Learning through co-creation across internal organisational professions and responsibilities

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explores the organisational dynamics in a change process across work units in a Swedish municipality. The purpose of this study is to understand how and why co-creation unfolds during efforts to bring different units into one united work unit.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative longitudinal study was designed using data triangulation for eight months, comprising written reflection texts, meeting protocols and interviews. This study is based on a back-and-forth inductive and abductive grounded theory analysis.

Findings – The main results of this study indicate that there was friction in the co-creation process between units, between the members of the change group and supervisors, as well as friction within the change group. Further, the results indicate that communications, relations, supervisor support and governing strategies clashed with work routines and methods, work cultures, roles and responsibilities and that the units had differing views of the needs of the intended target group. This thereby challenged the propensity for change which, in turn, may have limited developmental learning at a workplace and organisational level.

Originality/value – Working across units to find common and new paths and work methods for labour market inclusion proved to be challenging because of contextual circumstances. Crossing and merging organisational boundaries through co-creation processes was demanding because of new expectations from the organisation, as it shifted towards trust-based governance in conjunction with working during a pandemic when social interactions were restricted to digital communication channels.

Keywords Sweden, Organisational learning, Co-creation, Workplace learning, Social services

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

During recent decades, social services in Sweden's municipalities have taken on increased responsibility for support and services to enable labour market inclusion for vulnerable groups. These include individuals without a final grade from high school, people with a foreign

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background and single mothers (Panican and Ulmestig, 2019). The shift in responsibility from the national to the municipal level is because of changes in unemployment and social insurance benefits. Thus, more individuals have become reliant on financial assistance from social services to secure their finances. Social services administrate support to the most vulnerable groups in society (Grell *et al.*, 2021). According to the law, the goal for social services is to create conditions for financial security and equal living conditions and facilitate active participation in society (SFS:453, 2001). The supportive services they provide include housing support, support in parenting and financial assistance. As such, social services organise their service provision according to problem-based specialisations, for instance, child and family care, substance abuse, psychiatric disabilities, intellectual disabilities and financial assistance (Lundgren *et al.*, 2009). The original purpose of financial assistance was to enable support for a short period of time and to secure individuals' income to cover costs for rent, food, transport and clothes, that is, the most necessary things for their livelihood. During recent years, this has developed into long-term financial assistance for many individuals, which means that they have very limited financial means for a long time (Bergmark, 2016).

The focus area covered by this study relates to labour market inclusion. According to the Social Services Act (SFS:453, 2001), social services may grant a person financial assistance for skills-enhancing interventions to improve their ability and possibilities to enter the labour market (Olofsson and Wadensjö, 2009). Consequently, the majority of municipalities in Sweden have developed their own local labour market programmes (LLMPs) (Jacobson-Libietis and Ljungkvist, 2017) to meet the increasing demands of the welfare system. In addition, there is a shift in governing logics within social services from New Public Management (NPM) towards trust-based governance. This shift has had an impact on the LLMP. Under the NPM model, services are organised according to a function-based specialisation in which authority, assessment and decision-making are differentiated between the units responsible for support and treatment (Perlinski, 2010), and there has been an increase in administration, documentation, follow-up and evaluation of the services. In turn, this has led to a greater requirement for standardisation of tasks which has reduced the scope for using one's professional knowledge and judgement. Studies have described the phenomenon as a de-professionalisation of social work (Ponnert and Svensson, 2016). In addition, the leadership role has also changed over time, from being a support for employees to make professional assessments to making sure that the unit is cost-effective and that the budget is kept in balance (Forsberg Kankkunen *et al.*, 2015).

The consequences of NPM governance have been criticised and led to a governmental investigation in Sweden that emphasised the underlying ideas of trust-based governance. The investigation highlighted that the organisation should give employees greater autonomy in their work to meet the needs of citizens, with a holistic view of the citizen and collaboration within and between organisations being necessary to provide high-quality welfare services. This requires organisational changes in both formal structure and organisational culture. Examples of structural changes include proposals to create arenas for communication, cooperation, support and skills development between units and levels, as well as decentralisation of decisions, while changes in the organisational culture cover norms, values, the organisational climate, leadership for building trustworthy relationships and adopting a holistic perspective (Tillitsdelegationen, 2018). One essential element involves creating the conditions for the profession to be able to act autonomously with increased discretion (Grell *et al.*, 2020) and coordinating interventions between several social services units that target the unique individual's needs.

Social services in the municipality analysed in this study have been affected by the welfare system's changes in benefits as well as a shift in governance as the municipal council in question has decided to move from NPM towards trust-based governance.

Through the design of the governance model, the ambition and desire are to increase coordination between the municipality's units and adopt a holistic approach to activities to the benefit of the service users. At the same time, there was a reorganisation of the social services unit that worked with LLMP which involved four specialised units coming together as one and a consequent need to develop collaboration and work methods. The change process needed to promote sustainable inclusion of vulnerable individuals into working life through new ways of organising work across internal organisational boundaries and learning together across professions in a co-creation process. Thus, the analytical focus on how and why the process unfolds will draw on learning organisations as a theoretical framework.

Academic literature emphasises that learning within the context of working life and the views of learning organisations is based on different social ontologies or schools of learning, for instance, behaviourists, cognitivists, humanists, constructivists and social interaction (Marquardt and Waddill, 2004). Furthermore, learning occurs at different levels within an organisation such as the individual, workplace and organisational levels (Pettit, Crossan, Vera, 2016) and by different means including informal and formal learning (Manuti *et al.*, 2015), reflexivity (Baerheim and Ness, 2021) and social interaction (Billett, 2001). The social ontology that guided this study lies within the realm of how the process of learning unfolds through social interaction between individuals throughout an internal organisational change process. As such, a theoretical framework that draws on situated learning as the concept of communities of practice (Buch, 2020), learning by doing (Pettit, Crossan, Vera, 2016) and action learning (Marquardt and Waddill, 2004; Cunliffe *et al.*, 2019) may unravel how social practice and actions shape co-creation during the process. These three perspectives on learning all stress that social interaction, collaboration and participation are prerequisites for learning to take place through activities and actions between individuals stemming from direct experience (Marquardt and Waddill, 2004). The perspectives also acknowledge that key components including knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing between individuals and groups are important sub-processes that may lead to organisational change in, for instance, work organisation, routines and policies (Pettit *et al.*, 2016).

Situated learning within organisations can be understood to be contextual and unique in relation to a range of external and internal factors that shape the learning climate. Studies suggest that external factors, such as market-driven forces, have an impact. In the context of the Swedish social services and this study, such forces may be understood to be socio-political values, the organisation of the welfare system and being a public administrative authority. Internal factors also shape the conditions for individual and organisational learning, for instance, work organisation, inter-organisational cooperation, the characteristics of work tasks and management and organisational views on learning (Fuller and Unwin, 2011). These conditions for learning can result in a spectrum of individual and organisational learning processes and outcomes. Ellström (2001) refers to this as the adaptive – developmental learning span. Adaptive learning refers to an individual-centred process based on experience and the individual learns to master new tasks or follow routines to develop skills (Nilsen *et al.*, 2012) to handle the demands and challenges that occur in their day-to-day work life (Ellström, 1992, 2001). On the other hand, if the organisation aims to critically examine and identify challenges to complex organisational issues and routines, then developmental learning may be appropriate (Ellström, 2010; Ellström and Hultman, 2004). Developmental learning requires individuals or groups within an organisation to be able to question routines in the workplace and start to think or act in new and innovative ways regarding, for instance, work tasks or

requirements. In addition, the organisational conditions must allow critical reflection on how work is organised (Nilsen *et al.*, 2012). In the context of this study, the learning has, therefore, been viewed as a co-creation process drawing on the theories described within organisational learning. In this regard, a co-creation process is defined as everyone's perspective having value, a shared belief in creating synergy to achieve a shared goal and co-creation in new ways of working together through "learning by doing". Thus, this study explores the organisational dynamics in a change process that extended across work units in a Swedish municipality. The aim was to understand how and why co-creation unfolds in the efforts to bring different units into one united work unit.

Methods

A qualitative longitudinal study was designed, as the aim of the study was to unravel an organisational change process and capture participants' experiences as they unfolded throughout the process (Neale, 2016). Data was gathered through data triangulation for eight months, comprising written reflection texts, meeting protocols and interviews. The study is based on a back-and-forth inductive and abductive grounded theory analysis in accordance with Kathy Charmaz (2014) that allows a focus on social interaction between individuals.

Sample

The study sample included participants from four units; financial assistance, work and rehabilitation, LLMP and assessment and decision-making regarding adults (i.e. substance abuse and social psychiatry). The first-line managers of the units included constituted the managerial group for the process. They met once a week to discuss, agreed on goals and activities and informed each other on what was going on in each unit. In addition, a change group was created which consisted of two representatives from each unit and one coordinator from one of the units. The change group met every second week for 3 h. Each unit was able to contribute to the process by submitting proposals to its representatives in the change group. The change group's proposals were then discussed within each unit at their group meetings.

Data collection

Reflection texts were collected bi-weekly using a social media platform (SSM) called Loop Me (Lackéus, 202; Lackéus and Sävetun, 2019). The SSM was accessed by the participants through an app on their smartphone or tablet or via the Web. Through the SSM, the participants were asked questions which they answered with written reflections. As the research aimed to follow a change process with a focus on the social interaction between participants in the process, four questions were repeatedly asked during the eight months. These questions concerned the participants' own sense of value after their bi-weekly meetings, the actions the individuals had taken between meetings, how they experienced and implemented a new work method in which four units worked together and a monthly critical event they wanted to highlight during the process. In total, 12 individuals wrote 156 reflections during the period of November 2020–June 2021. During the same period, meeting documents and meeting notes from the managers and the individuals in the change group were gathered continuously.

Additionally, five individual and two group interviews were performed via video link, including a total of nine individuals in June 2021. The individuals varied in terms of organisational functions represented in the change process; three were managers and six were employees from four separate units within the organisation. The themes in the

interview guide were based on the constant formative analysis of the bi-weekly reflection texts. The questions concerned the background to the change process, the prerequisites in place for change, the changes made in work methods and organisation, how they organised their work within the change process and cooperation internally and externally with others.

Data analysis
Inductive analysis of reflection texts and documents was performed longitudinally and simultaneously with data collection. Both authors read the text and initially coded the data individually using sensitising concepts related to social interaction including situation, action, meaning and process, to understand what occurred from the data. The authors compared and combined the initial codes, as well as memo-writings, to visualise the relationships between codes to explore the empirical notions of the research participants. Through focused coding, two sensitising concepts were added to the initial coding schemes concerning cooperation and learning. The initial and focused coding shaped the theoretical sampling of interviews, that is, the coding informed the thematic interview guide. Thereafter, the same analytical procedure was performed with the interviews and combined with the longitudinal data by the end of the data collection period.
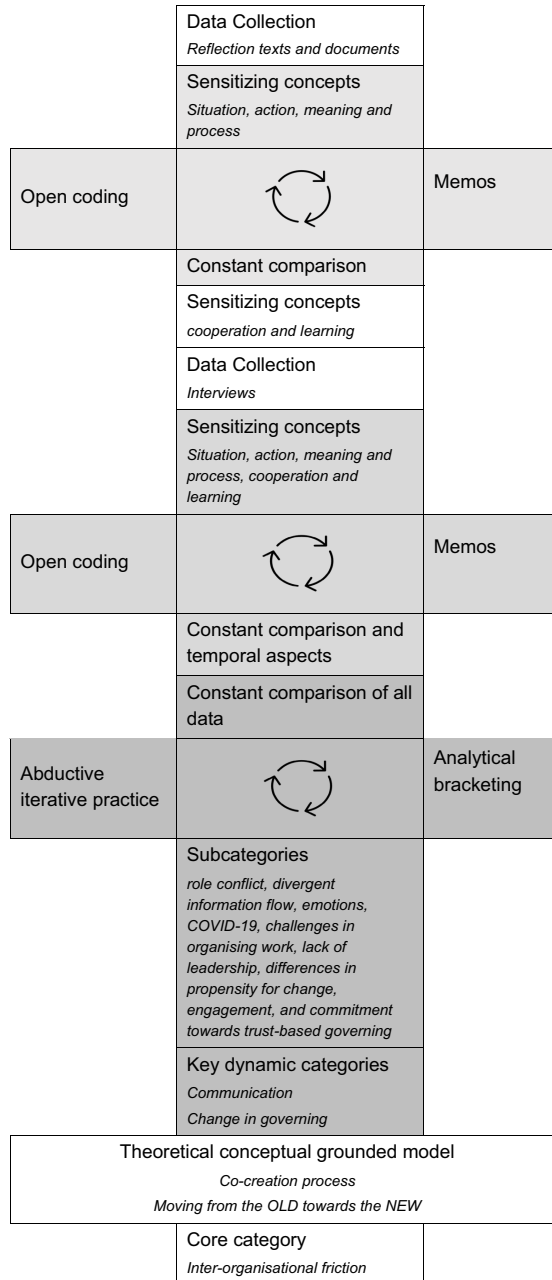
Discussions between the authors allowed for theoretical coding. This analytical phase was undertaken through abductive iterative practice using analytical bracketing. Continuous questioning of the data using what, when and how questions allowed an understanding of the actions taken, in other words the "why" in the co-creation efforts (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997), and acknowledged temporal aspects in the analysis. Codes were compared between the authors and combined into categories of conceptual strength, resulting in a conceptual grounded model (Charmaz, 2014) illustrating the co-creation process as a move from the old towards the new where the core category of inter-organisational friction became visible. Reflexivity and confirmability of findings was embedded into the continuous feedback of the analysis to the change group and managers throughout the process. Two key dynamics emerged during the analysis, namely, communication and change in governing. Each key dynamic can be broken down into categories illustrating factors that created challenges for the co-creation process. For communication, role conflict, divergent information flow, emotions, COVID-19 and challenges in organising work created disputes. For change in governing, lack of leadership and differences in propensity for change were experienced as challenging. However, engagement and commitment towards trust-based governing were identified as a facilitator for future change (Figure 1).

Ethics
Informed written consent was obtained from all participants at the start of the study through the SSM, and an additional verbal consent was obtained at the start of the interviews. The data has been treated confidentially. The participants were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any time without providing any explanation or information and that it was optional to answer the questions posed through the SSM. All data was properly stored according to the Swedish Act on Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans (SFS 2003:460, 2005).

Methodological considerations
The choice of data collection methods was limited during the study because of the COVID-19 pandemic with restrictions on physical social interaction limiting the choice of data gathering methods. Consequently, a SSM (Lackéus, 2021; Lackéus and Sävetun, 2019), gathering of documents and interviews via video link were chosen (Lobe *et al.*, 2020; Archibald *et al.*, 2019). Using several data gathering methods allowed for a combination of

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Data Collection		
Reflection texts and documents		
Sensitizing concepts		
Situation, action, meaning and process		
Open coding	⟳	Memos
Constant comparison		
Sensitizing concepts		
cooperation and learning		
Data Collection		
Interviews		
Sensitizing concepts		
Situation, action, meaning and process, cooperation and learning		
Open coding	⟳	Memos
Constant comparison and temporal aspects		
Constant comparison of all data		
Abductive iterative practice	⟳	Analytical bracketing
Subcategories		
role conflict, divergent information flow, emotions, COVID-19, challenges in organising work, lack of leadership, differences in propensity for change, engagement, and commitment towards trust-based governing		
Key dynamic categories		
Communication		
Change in governing		
Theoretical conceptual grounded model		
Co-creation process		
Moving from the OLD towards the NEW		
Core category		
Inter-organisational friction		

Figure 1.
Flowchart of the
analysis process

data and corroboration between longitudinal reflections and documents, as well as interviews at a certain point in time during the process. Furthermore, a stronger foundation from which to draw conclusions about the study results has been provided by combining data sets and following the process over time. The SSM combined the researchers' purposes with practitioner utility over time, facilitated by real-time feedback loops, which relate to interactive or action-oriented research methods. Using video-link interviews was enabled by the fact that the participants of the study were already familiar with the platform used and felt comfortable having both camera and sound on in the milieu they were in during the interview. This allowed the researcher to interact and acknowledge pauses, facial expressions and, to some extent, body language during the interview. Looking at the results, it may be considered a limitation that the study was conducted in a single geographical area in Sweden, within a single municipality and during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in terms of the methodological study design and the aim of the research conducted, the participants shared information until saturation was reached (Charmaz, 2014; Malterud *et al.*, 2016).

Results

Friction – moving from the old towards the new

The results show that during the change process, different factors created challenges for the transition towards new ways of working in co-creation. The different units had their own inherent culture, social relations and communication patterns and ways of organising work, and the change process proved to be harder than expected. Two key dynamics influenced the co-creation process, namely, communication and change in governing, which in turn was impeded by inter-organisational friction (Figure 2).

Communication

Role conflict. The representatives in the change group experienced the co-creation process as challenging because of role conflicts. They faced clashes in social relations and
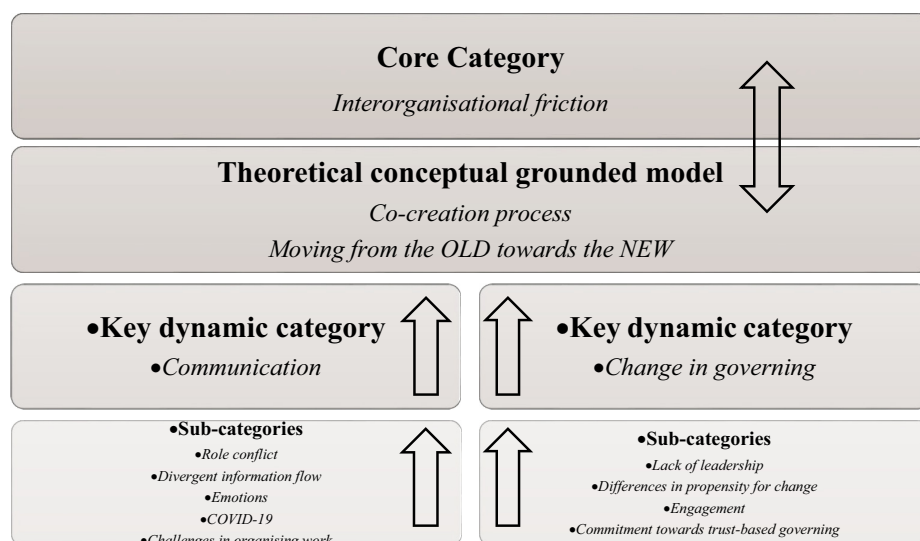

Figure 2.
Grounded conceptual
model

communication which resulted in discussions characterised by person-oriented issues instead of function-oriented issues. The role conflicts were explained by an internal hierarchical order of tasks, with some professional tasks being viewed as having a higher status than others. Every unit has a history of its own, and in "the old way" of organising work, the roles were clear, understandable and not questioned. Suddenly, the old roles were questioned, new roles were created and all the employees were expected to be open to changes in line with "the new way" of working. One manager gave this illustration:

> Imagine an entire individual and family welfare service that has always worked this way and worked within their boxes. And suddenly we, as the management team, say that we're going to merge into one. (Interview, EC 1)

Divergent information flow
In addition, the representatives in the change group had different ways of communicating with their own managers. They experienced that some of them received more comprehensive information than others about the new way and the expectations of them. Furthermore, they experienced that the managers of each unit gave somewhat contradictory information which they felt indicated a lack of consensus. This, in turn, created individual feelings of frustration, uncertainty and confusion within the change group which affected the communication climate. They even questioned whether they were able to influence the co-creation process and change work in a positive direction. The communication they provided to their own units was contested because of a lack of information and transparency from management about their role and mandate in the process. The intention was to share information and raise concerns with their own units during the process and conduct back-and-forth dialogues. In this regard, some of the representatives felt that the demands upon them were too high which challenged the co-operation process. They found it difficult to deal with the negative critics within their own units:

> My idea was that in between these change group meetings we would work to get closer to each other, but I get the sense that the opposite has happened. My working group is getting more and more irritated about the process and everything that doesn't work. I have a hard time to drive things forward and motivate people when I don't really feel motivated myself. I end up feeling dejected and that nobody wants to help our clients, nobody wants to work with them. I also think we are out of synch with the process management team and that they don't really understand what actually goes on "in real life". (Loop, May)

> I think it's a difficult position to be in because the group I belong to has a negative view of the change group and our work. Given that I feel everybody's frustration it's sometimes hard for me to know how to deal with the situation. (Loop, March)

Emotions
The emotions of uncertainty, frustration and confusion within the change group finally led to an "explosion" of feelings during one meeting towards the end of the change group's existence. Their task was perceived as challenging and obstructed the communication flow. It became overwhelming to be innovative, share knowledge, act as communication channel both upwards and downwards in the organisation, develop common working methods and find new ways to collaborate. One representative illustrated how the challenge could be understood:

But perhaps if it's what you're used to, that talking about each other rather than with each other is part of the culture there. (Interview, GP 2)

Another quote illustrates how the representatives of the change group finally opened their hearts and spoke out about issues they felt were obstructing their process:

Well, I just wanted to cry, just throw the damned process out the window, "let's forget it all, I can't work with these people". You know, when you keep thinking about something "when is the right time to say this?" And the right time never comes up. Then [. . .] in the end, an explosion [. . .] The bomb sits there ticking away and in the end it explodes, and then it really explodes. And then we started again, turned over a new leaf, and it was like everybody gained a different understanding. (Interview, GP 4)

COVID-19. That meeting was an awakening for the managers, and it led to a common awareness that other ways of working through the entire organisational change were needed than merely placing the responsibility on the change group. In addition, at the time of the co-creation process, the COVID-19 pandemic was an external factor that posed a relational challenge. The representatives in the change group experienced a need for physical meetings which were not possible because of societal restrictions. They were used to working through social physical contacts and felt it was challenging to find digital meeting forms that met their need to build co-creation. They would also have liked a facilitator that could have led the process:

Once again, we need to talk, talk, talk! Together, preferably physically in person, and with an external/neutral meeting facilitator. (Loop May)

Challenges in organising work
Another reason for the communication failure was that the representatives felt it was hard to reassess their own units' way of organising work. The dialogue got caught in discussions about the old ways of working and practical details about what each unit should do in their respective professional roles, who the target group was and which measures should be taken in relation to the target group, as well as the internal workflow. Instead of finding common ground and working through how the new way of working could look, they became caught in circular discussions month after month. They all acknowledged the frustration of being stuck in old patterns about "what" different professional assignments and roles entailed instead of finding the new "how" the units could come together as one. They would have appreciated help in the dialogues from the supervisors to enable them to make progress:

When we have gotten stuck, or when it really has become too much, that's when our supervisors have [. . .] I mean, that's when our supervisors have stepped in. But they could perhaps have gone in before it got to that "straw that broke the camel's' back, it's all too much" moment, done it earlier. But they probably trusted us to have free reins, to decide and do much of it ourselves, and such. But there are still a lot of voices. Some voices are louder than others. Some are more prone to change than others. (Interview, GP1)

One manager gave a possible explanation for the group getting stuck and caught in old patterns:

Because of the very strong silos that previously existed. We have our legislation to adhere to in the Social Service Act, and we have ours, and it [. . .] It doesn't all always come together, but so what, fine [laughs]. (Interview, EC1)

Thus, crossing organisational boundaries and professional roles to co-create and find ways to make progress was hampered by communications patterns becoming stuck, role conflicts

arising and a lack of management guidance on how they could have moved forward. In turn, the individuals in the change group developed negative emotions about the process.

Change in governing
Lack of leadership. During the same period as the implementation of the co-creation process, the organisation also shifted to trust-based governance. The interviewees found it difficult to move from the prior controlled decision-making and execution system influenced by NPM to a form of governance that gives the employee more room to manoeuvre and where the change work is intended to be employee driven. During the transition in governing, it became clear that the units were organised based on different development and leadership models, which meant there were differences in how prepared they felt to undergo a change. This created challenges in interacting with each other within the organisational structure, as there were varied perspectives on client/target group needs and the standpoints of the representatives were shaped by diverse programme theories and experiences in work methods. Also, leaving the NPM function-based specialisation representatives had worked in for years created uncertainty in the change group over their mandate to co-create within the new way of governing. In turn, this led to what the change group members described as a lack of leadership or a gap in leadership strategies that needed to be filled. This was particularly the case when the different work cultures collided. The representatives would have appreciated close, continuous and situational support to counter the feeling of being left on their own during the process. Instead, they felt they were given an endpoint and left with the task of co-creating the road to the endpoint on their own:

> But it's a bit like, if you look at management it feels like this, once you start to discuss details it still feels so very happy and so very great. It's like everything will work out fine in the end. There's still a bit of that mentality. But we keep on at it and then [. . .] we have so much going on, and on, never mind, but it doesn't matter if we have the best motorway in the world ahead of us. If there's a hole in the road on the way there we'll never get to that super fine motorway. That's a bit what it feels like. It was meant to be so very employee driven from the beginning, even the major issues. And I understand that vision, but it became almost too hard for us. So I think that it has tripped us up more than what it has given us. (Interview, GP 4)

Differences in propensity for change
Also, it became evident to the managers that all units needed different amounts of time to get into the process and actively work with "the new" to foster the propensity for change. Each unit needed its own pace of change in the effort to become one unit. Thus, the different units and representatives in the change group each had a different propensity for change when moving from the old to the new ways of working and finding consensus. As illustrated below, one unit had put a lot of effort in recent years into shaping their own group to prepare for the new work organisation, and the representatives felt that the new process had stagnated:

> And that's what's been a bit difficult in this process, that things have kind of stagnated a bit and we've been just waiting for, yes, but when are you lot from the labour market side going to help us then? So now we just want to motor on. We are mega-ready. (Interview, GP 4)

While the representatives in the change group struggled with their transition process, the managers expressed a need to recognise that change takes time. They did not expect a rapid transition, especially given their type of organisation and the work that they are responsible for. They were also aware that, as managers, they needed to plan properly to create a holistic approach across the units:

> We're turning an ocean liner here. This is nothing we're going to get done in 2021 [. . .] rather, a long-term implementation is needed, and for every unit concerned we really need to think through what we need to work on and how we need to work to create this holistic cohesion. (Interview, EC1)

Engagement and commitment towards trust-based governing

Even though the co-creation process was challenging, all those interviewed put their trust in the new way of working and in the learning process. This was characterised by shared principles that the perspectives of all units have a value and can add to the new ways of working. There was trust and a commitment from the professionals to identify forces that drove them towards new common goals. Furthermore, there was openness to co-creation through "learning by doing", that is, daring to test new shared working methods, follow up, evaluate and possibly reformulate. They all believed that a new way of working would stimulate work integration of vulnerable groups into the labour market, and they all emphasised that the process would result in positive approaches and value for the vulnerable individual:

> [. . .] and this very idea of working sustainably and focusing on the individual. And that we concentrate on what's working well, we also have to try to solve the things that don't work too, but we focus on the positive and that everybody has a place in society. It sounds like a cliché but [. . .] I think it's mega, mega important to work with. And I believe we do, so that people must be able to be however they are and still get to have an OK life.

> Being able to work in this kind of climate and with changing people's attitudes and what signals we want to give off. Imagine being the municipality that has this mindset where everybody is welcome and where's there's a place for all individuals, I mean, wow, wow, wow. (Interview, GP2)

The managers recognised that the new form of governing, that is, trust-based governance also needed time to be implemented and reflected upon in parallel to the merging of four units into one through co-creation. New tools were requested from the managerial level to be able to continuously visualise and understand the employees' needs in a timelier manner throughout the process. Further, the managers expressed a need for a deeper and continuous understanding of how they could adapt their management approach and bring clarity and transparency to the co-creation process.

Discussion

In the social services unit studied, the highest-level council of the municipal organisation decided to implement trust-based governance, which involved developing new working methods built on collaboration and co-creation across units within the organisation, as well as increased autonomy for the employees (Bringselius, 2021). The research aim of this study was to understand how and why co-creation unfolds in the efforts to bring different units into one united work unit. The main results indicate that there was inter-organisational friction in the co-creation process between units, between the members of the change group and the supervisors, as well as friction within the change group. Further, the results indicate that communications, relations, supervisor support and governing strategies clashed with work routines and methods, work cultures, roles and responsibilities and that the units had differing views of the needs of the intended target group. This thereby challenged the propensity for change, which in turn may have limited developmental learning at a workplace and organisational level (Ellström, 2010).

The analysis shows the need for social arenas to meet and share reflections to stimulate the co-creation process and prevent social friction to enable participation in practices (Buch, 2020). The participants in the study wanted social meeting arenas or places that were constructed for physical interaction and not digital communicating channels that were used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the arena could have enabled renewed communication channels which may have revealed the need for supportive leadership, a common work culture and work methods as well as the needs of the target group and, thus, strengthen co-creation and the propensity for change. The arena could have provided space for dialogue on the "how" to move the co-creation process forward and facilitate a supportive trust-based learning environment (Tjulin et al., 2019) where social friction and norms can be unravelled and participatory learning shaped (Pettit et al., 2016).

Unravelling learning
The disparity in the type of learning that emerges, more adaptive or developmental-oriented, along with changes in the governance logic create different conditions that affect the co-creation process. One thing that is decisive to the type of learning that emerges is the structural and personal conditions for learning, in other words how these relate to material, cultural and social structures in the organisation, as well as the individual's background, subjective ideas, interactions and actions (Ellström, 2001). Adaptive and developmental learning should be interpreted as a complementary process for learning, a pendulum movement where both types of learning are needed. Considering the results of this study, the propensity for change was challenged, as old ways of organising work had been institutionalised and met resistance. This resistance illustrates how routines can act as blinkers and counteract change because the professionals wanted to maintain existing structures, thus leading to adaptive learning (Ellström, 2001). The participants in the change group were also frustrated which posed a challenge to the developmental learning process, as the emotions impacted their social dynamics negatively. During organisational learning activities, individuals must be receptive to new ideas before they act (Pettit et al., 2016). However, one could venture that development-oriented learning did happen during the process in the change group. They questioned the new ways of working in asking how they should work through the change and by continuously asking what and why questions regarding how the process should look (Ellström, 2001; Nilsen et al., 2012). Through reflective inquiry, they identified that management needed to step in because certain vital elements for change needed to be worked through first, that is, they clarified the exact nature of the process challenges (Marquardt and Waddill, 2004). For example, their experience revealed the need for management to ensure that everyone was receptive to change, as well as to deal with the friction areas identified. In turn, the first-line managers had to question their initial actions and thoughts about how change would take place and how to unravel what and why questions in relation to both the change process and the new ways of organising their internal routines. In addition, the first-line managers sought new support strategies to facilitate development-oriented learning for the entire unit and simultaneously looked for strategies for their own leadership that aligned with the framework of trust-based governance. This implies a situated internal learning environment within the organisation with several parallel levels that need to be considered while untangling the social practices and actions shaped (Fuller and Unwin, 2011).

Unravelling friction areas
The identified friction areas arose, as supervisor support and governing strategies clashed with work routines and methods, work cultures, roles and responsibilities and as the units

had differing views of the needs of the intended target group. This can partially be understood as the challenge for the first-line managers to find new ways of leading in accordance with trust-based governance. The new approach to organisational management emphasised increased autonomy and involvement in work for employees (Grell *et al.*, 2021, Svensson and Svensson, 2021), that is, from governing logics based on top-down control approaches to bottom-up trust approaches. This reasoning is in line with development-oriented learning, and it presupposes autonomy and participation in the design of work and that there is room for critical reflection on the organisational conditions, goals and means. Development-oriented learning is resource-intensive, and studies show that a certain "slack" (time) is needed in the organisation to enable learning. In many activities, the logic of work execution is dominated by a focus on effective action, planning, control and monitoring (Ellström, 2001). It, therefore, became a challenge for first-line managers to empower the change group to take their own initiatives and decisions. The employees were used to working within each unit with clear directives from the manager, and the increased autonomy led to frustration and uncertainty when they experienced a lack of management. The two learning logics (Ellström, 2001) are similar to the two governing logics of NPM (performer-customer model) and trust-based governing. The organisation seems to swing between going from one approach to another and one can question whether both logics are needed, as they are viewed on a continuum. Perhaps the question to be asked is, in which contexts should one logic outweigh the other to foster the basic principles of trust-based governance and encourage the propensity for change?

Further, the results indicate that development-oriented learning did not reach beyond the inter-organisational boundaries. This can be attributed to COVID-19 and the new channels for collaboration, rather than control and monitoring from management. The pandemic did not only create involuntary social-, cultural- and working silos that needed to be conquered, but also new forms of collaboration needed to be created, such as virtual teamwork (Kniffin *et al.*, 2020). Participants of the study expressed that they preferred and were used to having "face-to-face" dialogue in a shared physical space in accordance with the profession's normal way of working. However, despite the friction areas identified and the varying propensity for change, some of the prerequisites for development-oriented learning were present. The findings show that there was trust within the organisation as well as confidence in and commitment to the tasks and clients. This means that the employees aimed to achieve a common set of values, shared a belief in creating synergy to reach shared goals and continued to try to find new ways of working through "learning by doing". Both the managers and the professionals in the change group were aware that development of their co-creation process was still required because of the complex circumstances of the shift in governance, leadership strategies, new ways of organising work tasks and the interruptions caused by COVID-19.

Conclusion and implications

To conclude, crossing and merging organisational learning through co-creation processes across units was demanding. Finding common and new paths and work methods for labour market inclusion proved to be challenging and created inter-organisational friction. Challenges were because of new expectations from the organisation, as it shifted towards trust-based governance in conjunction with working during a pandemic when the social interactions were restricted to digital communication channels.

Factors that impeded the co-creation processes related to new expectations on roles and responsibilities of professionals, both for the members of the change group and the supervisors, as well as negative emotions. The members of the change group experienced the process fuzzy

in relation to the aim of organisational development process. Further, they experienced lack of supervisory support and that the supervisor support were unspoken and unclear during the process, which created frustration. Also, the findings indicates that the internal co-creation process was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital communication channels impeded organisational development-oriented learning and challenged the social interactions in internal collaboration between different groups of professionals and units.

The impeding factors could have been prevented by continuous situational support from supervisors and management transparency throughout the process. The conclusion drawn from the challenges raised indicates that vital factors were missing from the co-creation process that restricted the progress made. These include trust, compliance, sensitivity and time for reflection and dialogue.

This reasoning is in line with development-oriented learning, and it presupposes autonomy and participation in the design of work and that there is room for critical reflection on the organisational conditions, goals and means. Development-oriented learning is resource-intensive, and studies show that a certain "slack" (time) is needed in the organisation to enable learning. Also, it appears that a physical social arena is essential for further evolvement of the co-creation process.

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