6. Formal Boundaries, Informal Bridges: Departments and Teams

Drawing on Advice Company's internal differentiation into the three offices as sub-systems, this chapter continues with an analysis of further organisational differentiation within each office. With a focus on functional and hierarchical differentiation, I will elaborate in Section 6.1 on the boundaries between the sub-systems across the open office floor. Starting with the functional divisions that stem from the organisational chart, I will trace how different teams emerge as sub-systems on the basis of their communication patterns and the self-observations of interlocutors. By presenting case studies of such sub-system in each of the three offices, I will illustrate that these perceived boundaries are consistent across the organisation and reinforce the meta-structure of the organisational system that is aligned with the dominant value client centricity. While this proposition holds for a number of cases, the internal differentiation at the street office implies that the client centricity scale is here reversed in a sense of Louis Dumont's hierarchical inversion, as it instead orientates along the value ground reality.

Section 6.2 focuses on further system differentiation and illustrates the emergence of sub-systems that do not necessarily adhere to the hierarchical or functional structure. Luhmann refers to such sub-systems as "conform/deviant" (1995a: 190). I will analyse these sub-systems in light of the structure developed in Section 6.1, as these deviant sub-systems constitute an egalitarian structure that is not connected to the formal structure of the organisation.

6.1. Differentiating function and hierarchy: Job types and teams

While the previous chapter demonstrated that the three offices can be placed on a continuum of client centricity, with distance to the client as the key crite-

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rion for positioning, this section will illustrate how the differentiation of the organisation continues beyond the emergence of sub-systems at each of the three offices. Starting with a basic description of the functional differentiation of departments and teams in the main office and the corresponding work patterns observed there, I will show how individual teams emerge as sub-systems that strongly emphasise their boundaries with other teams, despite a lack of physical divides in the office floor. Along with the functional differentiation, a differentiation of sub-systems into hierarchically organised clusters, which emerge along the superior value client centricity, becomes salient. In the city and street offices, an emergence of both functional and hierarchical sub-systems can be shown.

6.1.1. Main office: Working around client centricity

As described in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.1), the main office is an open plan space with 450 desks of identical size and equipment, and no physical divides (such as walls or offices) to mark departments. However, the office yields a clear territorial divide that becomes salient when one looks at the basic functional differentiation of departments and teams. The teams are, on the one hand, assigned to job roles such as client consulting, project coordination and HR management; but on the other hand, they are also assigned to particular clients and industry sectors. However, not all job roles are affiliated with a client or industry team: The accounting experts, for example, support all projects by creating contracts and invoices, while HR and finance colleagues have no connection at all to client projects. The diversity of the HR and finance team was emphasised in various ways during my meetings, by members of both these and other teams. A senior management board member opened his talk in the main office's central meeting room (to which all employees were invited) with the following statement:

> Do we have finance or HR people in here today? Raise your hands… er-hm, quite a few. Well, you might not understand all of what I am saying, but I'd appreciate if you guys look interested.

HR team member Sujata introduced herself at a meeting by making a similar reference to the distinctiveness of her role from that of the other speakers that day:

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> Hi all together I am Sujata, for those who haven't met me before. I am from the HR team here, so in this session it is not about business and markets, which I know just little about, but about collaboration.

These departments' positions as sub-systems set apart from the organisation's client-centric structure, yet with a substantial degree of relevance, are mirrored by their location in a corner of the office next to the desks of the top managers from all departments, including the CEO. The entire HR/finance/management area is "shielded" by several desk rows of teams that lack a client or industry affiliation, such as the data organisation and accounting teams. The remaining desks in the main office are assigned to client or industry teams and represent the hot spots of everyday action. The involvement into everyday work with or for clients is the is the first dimension of differentiation along which the sub-systems establish their internal boundaries. The client and industry teams have two further criteria along which sub-systems emerge: job type (client consultant or project coordinator) and client/industry type. The organisational set-up assumes close collaboration between the job types needed to execute the entire project development process. For example, a client consultant must collaborate closely with a project coordinator to execute a client project. Hence, I initially expected sub-systems to emerge in correspondence with client teams.

The actual differentiation, however, arises in the first instance according to job types. In meetings involving employees of several job types from different client teams, consultants communicate as a social system in opposition to project coordinators, and individuals are described by other teams and roles as "this client consultant lady" or "this project coordination guy", rather than "the consultant from the client ABC team". Project coordinator Asif expressed this notion of being identified primarily by his function when he commented on the accountability he felt as a project coordinator: "It is me who is working on the project, but it is the project coordinators who did it all wrong, who screwed up."

The differentiation between job types mirrors the continuum of client centricity and hence imposes a hierarchy, with the client consultants – those with the most direct interaction with clients – in the highest position. Project coordinator Nimesh expressed this explicitly, although he chose a surrogate to make his point: "I have seen my colleagues in the team being treated like a personal helper. We have to be equal; none of us should feel inferior to client consultants."

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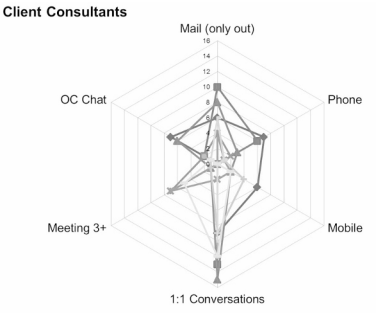
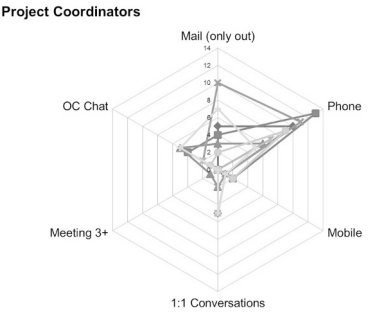
The fact that client centricity is the primary factor assigning system membership shows that this value is the leading one in this context, and not ground reality. These boundaries become salient from another angle, when looking at the communication patterns of the various job types. Data collected in one-hour "snapshots" of the observable communication of interlocutors across various channels enabled me to develop distinct communication profiles. I analysed a set of comparable snapshot data that had been collected during hours in which the employees perceived their workload as medium-high to high and there were no scheduled meetings/trainings. After plotting the incidents of incoming/outgoing communication per communication channel on a multi-dimensional radar chart, a pattern emerged across five to six employees of the same job type. For client consultants, a strong emphasis on personal (one-to-one) communication was noticeable (Figure 8), while project coordinators conducted a significant amount of their communication via the landline phone (Figure 9). This data illustrates that the job types are not only functionally different, but their work and communication styles also significantly diverge.

Figure 8 (left): Communication patterns of client consultants
Figure 9 (right): Communication patterns of project coordinators





Given the assumption of the organisational set-up that each consultant will collaborate with the project coordinator for a client project, the question arises via which communication channel this collaboration can be realised. The snapshot data suggests a further explanation for why the client teams do not evolve as social systems across different job types: they have only a narrow set of communication channels in common; hence, they have fewer opportu-

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nities to establish a social sub-system through communication. I do not wish to indicate that the two job types do not communicate with each other at all. Advice Company is dependent on their interaction for the maintenance of the organisation. But the data supports the employees' perceptions, which I will present in the next pages, that they operate in separate sub-systems. This is based on the assumption of Systems Theory that without communication, no social system can emerge.

Figure 8 shows the client consultants' strong emphasis on direct face-to-face interaction. My observations suggest that this communications predominantly occur within their team: several work tasks are performed by two or three members of the same consulting team (who sit together at one desk) closely interacting and therefore establishing and reconfirming their team as a social system distinct from other systems in the organisation. Therefore the sub-systems emerge according to the specific client teams. This communication pattern also fits with the territorial closeness of the consulting team members, whose desks are located in the same bay.

Consequently, consultants of one client team perceive their team as distinct to other client consulting teams, because the communication events within their team lead to differentiation and boundaries with other teams are explicitly communicated. When I asked Raj, a consultant, to elaborate on his statement that one client consulting team was more problematic than the others, he said that client team A was very stressed out because their customer was extremely demanding. Client consultant Kashish once commented about his team: "The time in my team is for one month as if it was a year in the rest of Advice Company." Ruchika, who had switched from one consulting team to another, commented on her previous team:

> Working in that team under that manager brought out the worst in me. I did not know I could behave like that, that I could write emails like that to my colleagues. But with that team it was simply the only way for me, and here in my current team it is very different now.

Her quote also underlines that members of a social system act according to the system's framework, and not on the basis of individual traits or preferences. The constitutive strength of client centricity as a central value in the organisation is illustrated by observations that the emergence of a sub-system such as the client consulting team can only be fostered through physical proximity once the overarching boundary between job types – along the value client centricity – is established.

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This stands in line with Luhmann's Systems Theory, according to which sub-systems emerge by repeating the established boundaries of the superordinate system – in this case, the job type divide. The communication between a consultant and a project coordinator who sits right across the desk row is conducted over the phone, chat or email, but rarely via one-to-one conversation. Anjali, a project coordinator, said that she found it problematic that she was assigned a desk close to the consulting team, whose projects she mainly managed, rather than other project coordinators:

> When I asked [why I had to sit here] I was told that it is due to the interaction with the consulting people, but that is not really true. Gopal [a consultant sitting two desks next to her] for example also just calls me via phone or sends a chat instead of getting up and going to my desk. So what is that argument!?

She also said that she missed team functions, as she was not part of the consulting teams and the coordinators did not host any functions. Hence, the physical proximity of project coordinators to their consulting colleagues did not overcome the boundaries between the job types, but prevented the emergence of project coordinators as a distinctive sub-system within the organisation. The project coordinator's relatively low share of one-to-one conversations as a strong system-constitutive communication channel corresponded with their dispersal across the office area.

6.1.2. City office: Same but different

As described in Chapter 4, the city office has a similar set-up to that of the main office. It has an open plan office and no walls except for a shielded row of cubicles for team managers and a separate office for the department manager. In contrast to the main office, however, the city office shows a significantly more homogeneous functional subdivision of teams: all teams have the purpose of supporting colleagues across the globe, and most teams on the ground floor fulfil this function by creating presentation files based on the data they receive and the formatting guidelines they are given. Yet, right at the beginning one of the team managers described the organisational structure and pointed out a distinct difference in job types across the departments. He felt that the difference between "embedded" teams and "standard" teams was important for my analysis: Employees of embedded teams are assigned to a client consulting team abroad which they mostly support exclusively. In

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contrast, standard teams act as a "pool of resources" to which work requests from several client consulting teams are submitted. The local standard team manager at the city office distributes requests amongst the team members on the basis of each individual's workload. But the requests not only come from colleagues abroad, but also from embedded colleagues. Both embedded and standard teams have a local team lead and a manager in the city office. But employees in the embedded teams receive their primary feedback from their overseas managers and view their local team leads as contact persons rather than a line managers.

The decision of whether a person will join an embedded or a standard team is made at the hiring stage: Advice Company offers either the former or the latter job type at the campus recruitment events, on the basis of university's ranking. Inside the city office, a member of a standard team can switch to an embedded team after one or two years, via a promotion for good performance. This notion of a hierarchical differentiation of the two job types was reflected in informal conversations between colleagues. When I accompanied Niharika from the standard team, Anas (embedded team) walked by and made a joke about the embedded analysts versus the standard ones, and that Niharika should be honoured that he had come to talk to her. They teased each other a bit more and Niharika turned to me with a laugh: "You know, people in the embedded teams don't talk with the standard teams, usually they don't interact much." Although this conversation happened in a casual, friendly context, the boundary between the two sub-systems was clearly communicated.

As explained above, the hierarchical differentiation is dependent on the universities from which employees have graduated, as an embedded team member commented during a casual coffee chat in the cafeteria: "The difference between embedded and standards? You really haven't noticed? I shouldn't say that, but look from which colleges they [the standards] come from." The differentiation is also connected to the client centricity continuum. Tauseef, an embedded team member, explained his job to me by presenting it in opposition to the standard team job:

> We are owning the project, we take responsibility. See, that is the difference to the standard team, you might have noticed. They don't own the project. They just deliver the task and that's it. But we are more on the client consultant side, the project is our baby, we are fully committed and we are much more committed to the client. See, this work task I am dealing with now we

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> usually would have outsourced to the standard team as there is nothing to learn. But unfortunately the standard team is working full capacity and have declined this request.

Entry into the organisation is therefore associated with a hierarchical distinction based on differentiation within the educational system, and this affects employees' perceptions within the organisation. This represents an interesting interplay not only between the organisation and the educational system, but also between the clients as a third system, through the connection of university ranking and proximity to clients.

Similar to the main office, in the city office there seems to be a distinction between job types, with a hierarchical order associated (embedded jobs are more desirable than standard jobs). Within each of the job types, subsystems further develop along regional and client teams. These teams form the sub-systems in which employees primarily perceive themselves to interact when asked about their work-related networks in the office. Similar to the main office employees, the employees here distinguish and characterise their teams from other teams and communicate the team boundaries explicitly. I asked Niharika to explain her comment that one must be careful when taking over work from other teams in order to help them out. She elucidated that, although all were members of the larger standard team, there were differences from team to team. She would look at a project from her team's perspective, but the other team might view a job from a different perspective. This difference in perspective might affect little things such as formatting decisions in the presentation slides, but also larger issues, such as analytical style. Her explanation exposes the sub-systems and the different selection procedures within them.

Ananya, from an embedded team, told me about a project the department manager was using to try to change the entire knowledge management culture. Upon my probing into which kind of culture he was referring to, she explained:

> People here are very closed and do not talk to each other much. The team B, for example, does a lot of special analysis, but nobody knows about it. Within my team I know quite well who is doing what, but outside I don't. I would rather ask my manager in Shanghai before I go to a person here I do not talk much with.

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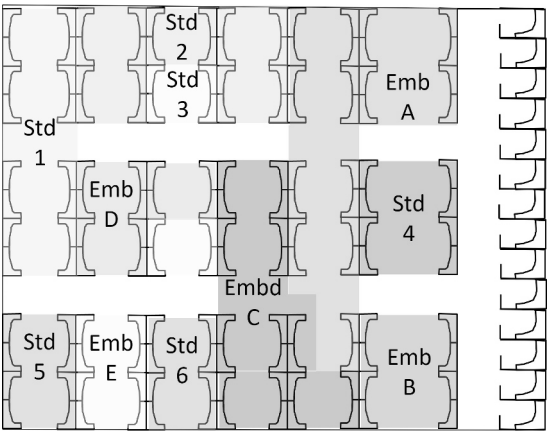
The perception of teams as sub-systems with clear boundaries hence aligned with the formal structure of the organisation. To illustrate these perceptions, I mapped the sub-systems in a seating map of the city office. Figure 10 shows a map of a part of the seating area, with individual teams indicated by different patterns.

Figure 10: City office team map



Similar to the differentiation within the main office, the differentiation in the city office shows a primary distinction and assignment of sub-system membership along the guiding difference client centricity/ground reality with client centricity as superior value. This boundary is communicated between the embedded jobs, which are described as more client-centric, and the hierarchically lower standard jobs, which are considered less client-centric. The secondary distinction occurs in line with the organisational matrix, along the distinction of client/regional teams, and is communicated accordingly.

6.1.3. Street office: Differentiating ground reality

The work area of the street office consists of two rooms that host up to 50 employees. The restricted space around each desk – resulting in physical closeness, shared phones and an interactive working practice between employees, as described in Chapter 5 (Section 5.4.3) – led me to assume relative system homogeneity. I did not expect to find emergent sub-systems across the small

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office space, especially considering that all of the job types performed at the location orientated on the value ground reality, in distinct opposition to client centricity.

My interlocutors, however, differentiated job types at the street office along a boundary between ground reality and client centricity. Consequently, two different sub-systems emerged in this setting. The most prevalent functions at the street office are managing interactions with freelancers and engaging in "boundary work" with Advice Company's environment. A different job type concerns interaction with the main office – specifically aggregating financial figures and managing staff workload. While the latter roles primarily interact with project coordinators at the main office to assign team leads to projects and to communicate this, the former are responsible for the concrete realisation of projects at the street office, including managing the freelancer team leads with respect to the types of projects and work expected from them. Respectively, these employees collect information about the status and progress of work, which is aggregated through the chain of job types (see Chapter 10, Section 10.4).

Similar to the differing communication patterns between consultants and project coordinators at the main office, the communication patterns between the two job types in the street office also diverge. Those whose role is to communicate primarily with the main office align their communication channels to their counterparts at the main office through their use of phone, chat and email. They select their communication style according to the value client centricity and emerge as a sub-system within the street office. In contrast, the execution team leads operate on the basis of the value ground reality: they do not primarily work at their desk, but move frequently between their desk and the freelancers' space in order to catch up on the freelancers' work status. Consequently, the execution team emerges as a sub-system with a different structure and communication style: this team reverts back on emails significantly more slowly than their office peers, they are not available on chat for spontaneous informal communication and they are usually on the move when called on their mobile. Their system is attuned to interaction with freelancers, and not with the rest of the organisation. I illustrated in Chapter 5 how this differentiation is expressed in the self-description of street office employees as the "simple people". The street office orientates along the value ground reality, rather than client centricity. This is apparent in Rohan's answer to the question of where he wants to work in the future: "Here only. I like to talk

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and interact with my team, with my freelancers, the supervisors. I do not like talking with my manager [at the main office]."

At the street office, the ground reality is the most relevant selection criteria. The execution team leads select their communication on the basis of what will be understood by the freelancers, rather than colleagues at the main office. The notion of these different sub-systems was voiced by Mudra, whose job was to distribute upcoming projects amongst the execution team leads, and who did not interact with freelancers:

> I don't interact with these people [the execution team leads], I don't feel comfortable when they are rushing in and out. I think we should be sitting in the main office as well. I feel much more closer to the mind-set of the people in the main office […] I have already asked the manager why we are here, and even wrote an email. But well, these guys [waves indifferently around addressing the office area] share a good rapport with the freelance side people, so they are fine. But I don't. I don't talk to these people; I only talk to her [points to the colleague behind her, who joined with her together].

Her statement not only communicates the boundary between the two sub-systems at the street office, which operate on the basis of different values, but her desire to move to the main office also implies that the client-centric sub-system she belongs to in the street office carries less prestige than that which is associated with the execution team leads. The client centricity scale is reversed at the street office, as the ground reality is the primary differentiation criterion (Figure 11 – next page).

6.2. Lunchmates and batchmates: Informal bridges across the office

In accordance with Luhmann's Systems Theory, I have elaborated on the internal differentiation of the organisational system into hierarchically and functionally distinct sub-systems. Luhmann, however, distinguishes another stable category with the potential to develop into further sub-systems: "conform/deviant" sub-systems, which include official/unofficial or formal/informal sub-systems (Luhmann 1995a: 190). I touched on this category in Chapter 4 (Section 4.3.4), through the example of continued communication between ex-employees and their former colleagues who still work at Advice Company. While such sub-systems emerge from within the boundaries of Advice Com-

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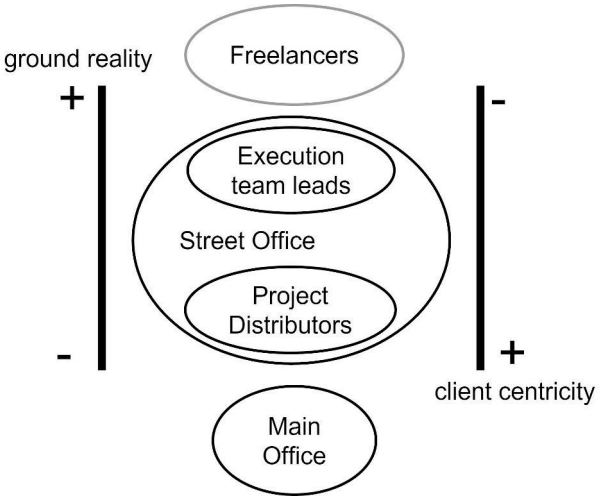
Figure 11: Reversed values at the street office



pany, they can proliferate beyond the system and even "last longer than the initial one" (ibid.: 189). In this section, I will trace the emergence of (relatively) permanent sub-systems that cannot be categorised as hierarchical or functional. For this analysis, the clear set-up of the city office and the limited size of the offshore support team (of 120 people) who work on the ground floor enabled an understanding of not only the physical distribution and boundaries of the formal sub-teams, but also the existence of both formal and informal communication systems. I analyse my interlocutors' informal social networks by tracing the persons they accompanied on lunch breaks, *chai* breaks and other non-work-related situations. For the purposes of triangulation, these observations are matched with interlocutor's self-assessments, which are obtained from individual ego-centred network diagrams. Through this data, a "webwork diagram", as I like to call it, is created. This diagram represents the lived communication praxis at the city office and reveals another layer of the perceived, emic perspective of the organisational structure in this office.

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6.2.1. "We don't talk much": Perceptions and lived praxis

Despite the absence of walls in the city office, the employees' descriptions of the office align with the organisational structure and the neatly divided seating arrangements of the different teams (Section 6.1.2). My interlocutors described their interactions with members of other teams as "we don't talk much". During my research phase at the city office a new project was started on the basis of a management initiative that aimed at creating a knowledge sharing platform to foster exchange among employees. The fact that such a project was initiated shows that the management team at the city office shared a similar impression of limited cross-team interaction, as my interlocutors expressed.

Advice Company furthermore used other formats to stimulate interaction amongst employees beyond the primarily subject of work-related tasks. Apart from a yearly cricket tournament, the "Presentation League" was launched in the main office and the city office. Colleagues from different parts of the organisation were invited to compete in mixed teams and asked to create presentations addressing difficult or controversial topics, as pre-selected by the jury of senior managers. These topics were socially controversial and unrelated to client projects; for example, they included suggesting a business plan for a gay marriage website in India and developing an advertising campaign for pharmacy chains intending to sell marijuana at their outlets. The Presentation League was designed to foster discussion amongst the temporary teams. Beyond this initiative, a team comprised of members from all departments organised office leisure activities, such as the Friday afternoon radio hour, during which popular music would be played across the office floor. Although these organisation-driven formats existed and I was able to observe the interactions they triggered, the employees' perception of the formal divide persisted.

Yet, when mapping the persons with whom my interlocutors spent their lunch and *chai* breaks, a strikingly different picture emerged, characterised by strong interlinkages not only within each employees' team, but also across the entire office. Furthermore, the lunch groups mirrored neither the formal team structures nor the organisational hierarchy (that divided team leads and team members) or the job type division between the standard and embedded teams (Figure 12).

These emergent sub-systems remained stable for several months or even years, as members met regularly for lunch at a table in the cafeteria or a col-

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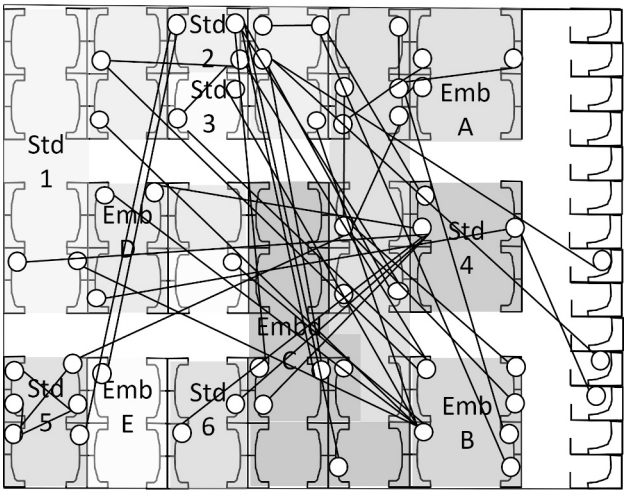
Figure 12: Lunch group connections at the city office



league's desk. When decisions were triggered to place a takeaway order from one of the numerous restaurants nearby, initiators would either start a multi-window chat session or directly approach the groupmates to ask for their order, then would fetch the bags from reception once the food arrived. When all had eaten, washed their hands and potentially stowed their tiffins back in their bags, the group would gather again to go outside the office for a short walk through the compound or around the corner to the kiosk for *mukhwas* (anise flavoured breathe fresheners) or chocolates. In the afternoon, some of the groups would gather again for a *chai* break – each group had their favourite *chai* stall on the main road.

6.2.2. Patterns of emerging informational sub-systems

The lunch groups represented a rather egalitarian structure that diverged from the formal differentiation categories and sub-systems. The membership criteria for the lunch groups varied, but one rather surprising criteria became salient: "batchmateship" – a term frequently used in Advice Company to refer to colleagues who joined the organisation at the same time. A large proportion of the lunch groups consisted of colleagues who had joined the organisation

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at the same time. Some of them had been at the same college and were hired via the intense campus recruitment process. Many of them shared the experience of having "lost" collegemates in each new decision-making round, until they – the two or three "chosen ones" – finally "made it" together. Even when the group members were not from the same college, belonging to the same "batch" and having jointly gone through the process of becoming a member of the organisation at the same time was described as a strong bonding experience that could form persistent informal groups on a level that was independent from the organisational structure.

Sonali and Ameya demonstrated the important link that batchmateship could provide between new colleagues. Sonali, from the city office, asked me which teams I had accompanied at the main office. When I began to name them, Sonali instantly prompted the name of Ameya, who had been her batchmate five years prior. She could recall the team Ameya had been in and knew where she was now. When I was back at the main office, I mentioned to Ameya that I had accompanied a former batchmate of hers at the city office. Accordingly, she did not even have to think for a second to come up with Sonali's name.

But the lunch groups not only evolved around batchmateship; several groups consisted of members from former team structures that had originated in the early days, when the department was known as the "fun place". While the formal sub-systems had dissolved through organisational restructuring and members moving to other teams, the informal sub-system of the team remained intact across teams, job types and hierarchy levels. In one remarkable example, the sub-system even persisted across offices. I accompanied Sheeba in the main office and asked her about a laminated group picture at her desk. She told me enthusiastically about her old team at the city office and how it had been closed three years ago. But most of the former members had taken new jobs in other teams at the city office and she desperately wanted a job at the location. A few months later, she managed to get a placement at the city office, and during my fieldwork there, I recognised several of the colleagues in her photo when I accompanied her to lunch.

6.2.3. Lunch groups: A totally independent sub-system?

These lunch groups existed as a stable category of emergent sub-systems in parallel to the functional and hierarchical differentiations. They emerged from shared values – either through members' shared joining experience or work

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experience in a "distant past" – and were independent (in their communication structure) from the organisational value system of client centricity. While the communication in these sub-systems did not function or process information according to the organisational framework, the lunch group subsystems nonetheless reinforced the organisational boundaries, as they could not exist without the organisation. The lunch groups could also be seen as networks – forms of social order consisting of reflexive contacts that could emerge within or between social systems (Holzer 2010: 163) – and they repeated the system/environmental differentiation. Thus, the lunch groups represented an informal network within the organisation that were restricted by organisational membership (ibid.: 158).

The independence of lunch groups from the formal structure of the organisation became salient when I initially tried to set up focus groups to discuss topics of misunderstanding. I discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4) why focus groups did not prove helpful for generating data. However, before I refrained from using that method I had the idea of letting my interlocutors decide the persons with whom they would like to have the discussion; one of my thoughts was that lunch groupmates might provide a sound basis for a discussion group. But Ameya opted for a different group, consisting of colleagues in her work team. When I pointed out that we could also set up a group with her lunchmates, she answered: "You know, these guys are my pals, I am not sure if I want to discuss work items with them." Ameya definitely interacted with some of her lunchmates with respect to work-related issues, but she perceived the explicit connection of this lunch sub-system with discussion of her work sub-system as inappropriate. For her, the focus group event did not constitute a condition in which she was willing to transfer information and resources from the informal to the formal context (Holzer 2010: 162).

In other situations, however, a transfer of interaction across the formal/informal divide occurred. As informal as the lunch groups might have been perceived, they certainly had an influence on the formal structures within the organisation. In the interviews, my interlocutors assessed such informal connections as potentially unfair, since friendly contact with a member in the group might result in favouritism with respect to promotion opportunities. When I accompanied Sonali, from the standard team, I observed such an example. Joel, a team lead, who sometimes joined her lunch group, contacted her via the chat program and told her about an upcoming job opportunity in one of the embedded teams. He asked if she would be interested in applying for it. The communication medium he chose indicates

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the semi-formal nature of the conversation. Furthermore, the adjustments made to accommodate the situation necessitated "switching" between contexts (Mische and White 1998: 710). By choosing the chat program, Joel was able to contact her without revealing the content of his message to others, as he would have done had he simply come by her desk. On the other hand, he did not choose to communicate via the more formal email channel, nor did he call her to his cubicle or a meeting room. But he also did not choose to raise the topic over the lunch break, when it would have fallen into the informal sphere. The chat program allowed for the semi-formal style of informing her of this job opportunity without raising the attention of other (also potentially eligible and interested) teammates.

6.3. Concluding remarks on the organisational system

Part I has analysed Advice Company as a social system on the basis of Niklas Luhmann's Systems Theory. In Chapter 4, I illustrated how complex organisations shape and underline their boundaries with the environment, drawing on the example of the elaborate entry procedures at the main office. Advice Company further differentiates itself from its environment in its communication with the most relevant environmental systems: clients and freelancers. These systems are at opposite extremes of the client centricity scale, despite being attended to through structurally similar boundaries. In Chapter 5, I demonstrated how client centricity constitutes a superior value in the organisational system, not only with respect to the organisation's external boundaries, but also in its internal hierarchy.

Through a comparison of the three offices' respective access procedures, equipment and atmosphere, it became clear that the offices could be placed on a continuum of client centricity. The main office is the most client-centric location, the city office occupies a middle position on the continuum and the street office is the least client-centric of the three. The analysis of office atmosphere further revealed the oppositional value of the organisation's guiding difference that runs as a counter-current to client centricity: the ground reality.

Chapter 6 carved out the organisation's further differentiation into emergent sub-systems on the basis of job type hierarchies that follow the client centricity paradigm, with jobs with the most direct client interaction at the top of the hierarchy. In the street office, however, the internal differentiation

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orientates on the value ground reality and hence reverses the client centricity scale.

Following Luhmann's categories of conform/deviant system in system differentiation, I visualised (in Section 6.2) the emergence of lunch groups as informal sub-systems. These sub-systems provide communication bridges across the organisation's formal sub-systems and enable translocal ties between them. One hypothesis is that employees' shared history as batchmates or (ex-)teammates creates an egalitarian setting that allows them to bridge the intra-organisational borders.

Part I of this book has demonstrated the structures of the client-centric organisation, in which closeness to the client is he highest value and, consequently, associated with prestige and power. The analysis has illustrated the leading influence of the social system on the communication and behaviour of its members, who act in accordance with the client centricity value paradigm, independent of their office location or functional proximity to clients. Furthermore, the analysis has shown that the emergence of sub-systems is dependent on the organisation's guiding difference client centricity/ground reality. The physical proximity of members in the open plan office setting does not suffice for the emergence of sub-systems, as internal differentiation (predominantly) occurs on the basis of client centricity. The value ground reality seems to counterbalance these structures and sometimes even invert the client-centric orientation of the organisation, although it remains an implicitly expressed opposing value. In Part II of this book, the focus will shift from the structure of Advice Company to its inter- and intra-system interactions. I will demonstrate that working misunderstandings repeat these organisational structures and, at the same time, strengthen them via the system's autopoiesis.

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