided'. Steps to formulate and try out new behavior turned out to be feigned adjustments. There was no trust. Functional working relationships existed on paper, but did not reflect reality. Time and again, the actual shape of organizational life turned out different than we thought. This elusiveness required constant alertness, suspicion and deliberate action on our part.

Another unpleasant discovery was that it was virtually impossible to replicate the steps taken during the one-year change process on a particular line. Every line required a custom-made approach because of some surprise element or special circumstance that had not been taken into account. Transformational leadership became key. In this sense, too, we constantly had to be on the ball; nothing came easy. This applied not only to change interventions, but also to normal daily operations that were fraught with problems.

The formal connections between people in the organization seemed completely severed at every level. Pervasive cynicism persisted despite the many improvements made to employees' working conditions and courteous treatment from management. Staff and line management neither

developed a targeted, goal-oriented approach nor owned the changes. The power of personal networks was unbroken.

2.4 A First Attempt to Explain

GVB was a tough nut to crack. At best, my OD interventions only partially achieved their intended effect. As I puzzled over the intransigent reality of organizational life at the company, I scoured the literature on change management. I read up on the root causes of such entrenchment, how to squarely face such problems, on the complexity of and resistance to organizational change, and particularly on processes that take place in the backstreets and alleys of organizational life.

Beer and Eisenstat (1996; 2003) offer a partial explanation. They give a number of factors that prevent effective change. They use a medical metaphor to characterize these factors as 'silent killers', unmentionable barriers that undermine an organization's health:

- Unclear strategy and/or conflicting priorities;
- Ineffective senior management team;
- Top-down or laissez-faire senior management style;
- Poor vertical communication;
- Poor coordination across units, positions and locations;
- Inadequate operational management leadership skills and development.

These six barriers are mutually reinforcing. The medical metaphor of silent killers seems apt in this case, but it is not quite so. High cholesterol, high blood pressure and some types of cancer can be growing quietly, causing no outward symptoms, only to suddenly appear as terminal conditions that rapidly end in death. But the barriers in an organization are more treacherous because they are not so much invisible as *ignored*. People see the symptoms, but look the other way. Bird and Waters (1989) call this phenomenon 'moral muteness'. This condition occurs when naming reality is too confrontational for those in power, threatens to disrupt the internal balance, or might have grave

financial consequences. All six silent killers can be identified in GVB's history, as can moral muteness among senior management and the board in the period leading up to 1996, when the company was first diagnosed as 'out of control'.

At the time of the Traffic Control reorganization in 1998, coordination across units, positions and locations was still poor. During the implementation of Line-Bound Operation from 2000 to 2008, coordination was improved by making each line responsible for its own performance. It became painfully obvious that the direct supervisors possessed little or no leadership skills, and did too little to develop them. Moral muteness no longer applied. Senior management admitted 'the problems were consistently worse than they had imagined' and 'that they always hit closer to home than expected', meaning there were implications for senior management's own leadership style. Senior management finally broke what Morrison and Milliken (2000) called 'organizational silence'. However, direct supervisors apparently remained morally mute toward their own subordinates, as I discovered in my discussion with workers on Tram Line 3 (see text box 'Nothing's Changed').

Persistent Problem

At the GVB-wide level, the organization's dysfunctionality at that time should be seen as a tough, two-decade old legacy that no one, despite years of trying, had managed to tackle. The situation was either mistaken for too mild a problem, or change agents fell into the trap of taking too firm and pro-active an approach (Vermaak, 2012). The entire organization had to be re-thought and reformed. Too many change processes were going on at once: safety, employership, new rolling stock and new maintenance processes, uniforms, rosters and privatization. Everything was in flux.

The search for answers as to why the problems at GVB were so persistent brought me to Vermaak, who identified four domains of change management: interaction, cognition, process design and process anchoring (Vermaak, 2009). The GVB case was a complicated and deeply ingrained organizational development issue that required changes in all four of those domains. All four can be recognized in the two case studies I described. Examining these case studies in light of

Vermaak's approach – that is spotting the organization's fixations in each of these domains and then playfully involving the participants in changing these – I concluded that the step of identifying fixations did indeed fit the Line-Bound Operation change process (Stoppelenburg and Vermaak, 2009). It was easy to pinpoint fixations in the interactions at GVB: inclusion and exclusion, coercion and ducking, and blaming and protecting. Vermaak's next step, to take interaction to a more playful realm and to use co-production as an alternative for coercion and ducking, for example, failed to work however. Switching to co-production presupposes both the stakeholders' willingness to take on responsibility and the presence of a reciprocal relationship. These elements were precisely what was missing at GVB. The organization's primary process needed to be overhauled; it first needed to put its house in order in all four of Vermaak's domains, starting with interactions. The managing director of the Tram division sensed this and put it like this: 'First, we need to start acting normal again.'

Apparently, there was a deeply rooted problem or something had gone awry in the organization's development that current change management theory did not address. To my amazement I found that the problems that surfaced in the case studies dated back more than half a century, as a 1932 publication entitled *The Tram Problem [Het Tramvraagstuk]* by investigative journalist P.J. Zürcher showed:

<quote>But it might have been a different matter ... if the men who led that company ... were not so hopelessly divided in opinion and ultimately so conservative. ... The men who head the company have too many hobbies – not to mention hobby horses. (Zürcher, 1932, p. 7)<end quote>

Zürcher made the following telling observation: 'The ticket inspectors – particularly the more senior ones – are very smug, if not self-congratulatory, or even pedantic' (Zürcher, 1932, p. 19). It may as well have been a report from the 1990s.

Islands of Meaning

Based on the Traffic Control reorganization, senior management and I concluded that a positional change strategy had not done the trick. Therefore we opted for a transactional strategy in the implementation of Line-Bound Operation. However, this process-oriented and interactive intervention strategy also failed to produce adequate results. 'Real' organizational life appeared to lead a life of its own, with dynamics that only surfaced when attempts were made to intervene.

In their book on the incorrigibility of organizations, Van Oss and Van 't Hek (2011) discuss 'islands of meaning', which refers to formal or informal groups whose members are continually constructing their own collective reality. Van Oss and Van 't Hek measure the robustness of collective realities based on three criteria: memory (cognition), routines (social interaction) and power relations (politics). They define robustness as an organization's ability to maintain its core qualities under changing circumstances:

<quote>It is what the organization is from day to day, its daily landscape.... Robustness is the capacity of an organization to retain its core characteristics under changing conditions ... It is the balance between stability and adaptiveness. Robustness is noticeable when something in the landscape changes. (Van Oss and Van 't Hek, 2011, p. 4)<end quote>

Interventions test the robustness of collective realities created by islands of meaning. Organizations consist of multiple islands of meaning. The coherence of the organizational reality is determined by the number, strength and nature of the links between these islands of meaning.

At GVB, islands of meaning – with varying degrees of power – abounded, for example the Tram, Bus and Metro divisions, headquarters, maintenance and termini, Group support departments, individual lines, the workers' council and trade unions. The problem seemed to be that these islands were unwilling to share meaning. In other words, there were very few links between them. Working relationships were dysfunctional and had been replaced by personal relationships. Any meaning

shared in those personal networks was aimed at surviving in the system and avoiding control and conflict. 'I do my job despite the organization', is how one tram driver put it.

GVB had both a formal and an informal organization, each with its own dynamics. In the Traffic Control reorganization, the new, formal organization was so completely separate from the informal one that it could be disregarded: everyone continued with business as usual.

The Shadow Side

In *Informal Coalitions*, Rodgers (2007) points to the influence of hidden aspects of organizations.

Shadow-side dynamics, as he calls them, are a powerful and unavoidable aspect of organizational life, though 'shadow-side behaviors are not necessarily negative or destructive, despite the sinister sounding name' (Rodgers, 2007, p. 21). In *Working the Shadow Side*, Egan (1994) defines organization's covert systems as 'realities that often disrupt, and sometimes benefit, but are not dealt with in the formal settings of the organization' (Egan, 1994, p. 91). As Rodgers points out, all interventions have a shadow side. Rodgers's list of formal change strategies (comparable to the mix of planned change strategies used in the Traffic Control reorganization) includes an 'informal coalition' perspective. In informal coalitions, people share meaning and connect based on common interests. The power of an informal coalition's dynamics depends on the influence of its participants, their personal motives, their opportunities to manifest themselves and the extent to which their identities and positions within the organization are affected by the planned changes.

If, as Rodgers argues, informal coalitions serve two purposes – sensemaking and usemaking – then at GVB they mainly served usemaking. I recognized this aspect of informal coalitions in the behavior of the workers' council members and the trade unionists during the Traffic Control reorganization. They identified closely with the interests of the drivers and ticket inspectors. Traffic control staff on the other hand was not a cohesive coalition but rather a collection of individuals lacking a common interest. The same could be said of drivers and ticket inspectors across and within particular lines. Operational management did not form a horizontal, informal coalition either; it was

every man for himself in a struggle to survive. Then again, the interventions during the implementation of Line-Bound Operation did prompt line management teams to form more formal coalitions.

Approaching change from the angle of the shadow-side of organizations is a process of 'interact[ing] with people to engage them in the changes' in order to foster 'joint sensemaking, engagement and personal resonance' (Rodgers, 2007, p. 26). According to Rodgers, change leaders serve as coalition builders and sensemakers, while consultants supervise the process and serve as catalysts. This is an accurate description of how Line-Bound Operation was implemented. The shadow side was most definitely part of the picture. Yet, there was a total lack of interest in sharing meaning, in engaging with change, even in engaging with the existing organization. None of the interventions resonated: there was no response. Organizational life simply went on as usual, that is to say staff and operational management just continued to survive.

2.5 **Conclusions**

Clearly, the interventions at GVB failed or had less impact than planned and expected based upon the available theory on planned change and positional and transactional organization, respectively.

The normative re-educative strategy I chose for the implementation of the change processes at Traffic Control were intended to provoke staff into taking ownership of the change, because they co-produced it. This strategy did not generate the desired results. The same is true of the empirical-rational strategy I deployed in the hopes of convincing staff of the need for change and the benefits inherent to the changes, such as more job variation. This, too, failed. Even the power-coercive strategy, the demand that people start fulfilling their new responsibilities, failed to mobilize them. In short, none of these three strategies worked, and daily life at 'Central Command' just continued as if nothing had ever happened.

Seasoned by the Traffic Control and other GVB change projects, we decided to shift our approach when implementing the Line-Bound Operation project. One of the things we had learned was that GVB lacked a cohesive vision of the organization's objectives. This ruled out positional organization as an approach, since that presumes agreement on the organization's goals. This was the main reason why we opted for a process rather than a project approach and for close supervision of daily operations. Our approach was based on transactional organization principles, or the belief that people in an organization connect based on activities they jointly perform and that this makes them dependent on each other, thus creating networks of working relationships. Again, our expectations were not met. GVB proved not yet ripe for transactional leadership. Mutual dependency was on no one's radar; instead it was still every man for himself.

The reasons for failure went deeper, however. The existing social networks were not based on shared activities but on emotions, sentiment and the sheer need to survive, which undermined the prime foundation for transactional organization: a functional, mutual relationship. Another element that was absent at GVB was a willingness to learn. Wierdsma (2004) pointed out that a transition to transactional leadership requires a fundamental change in organizational principles, one that enables co-creation of change. This ability seemed entirely lacking at GVB, as if it had been unlearned through long experience. GVB was absolutely not ready for double-loop learning; we identified many obstacles to learning in both the direct supervisors and the Group support departments. Individual development seemed out of reach, as did collective development. Neither operational management nor staff was prepared to leave its comfort zone, because it was not safe enough.

One key insight gained from these two case studies is about the dynamics of GVB's organizational life. An important finding was that the company's organizational life was miles apart from its developmental goals and the city of Amsterdam's performance demands. I would caution readers not to conclude that the deficits in GVB's functioning and the organization's failure to implement real improvements were attributable to its being government-run. They were not.

Research has shown that there are more similarities than differences between public and private organizations, so any such conclusion would be unwarranted (Rainey and Bozeman, 2000, p. 447-69). In reflecting on why so many change projects at GVB had failed, I consulted the literature on change management. I did research on complexity, resistance, root causes, muteness and the things that happen away from the spotlight in organizations. That last angle in particular led me to the shadow-side of organizations as a constituent part of organizational reality. But even this insight did not provide any pegs for successful interventions. Another conclusion I drew is that, despite the long-standing problems at GVB, the organization was clearly not ready for playful interventions either. The general sense I had was that something else had to change first. This insight was similar to that of Schuiling (2014), who believes operational management and staff can only start to develop again once mutual availability has been restored. Yet again, however, GVB defied expectations. In the Line-Bound Operation project, mutual availability was created, yet it failed to engender any responsiveness. One major lesson I drew from the GVB case is that any intervention aimed at organizational development should be grounded in organizational reality, however problematic that reality is. To come to grips with that organizational reality, I began asking questions like: What could explain employees' 'strange' behavior? What does this behavior mean, or indicate? Why doesn't staff assume responsibility? Why do employees distrust every new supervisor? Why do employees reject a participatory approach and why do they give the cold shoulder to a supervisor who is clearly available? What implications does this organizational reality have for leadership styles and change strategies, now and in the past? What do we know about the organization's context? What impact does that have? These queries helped me determine how I could make use of another domain that Schuiling and I serendipitously 'stumbled' upon in 2005 (Kampen and Schuiling, 2005). In my exploration of the child development domain I sought ways to better explain three key aspects of organizational development: the functionality and impact of the organization's context, leadership styles, and employees' behavior. Chapter 3 will discuss the insights I gained from research into the behavior of abused and neglected children.