6. Social intuition in task-related interaction: Stimulating development, cooperation and assessing change readiness

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Abstract
While much of organizational life is made up by social interactions, the role of affective and automatic processes in these interactions is still underexplored. In this study we particularly seek to understand how social intuition is consumed in practice to shed further light on the subjective micro-processes of interaction. We do so by relying on inferences from managers with heightened awareness to social and emotional cues. The data comprise two successive sets of interviews that are used to explore experiences with, functions of and situations in which references to these social intuitions are referred to. Our insights describe references to intuition during a variety of work processes. These references are made with the purpose to assist the other person in their development, to address the unsaid to foster collaboration and to sense what is the right time to share information to increase the likelihood of acceptance of new ideas. These descriptions reveal a role for intuition in development, cooperation and change and extend current conceptualizations of social intuition beyond first impressions and selection. As such it contributes to further unpacking the notion of social intuition as well as to the literature on sensory processing sensitivity by explicating references to social intuition of these professionals.

Keywords: attributions and stories, social intuition and sensory processing sensitivity.
6.1 Introduction

Much of organizational life is made up by the social linkages we have with others. At the very core of many organizational tasks there is a component of interaction that is vital for organizational functioning and flourishing (Ambady, 2010; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Theories of organization have fallen short of the affective and intuitive nature that make up large parts of social work life (Ashkanasy et al., 2014; Lieberman, 2007; Neisser, 1963), while it “plays a prominent role in our relationships, in our judgments of other people and our behaviors towards them” (Neisser, 1963: 1). It is at this dyadic level of interaction that unconscious information is exchanged (Kahneman & Klein, 2009), in the form of immediate liking (Vaughan, 1979), the life-giving energy that is transmitted from another person (Owens et al., 2016) or the reading of unconsciously glanced information.

The literature on intuition that explicitly addresses these affective and automatic evaluations has likewise hinted at the limited understanding of the tacit components that drive social interaction (Sinclair, 2011). The “rapid and automatic evaluation of another person’s cognitive and/or affective state through the perception and unconscious processing of verbal and/or nonverbal indicators” (Gore & Sadler-Smith, 2011: 310) has its applications in the formation of first impressions of others (Ambady, 2010; Lieberman, 2000), assessment and performance appraisals. Therefore, organizational scholars have started to study the role of intuition as means of decision-making informed by first impressions in contexts of employee selection, coworker preference and performance appraisals (Miles & Sadler-Smith, 2014; Sadler-Smith, 2016b).

However, there is reason to believe that the exchange of tacit information is not restricted to the formation of first impressions. The affective and tacit dimension forms an integral function of the human brain (Lieberman, 2007) and seems an ongoing process that is hard to control (Gore & Sadler-Smith, 2011). There is some scattered knowledge that this subjective information is important during regular work interactions. Leaders’ ability to read emotional cues of others has been related to success in strategic and organizational change (Sanchez-Burks, Bartel, Rees, & Huy, 2016; Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009), as well as transformation and growth of employees (L. Downey, Papageorgiou, & Stough, 2006; Greenleaf & Spears, 2002; Van Dierendonck & Heeren, 2006). Related fields of organizational learning (Crossan et al., 1999) and the creation of shared meaning (Sadler-Smith, 2008) highlighted that the origin of development and change is intuitive. Therefore it seems that tacit processes also play a role in the micro-processes of cooperation.
These promising routes outlined above, lack inductive and interpretive work on managers accounts’ of how and why these subjective forms of knowledge are shared at work. Therefore, in this paper we have the aim to further theoretical development on the concept of social intuition by relying on interpretations of managers. To gain deep insight in the micro-processes of interaction at work, we draw on insights of managers that have an increased awareness of social and emotional cues. The informants exhibit above average sensitivity towards both environmental and internal stimuli and have a more efficiently developed unconscious processing which favors intuition (Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron, Aron, & Jagiellowicz, 2012) and can therefore serve as particularly relevant group to study intuition (Dane, 2011; Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2007). The data consist of a combination of two successive samples of interviews using a phenomenological approach to understand intuition from within (Akinci & Sadler‐Smith, 2012; Hodgkinson & Sadler‐Smith, 2003; Sadler-Smith, 2016b). Hence, the data reflect attributions to intuition rather than capturing the phenomenon in situ (Blume & Covin, 2011). The first phase consists of 21 interviews on the subjective nature of social interactions of service professionals. The second phase of data collection was formed by findings on attributions to feelings and automatic evaluations of others in the first phase. This resulted in a total set of 44 interviews that formed the base for this paper.

The results describe references to intuitions in interpersonal interactions with existing relations at work. The descriptions of reading unconscious information are used for developmental purposes, to foster cooperation or to increase the likelihood of getting ideas across in the organization. The practice of asking questions or openly sharing the information to see how it resonated with the other person addressed the unsaid in the context of development and cooperation. For the final purpose informants sensed when was the right time to share the information. We used the framework of organizational learning to shed light on the integration of these social intuitions in work relationships. Our findings extend current conceptualizations of social intuition with developmental, cooperative and strategic purposes and we describe social intuition in the context of highly sensitive professionals.
6.2 Theoretical background

6.2.1 Social intuition

Much of professional life runs through social interaction with others (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) in order to accomplish organizational tasks. During collaborative tasks, job interviews, social gatherings at work, processes of partner selection and leader-follower relations the interpersonal interaction plays a key role in task performance. The way to engage in social relations at work can have both direct and indirect outcomes. For example, the composition and type of social relations can have direct beneficial as well as detrimental effects (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Heaphy & Dutton, 2008) on job-satisfaction, well-being and learning, while the reading of unconscious thoughts in social interaction can also indirectly affect leaders’ effectiveness in change processes (Sanchez-Burks et al., 2016; Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009). However, the micro-processes that direct these social interaction have thus far been out of investigation of organizational phenomena (Ashkanasy et al., 2014; Sinclair, 2011) and may provide the potential to uncover phenomena currently hidden in higher level outcomes. In order to better understand the micro-processes of this complex and subjective phenomenon (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) we need to take the unconscious and affective components into account (Neisser, 1963).

As particular form of automatic and affective evaluations, intuition is proposed to play an important role in the micro-processes of relationships at work (Neisser, 1963; Vaughan, 1979). The complexity involved in interpersonal interaction and the incomplete information about the other person provides floor for automatic, affective and rapid evaluations of others (Agor, 1987; Haidt, 2001; Lieberman, 2000) as well as subjective interpretations and biases (Gore & Sadler-Smith, 2011). Intuition is “essential to optimal social and interpersonal functioning” (Ambady, 2010: 271) as it provides additional information through the “rapid and automatic evaluation of another person’s cognitive and/or affective state through the perception and non-conscious processing of verbal and/or nonverbal indicators.” (Gore & Sadler-Smith, 2011: 310).

The evaluations that emerge through an unconscious process of intuiting (Sadler-Smith, 2016b) are characterized by high levels of affect (Adolphs & Damasio, 2001) and immediate (dis)liking of someone ( Vaughan, 1979) in case of social interaction. While this heuristic approach of interaction also contains biases, the rapidly generated intuitions (Ambady, 2010) can be surprisingly accurate. Some even go that far in blasting too much thinking and deliberation before taking action (Dijksterhuis & Nordgren, 2006; Wilson &
Schooler, 1991). This additional information is continuously generated and the reception of this information is based on audio, visual, bodily and/or verbal communication.

Literature on psychology has particularly highlighted the role of social intuitions in first impressions of others (Ambady, 2010; Ambady, Krabbenhof, & Hogan, 2006) and how they form a distinct spontaneous mechanism in the brain (Lieberman, 2000, 2007). First impressions are exemplified by the incompleteness of information as well as the uncertainty that prompt an intuitive judgment. These judgments when meeting new others occur in situations that require a judgmental task such as employee selection or performance appraisals. Empirical work on this phenomenon has started to highlight the role of social intuition in the process of employee selection (Miles & Sadler-Smith, 2014; Sadler-Smith, 2016b).

However, the automatic and unconscious component of social interaction makes it likely to be present throughout a variety of work processes. Intuition and rational analysis are considered as two integral parts of human thinking (Epstein et al., 1996; Sloman, 1977), and the unconscious is present throughout all kinds of work processes. The processes of social interaction are not linear (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), while these often have not been taken into account in the analysis. For instance, the reading of unconscious glances (Kahneman & Klein, 2009), unconscious gestures (Sinclair, 2011), emotional cues (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009), voice expression, body language and sensing when something is amiss or someone is lying (Epstein, 1994; Epstein et al., 1996), provide information about the other person(s) (Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011).

In particular, the reading of non-conscious information has been associated with strategic and organizational change (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), individual learning and the creation of shared meaning (Sadler-Smith, 2008) and cooperation processes (Rand, Greene, & Nowak, 2012, 2013). This makes the tacit component of interaction relevant during times of change and transformation (L. Downey et al., 2006; Sanchez-Burks et al., 2016). There is a particular role for leaders to guide these processes. The success of change processes relies on the leaders’ ability to read collective emotions and address these during the change process (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009). Likewise, intuition has been associated with transformational leadership practices of female managers (L. Downey et al., 2006) and as guiding information for servant leaders to provide direction or stimulate followers’ growth (Van Dierendonck & Heeren, 2006).

In the context of change and leadership the communication of the tacit components becomes more central to the integration of this information into the organizational process.
at hand. In this case the framework of organizational learning (Crossan et al., 1999) provides insight in how the outcomes of intuitive processes can be integrated into the organization. This framework makes a distinction between the intra-individual and inter-individual level of interaction in the integration of intuition. With regards to this framework the processes of intuiting, interpreting and integration are of particular relevance. The first process of intuiting occurs at the intra-individual level, while the second is described at either the intra-individual level or the inter-individual level. The process of integration requires a transition to the interpersonal level.

In particular the processes of interpreting and integrating are relevant in sensitive topics that social intuitions may uncover. The process of sharing information read from unconscious cues at the individual or group level is not a commonly accepted stance in the Western culture (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009). Particularly, the sharing of this information is often not included in immediate task descriptions, but failing to address them may result in failure of organizational change (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009).

Therefore, in this paper we further unravel the role of affective and automatic processes involved in interpersonal interaction that stretch beyond first impressions towards the reading of individual and collective cues present in cooperative and coordinative tasks. Especially in the context of change and development, the communication of the intuitive information seems of particular importance. In terms of infusing non-verbal information into organizational processes the term integrating is used (Crossan et al., 1999). The micro-dynamics of decoding of intuitive information imbued by social cues together with the need to bring this information into the organizational process sheds light on the micro-mechanisms of social intuition. We examine when and how notions of social intuition are referred to in organizational settings.

6.2.2 Selecting a particular context: intuition and sensory processing sensitivity

The openness towards emotional cues of others is understood as attending to and decoding of unconscious information (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2009). Professionals that are highly sensitive have an increased openness to emotional and social cues and score high on the personality trait of sensory processing sensitivity. This trait of sensory processing sensitivity involves deeper cognitive processing of stimuli driven by higher emotional reactivity (Aron & Aron, 1997). It reflects a human biological response system that is observed in among 20% of the population and is also observed in most animal species. Jagiellowicz and colleagues (2012) showed that this higher reactivity coincides with
increased neurological activation that involved higher-order visual processing when small changes in stimuli were noticed.

As a coinciding characteristic these professionals have better developed intuitions and a general preference for intuition as way of knowing. The sensitivity towards the own mental state (Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron et al., 2012), is related to deeper unconscious processing (Sinclair, 2010) and to higher awareness of “gut feelings” and “hunches” (Dane & Pratt, 2009; Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2007). Put simply, attributions to intuition are related to the extent in which individuals are in touch with their own feelings (Epstein et al., 1996). According to Jung (1938) sensitivity and preference for intuition can be regarded as synonyms for the same phenomenon.

Work on sensory processing sensitivity revealed three components that together make up the trait. These are ease of excitement, low sensory threshold and aesthetic sensitivity (Smolewska, McCabe, & Woody, 2006). The trait and its components have been subject of study in clinical psychological work, thereby highlighting primarily negative and clinical aspects of the trait. For example, it has been associated with being prone to overstimulation due to an overload of sensory input, sensitivity to pain, loud noises, emotional sensitivity and having a complex inner life. The ease of excitement and low sensory threshold have particularly been associated with social anxiety, depression and autism, whereas aesthetic sensitivity has been related to attention to details and anxiety (Liss, Mailloux, & Erchull, 2008; Liss, Timmel, Baxley, & Killingsworth, 2005).

As a consequence of the primarily psychological and clinical conceptualization of this trait, it has so far been disregarded in the explorations in organizational processes. However, enhanced sensitivity to social and emotional cues contains potentially an important feature in light of the recent “affective turn” in organization studies. Sensitive professionals are betting in avoiding errors, more conscientious and more in touch with their thoughts and emotions (Aron, 2010). The deeper level of processing information and increased awareness for details may generate more associations and connections in the unconscious mind, or a greater receptivity of information, that result in intuitions that are generated before others may have them. While, sensory processing sensitivity has been associated with higher levels of stress at work in form of perceived work-load, emotional overload and need for recovery (Evers, Rasche, & Schabracq, 2008), it has also been described as an asset in terms of encouraging “creativity, aesthetic sense, parenting ability and giftedness in various fields” (Aron & Aron, 1997: 365). If, in particular, this enhanced social sensitivity goes together with “more rapid and effective unconscious processing,
commonly called intuition” (Aron et al., 2012: 6), professionals with this trait may yield important information to advance theoretical development of the concept of social intuition.

6.3 Method
The abstract nature of management theories are typically far off from the practice and experience of practitioners in the “real world” (Weick, 2003: 453). Qualitative approaches that aim to reveal the essence of experience (Gill, 2014) “that make themselves known through intuition” (Husserl, 2001: 86) have the potential to reflect the practices of practitioners more closely (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011). One approach that comes close to what is experienced ‘out there’ reflects the epistemological perspective of phenomenology. Phenomenological approaches reflect an ontological position of being-in-the-world (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011) that allows for the inclusions of the aesthetic, kinesthetic and other intelligences in the research process (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). This makes it a particularly suitable approach to study the affective and subjective nature of intuitive experiences (Akinci & Sadler-Smith, 2012; Miles & Sadler-Smith, 2014; Petitmengin, 2014; Sadler-Smith, 2016b).

Having outlined our ontological position, the research process followed an abductive approach. Abduction offers flexibility to move between data and theory and vice versa to unravel novel theoretical insights (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). It explicitly allows pursuing new directions during the research process based on reading the theory. The first phase consisted of 21 interviews that elaborated on the subjective nature of social network interactions of service-professionals. These data uncovered theoretical insights about the affective and intuitive nature of interaction and simultaneously theoretically pointed at the incompleteness of the current understandings of social intuition. Based on this potential for theory development (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007), we decided to conduct a consecutive phase of data collection. We approached seven informants from the first round to discuss their experiences using intuition in more detail. A snowball technique provided direction to identify new potential informants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Heckathorn, 1997). This approach offers guidance when the relevant population is hard to discern from the outside. This technique resulted in an informant driven technique of another 23 interviews. We stopped interviewing when we reached saturation of the data.

During the second phase, we were particularly interested in incidents in which intuition became prevalent. In this phase we employed a critical incident technique (CIT)
(Akinci, 2014; Flanagan, 1954) that can be used to study intuition as inductive method without predefined hypotheses (Akinci, 2014; Miles & Sadler-Smith, 2014). This technique aims at the identification and description of critical incidents, events or issues by the informant to capture experiences and behavior in a certain situation. In addition, factors that are considered important in relation to this situation can also be reported. Important for this study is the opportunity for informants to give detailed accounts of their own experiences. We acknowledge that intuitive information can go by unnoticed (Dane, 2011) or is automatically acted upon (Yanow & Tsoukas, 2009). For this empirical inquiry we are bound to the intuitions that are remembered or retrospectively attributed to as such.

In addition to the interviews, informants were asked to fill out a short version of the HSP-scale (Aron & Aron, 1997) and the ratio experiential inventory scale (REI) (Epstein et al., 1996) after the interview was conducted. This provided information on their faith in intuition as well as perceived sensitivity towards stimuli and contextualized the findings.

6.3.1 Data

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 130 minutes, with an average of 62 minutes and they were all tape recorded with permission of the informant. The interviews were held at places chosen by the informant and were conducted in the office, home or cafes. The interviews were transcribed shortly after the interview to ensure reliability (Eisenhardt, 1989). Interviews were transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word.

The informants occupied professions in consulting, managing, training and executive coaching and had an average of 23 years of experience. This contributes to their domain knowledge and the level of expertise that is important to develop cognitive structures that favor intuition (Dane & Pratt, 2007). They obtained university or doctoral degrees. Further, these informants scored significantly above the average score for the REI scale ($t(39) = 4.268; p = 0.00$) as verified by a one sample t-test compared to the original study (Epstein, 1994; Epstein et al., 1996). The informants further reported above average scores (5.33) on the High Sensitive Person scale (Aron & Aron, 1997) compared to the original study of these authors, likewise verified by a one sample t-test ($t(36) = 7.169; p =0.00$). This gives a justification that our sample qualifies for placing the findings in the context of social sensitive professionals.

Apart from their responses on the survey scales of being sensitive, informants explicitly identified themselves as sensitive or intuitive in their work. It seemed that for some this sensitivity seemed to be more conscious than for others. This sensory part was
described as being able to see more or faster than others. Some professionals referred to this as seeing, while others emphasized feeling as primary source of information. Apart from seeing earlier than others, informants also reflected that they were able to see the essence of experience that was sometimes not yet conscious for the other person.

That is that I am sometimes able to taste the essence of what someone, what is not yet conscious for the other person, but what I can then bring to the surface of their awareness. (R40)

The experience of this set of informants contributed to their awareness of their trait and preference for intuition. In particular, some of these even understood their sensitivity in a positive light: “Along the way you notice that it [being sensitive] can function as a powerful instrument, especially in a world where it is not done to use it.” (R24)

6.3.2 Analysis

The interview transcripts have been analyzed using software package Nvivo10 for Windows. We follow a similar approach as recent qualitative work on intuition (see Sadler-Smith, 2016b) by conducting a disciplined qualitative analysis following Gioia and colleagues (2013). We started with open coding of the data on the topic of intuition for all the data. While intuition was an unexpected outcome of the first phase, it was central in the data collection of the second phase. We identified 99 incidents that described a professional experience with intuition. For each incident we coded elements as the experience of intuition, the situation in which this experience occurred, the interpretation of the purpose of the intuition in that situation, how intuition was followed up and anything else that seemed relevant. When cases were reported on multiple times during the interview, they were coded under the same case.

Intuition was most often reported on in interpersonal situations thereby showing the importance of intuition in social interactions. These interpersonal situations reflected both situations at work such as project meetings, training or coaching sessions, hiring employees and situations that crossed organizational boundaries such as job talks, social network formation and maintenance, partner selection and so on. By taking a closer look at the scholarly work on intuition we recognized that the concept of social intuition in its current form reflected only part of our data. Subsequent analysis focused on 205 pieces of coding text that reflected interpersonal situations. We recognized a distinction between references to intuition when meeting new others and ongoing work interactions. After the first round of coding, the data structure was refined and codes were categorized by mode of
reception, purpose of intuition in situations involving interpersonal interaction and the peculiarities of sensitive professionals. In order to display the depth present in the data we decided to focus intuitions referred to in existing work contexts. This systematic approach allowed us to observe patterns in the data and to generate theoretical dimensions (Gioia et al., 2013) as shown in Figure 6.1. and Table 6.1.

Figure 6.1. *Data structure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First order concepts</th>
<th>Second order concepts</th>
<th>Aggregate dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Positive confirmation gives rise to trusting insights</td>
<td>• Experience to trust intuition</td>
<td>Acknowledging sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Over the years the approach has become more conscious</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sharing information from intuition and have other person interpret this information</td>
<td>• Supporting others by providing information</td>
<td>Social intuition in context of development and cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sharing interpretation of intuition to whether it makes sense to the other person</td>
<td>• Addressing the unsaid by asking questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The unsaid is addressed through asking implicit questions to the other person(s)</td>
<td>• Waiting for the right moment to integrate information</td>
<td>Social intuition in context of change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The unsaid is explicitly addressed to find new ways of cooperation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respondents sense that intuition will not yet be received by others and wait</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Respondents wait for an appropriate setting to share information</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggregate dimensions (#)</td>
<td>Second order concept (#)</td>
<td>Exemplary quote</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acknowledging sensitivity (87)</td>
<td>Awareness of sensitivity / intuition (54)</td>
<td>In fact I am, well in fact, but like: “That is the solution.” And I try to analyze it in hindsight. (R25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experience to trust intuition (33)</td>
<td>My approach has changed. When I started working, I was quite nagging to get it done my way. (R24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social intuition in the context of development, cooperation (48)</td>
<td>Supporting others by providing information (24)</td>
<td>And with the intuition I can much faster reach that point and the other person says: “Great, this is exactly what it is about. This is the essence. Am I doing this the whole time?” We do not have the solution yet, but the other person gives feedback like: “This is true.” (R23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Addressing the unsaid by asking questions (24)</td>
<td>If I am coaching someone, I also use my intuition. Ehm, then I am talking with someone and I am asking questions and then I think? Where is this heading? I do not know, but I feel from the answers what I need to pursue and then I notice: “There is something.” (R23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social intuition in the context of change (26)</td>
<td>Waiting for the right moment to share information (26)</td>
<td>Well, that is all sensing. So if someone is very - you enter a room and you sense whether this is a good moment to address this point. Right? Like at home, when you knew when you had or had not to ask you parents for a new bike. (R38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 6.4 Findings I

Intuitions were most often referred to in work situations with colleagues and clients. This implies that within relationships at work intuitive hints are picked up and decoded. This was reported in project meetings, management meetings, training sessions, executive-coaching sessions. These are situations that do not contextually favor judgments. Instead in these situations intuition entailed a source of extra information. In these situations the informants shared the information that was attributed to intuition in order to see how it could impact the situation. In particular, their references to intuition contained a developmental, cooperative or strategic aim. The first two purposes were realized by providing the information labeled as intuition to others and or addressing the unsaid by asking questions. When intuition was strategically used it was integrated by waiting for the right moment to get ideas across. Overall our findings involve conscious reflections to the integration of intuition, as is highlighted by the following informant that runs large infrastructure projects; using intuition in a playful manner to get jointly further:

Using it [intuition] as a playful way by making use of images and the way in which people non-verbally react, to see whether you, whether you can find something that
makes that you can deepen a subject or jointly working out an idea. There is no need to make it big, but the essence is that you get further together. (R25)

In case the illustrative quotes contains particular relevant parts, these will be boldly marked.

6.4.1 Developmental purposes

The first way in which social intuition was referred to in ongoing work interactions was the need to support others by providing information. This approach of sharing information in plain form was done with the purpose to help the other person. This way of reading information and sharing it often entailed one-to-one encounters, but could also take place in group-sessions albeit the shared information focused on one person. This reading of information involved personal information about the other, that was interpreted as containing possibly relevant information for the other person and check this with this person. This then formed an opening to see whether this insight made sense to the other person, as is exemplified by this informant:

Well, yes I was in a meeting with her and eh, well if I get a very strong image then I just say it. Then I say like: “I do not know where it comes from, perhaps, perhaps, I am totally missing the point here, and maybe, then you have to say it, but I get this and this image about you.” (R28)

In this case the meaning of the image was not clear or interpreted by the informant. This implies that the interpretation of the information and its potential value is transferred to the other person in the situation. In other situations, references to intuition were internally interpreted and the informant shared the interpretation. Based on an internal confirmation the information is shared and according to this informant also experienced by the other person in the situation.

Perhaps there comes an image with it too. Maybe an image from the past, or that I see that person as a child. Or something like that. From that there an idea or a feeling arises saying: “Ah, I get it!” A sort of intuitive understanding like: “This is what you feel! This is what it makes it so difficult for you now.” (...) Or this is why you locked yourself up. That is not something that has been deliberated on much. That is something where observations, thus also sensory perception, images and thoughts, also analytical thoughts – it is like everything comes together and then and then such an insight emerges. And when I feel it, I know: “This is right.” [snaps fingers] Then I say it out loud and the other person feels it too. (R40)

Informants refer to this as sensing in which direction they have to ask or to go to retrieve information for the other person. One informant indicated this as follows:

In coaching I often know, ehm, I feel whether there is something or which direction it wants to go. Without actually knowing it. That helps to follow the right track of
information. Thinking like: “Here is energy – this is what I need to follow. Here is something.” (R41)

If not in a particular context of development, informants waited for the right time to share this information. This information is then picked up in a certain setting, but waited for the right moment – in this case a gathering with that other person – to share this information.

I am working in a particular context and something is tickling me. (…) I notice that he is incredibly smart, he draws and reads pictures. He immediately understands what is going on. But I just sense something is not right. So then I wait for an opportunity to talk to him. That needs to be with the two of us, you cannot do that when you are in a meeting with others. (R24)

The tactical component of trying to interpret intuition into the work process was an intuitive process too, where the informant waited for an appropriate situation to address what he has seen. Waiting for the right moment goes rather playfully. In the back of the head he reminds himself to see when there will be an opportunity:

That this is my instrument. It is not that I think: “Now I have to use my method.” That is not how it works, it goes playfully. And if not today, then perhaps tomorrow or next week there is a possibility [to share what I have seen]. (R24)

Finally, informants reported to have disregarded what they attributed to intuition earlier, but learned over the course of the years to use this information for the benefit of others.

6.4.2 Cooperation purposes

The main component to improve cooperation at the micro-level was to address sensations that were observed underneath the surface. This cooperation involved project meetings, training sessions and managerial meetings. The unsaid information could involve both group-level information as well as individually perceived information. In order to exchange the information, informants emphasized that the relationship with the other(s) needed to be good. One informant reflected on particularity of communicating intuition in ongoing work interactions as follows:

And if there is a good relationship, I actually use it [intuition] to help the other person, and to read what is going on with this person. And if something is bothering this person, to get that out in the open to have our conversation work out better. (R23)

In this sense this is related to developmental purposes of intuition, but specifically aimed at cooperation. We call the approach to foster cooperation within projects, meetings and regular interactions addressing the unsaid by asking questions. In this case informants signaled a discrepancy between what was said and what they unconsciously perceived as information. The following quote illustrates that an informant in a large infrastructure
project refers to intuition to address what is going on underneath the surface of a project meeting. With this she tries to stimulate a better cooperation. She describes that she gets her insights from both seeing how people sit and react and from feeling what is ‘in the air’:

Yes, I think almost by just looking. Partly by looking, but sometimes is the tension – in this case it was tension – so enormous that it was almost tangible in the air. Yes, that sounds weird. (...) And if I looked at the people I saw them getting more tense, they starting to take a defensive sit – some people closed down, while others opened up – depending on the person. (...) So it is like asking questions when you have the feeling that something is not being said. At the same time when you feel this resistance, name it that you notice this resistance. Keep on asking questions until someone is saying: “I do not want this.” Questions about the content, not about the person. (...) What I did was giving it a name and started asking questions until people gave a reaction like: “Alright, no I indeed do not approve of this.” (R34)

In a different setting an informant was training a group of professionals. While he likewise sensed that something was amiss in the group, he decided to use a similar tactic. He and his partner brought the program of their training up for discussion to check what was right to do next. In cooperation with the group they are able to devise a better training program for that day. This informant illustrates this as follows:

We just felt that our approach was not going to work. You can then do your training but then you know that it is not going to work. (...) At that point we brought our program up for discussion with the group and decided to run another program for that day. (R24)

He admitted that he learned this over the years. Prior he ignored the information that he observed and interpreted it as having a heavy day ahead. He argued that this was because he tried to convince others, while he forgot to address the unsaid.

6.4.3 Assessing change readiness purposes

During other situations the sensing part was used to indicate the right timing of sharing the information. In this case intuition reflected a tactic to get new ideas or solutions across in the organization or the project. The right moment to share information reflected the maximization of the probability of having it integrated into the work process.

I just call it office-politics, like: “How do I get things across in the organization?” (...) That is also a very important moment for intuition. (R38)

In describing how this approach worked, informants highlighted the importance of waiting for the right moment when the minds of others were ready to receive a new solution. One informant exemplifies this process during a project meeting:

R25: Sometimes I am purposively not so much present in the beginning of a meeting. Then I am listening and then I hear repetitions. And then I see: “He is mainly
there, she is in that problem-space and they are stuck there.” Yes, and I am making a construct of that unconsciously or something. And then you wait how the conversation develops. It did not move on, or only limited or there is a backlash as the argument that has been made comes back again. Then the problem is building up and then you see patterns of repetitions. You see so many repetitions in meetings!

I: When do you get the insight then?

R25: Well sometimes really in the beginning, but then I am a bit looking for the timing, you know? Then it gets more strategic or diplomatic in when do I set in. **If it is too early, or if I set in too early, the intuition is gone.**

I: Why is it gone?

R25: **Since the minds were not ready then to accept a [new] solution.**

Waiting for the right moment to share the observed information could also mean that they had to wait for another day or week to share this information. Informants reported that experience created more patience to wait for this readiness of others. For instance, this manager scans the readiness for his idea, and thereby having the team determine whether they are ready:

> I do not know where it comes from. Like: “If we do this now, this is a good moment, as I expect that we will get problems with this in two years. So let’s start already.” And then I see people around me thinking like: “What are you doing?” And then I learned – earlier I was pushing it through – and now I think, I have mentioned it once and then it will work in their minds. They will come back on it. I am more calm with that, a bit older. (R38)

Others also reflected on the importance of experience on how to communicate the information that was crystal clear to them but not always to the other. The receptiveness of others to receive this information labeled as intuitive was important to get ideas across. In this case the informant justified the intuitive information himself and the moment of integration in the work processes was tactically awaited for.

In this case, it seems to involve a double layer of intuition; sensing when information from intuition is best to be communicated. The above describes how unconsciously read information is anticipated on in group settings and one-to-one encounters. These descriptions add a dimension to the current conceptualization of social intuition, which we will now elaborate on.

### 6.5 Findings II: Sensitive professionals’ reference to social intuition

In this paper we explored how sensitive professionals in contexts that involve interpersonal interactions refer to intuition. We particularly focused on the purpose and type of situations that these descriptions revealed. We extend current work on intuition in interpersonal interaction as well as explore how sensitive professionals report their sensitivity in
interpersonal interactions. Our results emphasize references to intuition in cooperative, coordinative and developmental tasks. We particularly outline the role of intuition in processes of development, cooperation and readiness for change. In doing so, we outline how these intuitions are interpreted and integrated into these various contexts by means of the framework of organizational learning (Crossan et al., 1999). Figure 6.2. displays the three purposes of intuitions described in social context and ways in which they are infused in the organizational process.

Figure 6.2. Conceptual framework purposes of social intuition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
<th>Within individual level</th>
<th>Dyadic or group level</th>
<th>Organizational level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose / Processes of social intuition</td>
<td>Intuiting</td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental and cooperative purposes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Giving information to other(s).</td>
<td>Depends on how information resonates with other person(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Asking questions to address the unsaid.</td>
<td>Depends on confirmation of other(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing readiness for change purposes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Done individually.</td>
<td>Timing depends on readiness of other(s) to receive idea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We relied on attributions to intuition as epistemological ground. This implies that informants may differ in their consumption of the concept and how they talk about it. We believe that the definitions that are given by the informants and the findings, propose new directions. Informants referred to these social intuitions as additional information. One particularly exemplified this as reading the second process:

So in a way I think that that is a kind of intuition. It’s being able to attune to and receive secondary processes that are going on all the time. You know? It is like all the time it is like you know (…) feeling you know what is in the air, or that kind of stuff. (R43)

First, intuitions about others are referred to promote development and cooperation. In these contexts attributions to intuitions are communicated in two ways. First, the plain information is shared and is seen whether it resonates with the other person. Second, informants asked questions to address what was observed underneath the surface. Some of

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16 Processes of intuition are borrowed from Crossan and colleagues (1999).
these developmental suggestions were not included in the task description, but were understood to serve cooperation by the informants. In that case they argue that the relation needs to be good in order to be able to foster cooperation and development in this way. With this finding, we explicate intuition for developmental purposes, something that is hinted at in literature of servant leadership (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002) when the leader uses intuition to give direction.

**Proposition 1:** Attributions to social intuition can be used to assist others in their development

**Proposition 2:** Attributions to social intuition can be used to foster cooperation

Yet, there was also a more tactical component in the reading of the collective information and others’ readiness to accept new ideas. The literature that has described openness to others’ emotions only partly captures this information as it is also referred to as the reading of mental readiness to buy in a new idea. This makes this interpretation different than reading others’ emotions.

**Proposition 3:** Social intuition is used to wait for the right moment to get information across in contexts of change

The creation of shared meaning with social information entailed both the importance of interpreting the information from intuition as well as trying to integrate this information into the work process at hand. This general finding of the serving and strategic component of social intuition has implications for both the literature of intuition as well as for the literature of sensory processing sensitivity.

Reflecting on intuition more generally, informants argued that the social component was more difficult than other managerial tasks.

But that I find more difficult still, that I find more difficult still, with people I find it more difficult still than a business like situation. Then I am totally in my comfort zone and pf I am a lot more convinced about myself even if I am wrong and with people I find that very confronting. (R38)

In order to trust the information from intuition the informants emphasize the importance of experience. Together with experiences, daring to share experiences that are remarkable was also noted as necessary.

By now I have - well you get confirmation with the work you do. In the beginning that I felt stomach ache, I did not dare to say it. And then I managed to say at last:
“Do you have stomach ache?” And then someone says: “Yes.” If you get that confirmation every time, then you know [that it is right]. (R32)

**Proposition 4: Experience creates greater confidence in the social intuition.**

Thus, for these informants their references to intuition in interpersonal contexts revealed itself in both new social encounters as well as existing social relationships. This provides more depth into the concept of social intuition.

### 6.6 Discussion and conclusions

#### 6.6.1 Theoretical contributions

In this paper we described how sensitive professionals refer to intuition in interpersonal situations. We mainly emphasized the role of intuition when engaging with existing relations at work. When intuitions emerged during regular work interactions they were interpreted and professionals tried to integrate the information into the work process by communicating the feeling in order to foster development of the other person, improve cooperation or to facilitate change. The integration of this information ran through checking this information or addressing questions to uncover the unsaid for the first two contexts described above. To facilitate change informants waited for the right moment to scan information. These findings create insight in both social intuition of sensitive professionals as well as the phenomenon itself. In what follows we outline the contributions of this paper in more detail.

The first contribution comprises adding a more detailed description of social intuition as one of the recently defined types of intuition. In particular, we describe with which purposes intuitions in existing work relationships are referred to. Instead of first-impression in contexts of selection, we find references to intuitive information for developmental, cooperative and assessing change readiness purposes. This highlights potential micro-processes underneath work processes that previously may have been covered by higher-level outcomes. With these findings we adhere to those who have suggested the role of intuition in change processes (Crossan et al., 1999).

Second, we give a detailed description of how attributions to intuition in social situations can be integrated into the work process at hand. This is particularly relevant for those hunches that arise in ongoing work interactions. With these descriptions we explicate and contextualize the implementation of intuition as next important step after the intuitive judgment is experienced (Sadler-Smith, 2016b). This links to literature on organizational
learning that argues that the implementation of new ideas starts with the emergence and interpretation of what is attributed to intuition (Crossan et al., 1999; Sadler-Smith, 2008). In particular, we highlight that during social interactions at work there are three ways moving from interpretation to the integration: sharing the information for co-interpretation, asking questions about the unsaid and tactically waiting for the right moment to share information. These findings can be particularly relevant for those leadership practices that are aimed at supporting the other person with all information that is at hand (Boyatzis, Smith, & Blaize, 2006; L. Downey et al., 2006; Van Dierendonck, 2011) while not being limited to objective information.

Third, our findings originate from a context of sensitive professionals that give detailed descriptions of their experiences with intuition. These fine-grained descriptions give insight in the use of intuition of professionals that score high on sensory processing sensitivity. This context contributes to calls to examine subgroups that are particularly open towards intuition (Dane, 2011; Sadler-Smith, 2016b; Sadler-Smith & Burke, 2009). Further, we add to the literature on sensory processing sensitivity a description of how attributions to intuition are referred to and in particular their role to bring situations further. Thus far, literature discussing sensory processing sensitivity has primarily emphasized the negative aspects of this trait, such as being more prone to neuroticism (Aron & Aron, 1997) and stress at work (Evers et al., 2008). Therefore, this study could put this trait in a more positive perspective, balancing the negative sides such as social anxiety and depression (Aron & Aron, 1997).

6.6.2 Limitations and future research

As every investigation, this study has its limitations. Our work gives contextual insight in the phenomenon of social intuition. Future work could examine whether the ideas that are proposed in this paper are common to other samples or restricted to this sample exhibiting higher levels of sensory processing sensitivity. Using the distinction made in this paper between social intuitions in new and existing relationships may provide direction for future fieldwork. Regarding social intuition in first encounters scholars can examine to what extent this information is complemented with verifiable analytical information. This could then give insight in the questions around the interplay between intuition and analysis (Dane & Pratt, 2007). In addition, there are particular leadership theories that have highlighted the prosocial conception of this job and hinted at the potential role for intuitive insights in
providing direction and to bridge the gap between available and necessary information (Greenleaf & Spears, 2002).

The supportive stance of servant-leader may have links with the developmental usage of sensitivity by professionals that are highly sensitive. Therefore it can be worth examining whether sensitive professionals are attracted to leadership styles as servant leadership or transformational leadership more than to other styles. In particular, literature on servant leadership lacks the micro foundations of how micro-cognitive experiences form the base for providing direction or enabling growth of followers. In this case it could actually function as double layer – the intuition or sensitivity of the servant leader may inform the follower on his or her own intuition and as such facilitate growth. Future work could conduct qualitative studies to examine the relation between intuition and servant leadership more closely.

Furthermore, future work can follow up on this work by extending the investigation into the concept of high sensitivity at work. This work could then combine both the valuable elements of this trait as well as the challenges that come with it, as described by Evers and colleagues (2008). Scholars could also look for other valued characteristics that come with the trait like creativity, teaching or being gifted. This work needs to be a combination of both verification of being sensitive as well as in-depth research on the particularities of this trait. One a methodological note, subsequent work may want to triangulate the subjective experiences of informants with either experiences of the other professionals in the situation or neurological measures on intuition.

The finding that this group of professionals that says to prioritize intuition in their work also interprets themselves as being highly sensitive asks for a closer examination. Future studies need to examine how this plays out in different contexts and test these suggestions quantitatively. This work then can also address the origins of different levels of preciseness with which intuitive experiences are reported on. Is this a consequence of differences in sensitivity, men or women, experiences, training or else? Future research could make an attempt to investigate whether these differences are subject to different levels of awareness towards intuitive experiences or alternatively reflecting different sensitivity to inner stimuli (Aron & Aron, 1997). In particular, it could give direction to future work to view sensory processing sensitivity as a neutral trait rather than marked by social anxiety and depression. It opens up an exploration of how and when sensitive professionals can be an asset to the workforce.