Strategizing in Extreme Contexts: An Archival Study of Doctors without Borders

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With this thesis, I hope to show my two sons the importance of perseverance and intellectual curiosity. In this world where too much emphasis is placed on quick wins, on things you must achieve quickly, we often forget the beauty and interest of devoting time and effort to realizing a goal or a dream, as well as the learning and growth that comes with the journey. For me, this work was both. Newton, Edwin, I hope you find many in your life that despite the difficulties, will inspire you to persevere and achieve what may sometimes seem unattainable. Be curious and brave.

Acknowledgements

1 Abstract

Extreme context strategizing: what does this mean?

Explaining it, I am keen.

Exploring an organization in extreme contexts,

What can be found in the archival texts?

The story of Doctors without Borders

In four extreme cases full of disorders.

A multifaceted, multi-level and complex process

Like a game of chess.

Faced with a moral dilemma,

Prioritizing and creating are on the agenda.

Sensemaking, ethical decision-making and learning

Are the key constituent sub-processes of extreme context strategizing.

Across diverse organizational types and boundaries, extreme contexts are increasingly frequent and have the potential to disrupt and devastate organizational life. When a context shifts from a relatively stable environment to an extreme one, strategizing becomes embedded within an evolving, uncertain, and hazardous environment. This study investigates the complexities of strategizing in such an extreme context.

Employing a case study design, this research contributes to the growing body of Extreme Context Research (ECR) in the field of management and organization studies (MOS) by theorizing how organizations respond to and operate within an extreme context. Specifically, four archival case studies from Doctors Without Borders (MSF) –an organization renowned for its work in extreme context–, are examined. These archival case studies include the 1994 Rwandan genocide against Tutsis and moderate Hutus, the violence of the new Rwandan regime in 1994 and 1995, the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania from 1994 to 1996 and the hunting and killing of Rwandan refugees in Zaire-Congo in 1996 and 1997.

The process of strategizing in an extreme context is unveiled through the lived experiences of organizational members, as documented in archival data from reports commissioned by the organization. Through the analysis of these reports, I uncover the nuanced interplay between individual and organizational levels, exposing the intricate connections between these levels within an extreme context. This study deepens scholarly understanding by elucidating the impact of the three temporal dimensions – past, present, and future – on organizational

sensemaking, ethical decision-making, and learning practices, which collectively shape strategizing in an extreme context. It advances theory by developing a dynamic, multi-level model of extreme context strategizing. This model is further illustrated through vignettes constructed from rich and unique secondary data sources, offering a detailed account of how strategizing in an extreme context evolves over time. The vignettes emphasize the constellation of practices that emerge in response to the challenges posed by such an extreme environment.

In addition, this study contributes to research methodology in demonstrating how archival data can reveal critical organizational processes, particularly strategizing in an extreme context. By analyzing archival reports, it uncovers the interplay between field experiences and strategic decision-making at headquarters, showing how prescribed procedures often diverge from actual execution in extreme environments while preserving insights free from memory distortion over time. Furthermore, archival resources, are invaluable for research, particularly in extreme contexts where trauma makes data collection through interviews or observations difficult. These records provide non-intrusive access to natural evidence over time, reducing the risk of re-traumatization for participants and researchers, while offering flexibility, cost-effectiveness, and a transparent audit trail, making them valuable to study phenomena in extreme contexts.

On a practical level, this study demonstrates that timely comprehension of the extreme context, responses to moral dilemmas, and learning both in and from these contexts foster reflection and reflexivity. Engaging in reflexive practices is critical in addressing two central questions situated in the extreme context: *Who are we?*" and "*What are we doing?*". These insights offer a potential pathway for understanding the complex, fluid, and emergent process of strategizing in an extreme context as an ongoing redefinition of organizational identity and strategic action.

2   Introduction

2.1   The Motivation

First, my interest in the strategizing process comes from my past as a chess player. My late father was a chess Grandmaster so I started to play when I was a little girl. I played my first Youth National Championship at the age of 7, participated in countless tournaments after that

and stopped competitions at the age of 18. Chess beginners are usually not capable to really elaborate and think about strategy which is one of the main reasons of losing. When they realize that strategizing throughout the game is essential and that it is constantly being challenged and evolves to the new position of the pieces, they instantly become much better players. This comes from practice; in other words, playing a lot. I played a lot, so I learned the importance of strategizing really early in my life.

Second, my interest in how people create and share knowledge, and how organizations learn came from my studies. I have always loved learning. I was obsessed with school as a toddler, which I associated with the place of learning. I was so eager to begin that I started school at the age of 2 years and 3 months, which was possible at the time in France. Generally, I have always enjoyed going to school. Out of curiosity, I took the 'Knowledge Management' course given by Dr Viktor Dörfler during my Erasmus exchange at the University of Strathclyde. Every lecture in this course was fascinating and raised exciting new questions for me. When the course ended, I felt that I had to know more and keep digging. I was at the end of my master's studies and the past years had been a challenge due to my personal and financial situation. Nevertheless, I told my professor at the time of my interest and he asked me to come and see him when I was ready to start a PhD. It was not an option I had really considered before, but it created a spark and so Viktor Dörfler became my thesis supervisor a year later and this journey began for me.

Third, my interest in International Organizations really started when I got involved with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) as an Undergraduate Student. I started to be very interested in the work of UNICEF after the devastating earthquake in Haiti in 2010. My interest in UNICEF got stronger when I became a mother two years later. I became an intern, then a student ambassador and a volunteer of the organization for a few years. I had the chance to get to know the organization from the inside and some of its archives thanks to Paulette Préhembaud, Secretary General of UNICEF France, who supported me and taught me a lot about UNICEF's practices, strategy and history. Furthermore, I did my master's thesis in collaboration with the UNECE's Transport Division. I observed the interactions and decision-making in a SC.3 working party and interviewed members of the UNECE Transport Division, different commissions and Member States' transport ministries in the UN offices in Geneva. I found extremely interesting studying this type of international organizations.

I chose to study another organization in order to deepen my knowledge of the practices of international organizations that speak out and fight for humans (be it their rights or their lives) and how they make decisions in the complex contexts they face. As a French person, I have often heard about the work of Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders and I wanted to know more about how this organization operates and strategizes.

Combining these three interests, this research is the result of my curiosity.

2.2 The Field

The context of this study is the international association Doctors without Borders, mostly known worldwide as MSF. The primary mission of the organization at the heart of this study is to provide assistance to other human beings. I believe that this organization provides a primary example of organizing. The following narrative about the American anthropologist Margaret Mead showcases the importance of organizing in caregiving since care happens over time and requires the help of others.

> *"A student asked Dr. Mead what she considered to be the first sign of civilization, and she made no mention of any of the obvious artifacts of early civilizations such as tools, art, or religious relics. Rather, she claimed the first evidence of civilization was a fractured femur (the bone connecting the hip to the knee) from 15,000 years ago. This bone had been broken and then healed, a process that takes at least six weeks. It would have been impossible without the support of others. Mead explained that no person could have survive a broken leg 15,000 years ago as it would prevent escaping from predators, gathering food or water, or engaging in other activities needed for survival. The healed femur was evidence that somebody had decided to not abandon their injured companion, but to share their survival interests with another and help their fellow human recover." (Thompson & Nygren, 2020: 260)*

The story of the creation of MSF can be found on its website[1]. In short, the organization was founded in Paris on 22 December 1971 by thirteen doctors and journalists, and in particular by two doctors, Bernard Kouchner and Max Récamier, who had been asked by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to come and work to provide medical assistance in Biafra. They thought that medical assistance was just dressing a war wound and wanted to speak out

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[1] https://www.msf.fr/decouvrir-msf/notre-histoire

about what was happening in the field. The importance of witnessing and advocacy, alongside the provision of medical assistance, would later form the basis of the MSF movement. Here, advocacy is a means to either denounce the situation to raise awareness and/or influence policy-making and bring change to the situation in the field. In other terms, as an organization, MSF has the ambition to not only provide medical assistance to populations in suffering but as an independent entity, to witness and advocate to influence the situation for the benefit of those in distress.

At the time, there was no organization in charge of responding to an emergency abroad by providing medical assistance to people suffering from the emergency and speaking out about the situation. As stated by Bernard Kouchner, the simple idea to send medical teams to the locations of patients in need was revolutionary at the time. A new type of humanitarian association was born. MSF was created as an emergency-response organization and still has this image worldwide. The very first mission of the organization was an emergency response to the devastating earthquake in Managua, Nicaragua, in 1972. However, responding to emergencies is now only part of the organization's mission. The organization's first emergency missions in the 1970s revealed some shortcomings in terms of preparation and organization. An internal political conflict arose within the organization. Finally, a vote was held at the 1979 Annual General Meeting to decide on the strategic direction of the organization. The vote favored a more structured type of organization (as opposed to a commando of emergency doctors), leading to the departure of some of the organization's iconic founders such as Bernard Kouchner.

MSF is composed of five operational centers: Paris, Geneva, Barcelona, Amsterdam, and Brussels. These centers manage every field operation. According to the MSF website (https://www.msf.ch/a-propos/mouvement-msf), each MSF organization is connected to one specific operational center: (1) France, United States of America, Australia, and Japan are associated with the Paris operational center; (2) Switzerland and Austria are associated with the Geneva operational center; (3) Spain and Greece are associated with the Barcelona operational center, (4) Netherlands, Germany, and the United Kingdom are associated with the Amsterdam operational center; and (5) Belgium, Brazil, Italia, Norway, Luxembourg, Sweden, Hong Kong, Denmark, and South Africa are associated with the Brussels operational center. For example, this means that the fundraising done for MSF in the United States will serve the missions launched by the Paris operational center. The International Bureau coordinates the different operational centers and their associated sections or associations. The five operational

centers are associated internally with the countries in which they are located. In the various cases studied in this thesis, as the source of archival data is mainly internal, the operational centers are referred to by their internal names: we speak of sections and, for example, the Paris section is associated with MSF-F (i.e. MSF-France).

MSF is an international movement linked by the following Charter and principles:

"Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is a private international association. The association is made up mainly of doctors and health sector workers and is also open to all other professions which might help in achieving its aims.

All of its members agree to honour the following principles:

Médecins Sans Frontières provides assistance to populations in distress, to victims of natural or man-made disasters and to victims of armed conflict. They do so irrespective of race, religion, creed or political convictions.

Médecins Sans Frontières observes neutrality and impartiality in the name of universal medical ethics and the right to humanitarian assistance and claims full and unhindered freedom in the exercise of its functions.

Members undertake to respect their professional code of ethics and maintain complete independence from all political, economic or religious powers.

As volunteers, members understand the risks and dangers of the missions they carry out and make no claim for themselves or their assigns for any form of compensation other than that which the association might be able to afford them."

(Source: https://www.msf.org/msf-charter)

The organization started with 300 members and now has grown substantially to nearly 65,000 people, thus showing strategic success in the form of survival and prosperity.

2.3 The Aims of the Study

This thesis offers a unique contribution to the Strategic Management (SM) and the Extreme Context Research (ECR) literatures.

On the one hand, the SM literature has brought to the fore the understanding of strategizing as a dynamic process (Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel, & Quinn, 2003; Pettigrew, 1992; Takeuchi, 2013; Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2005; Van de Ven, 1992), in which practices (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Tsoukas, 2010; Whittington, 1996, 2003) and knowledge (Grant, 1996; Spender, 1996; Spender & Spender, 1989; Whitehill, 1997; Zack, 1999) are of utmost importance.

On the other hand, the ECR literature has been interested in how the nature of extreme contexts transforms organizational processes. While extreme context research has looked at the influence of extreme events on sensemaking (Cornelissen, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Weick, 1993), improvising (Crossan, 1998), sensing (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011; De Rond, Holeman, & Howard-Grenville, 2019; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015), ethical decision-making (Bagdasarov et al., 2016; Sonenshein, 2007) and learning (Meyer, 1982), it has yet limited understanding of how these human and organizational practices unfold as a process, particularly at the micro level. Moreover, what is even less understood is how these practices influence and are influenced by strategizing.

In integrating Strategy as Process and Practice (SAPP) and ECR theorizing, this study aims to develop a process model of extreme context strategizing that to the best of my knowledge uniquely looks at the special form of strategizing from a comprehensive perspective as it unfolded in real life scenarios that were documented including the experiences of field workers and headquarters strategists alike.

2.4 Research question and research objectives

As detailed in *The Motivation,* I grew up with an interest in strategy. This research is based on a processual view and the idea from the start was to study the process of strategizing (the philosophical underpinnings are discussed later in the *Philosophical framing*). However, the research question was not clearly defined at the outset and the plan for this study evolved over time. I initially planned to interview strategists working at headquarters and field workers to study extreme context strategizing in the interplay between decision-making and the translation of primary sensemaking in the field to secondary sensemaking[2] at headquarters and how this translates into action (cf Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

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[2] The authors use the terms 'first-order sensemaking' and 'second-order sensemaking' but here the terms first sensemaking and second sensemaking are preferred to avoid confusion.

Very early on, the organization MSF was selected as the study organization. When collecting archival data about the organization, I found the archival reports of extreme cases of the past. These reports offered particularly interesting data because of their subject matter, quantity, heterogeneity, richness and quality. In addition, they provided me with a repository of data collected during and shortly after the extreme context, which can be extremely difficult for the researcher to collect in the field, if not impossible because the extreme context no longer exists and a lot of time has passed. This is why archival reports became the main source of data for this study. I became very interested in extreme contexts and in particular ECR and chose to investigate more precisely extreme context strategizing through these archival reports. This study is at the crossroads of two fields: SM and ECR. Hence, my central research question is as follows:

How does the process of strategizing unfold in an extreme context?

I investigated this research question through phenomenon-driven theorizing (Bas, Sinclair, & Dörfler, 2023; Ployhart & Bartunek, 2019). The phenomenon studied here is the practice of strategy in an extreme context. The aim of this study is therefore to understand how strategizing is shaped in an extreme context over time, what critical processes come into play and how this interplay occurs. In this study, rather than scanning the literature and identifying a knowledge gap, the focus was on the discrepancy between the observable phenomenon in the field and the explanations available in the literature. The insights derived from this research are encapsulated in a dynamic multi-level model that is firmly grounded in the empirical data. Yet, the research methods used do not adhere to requirements of grounded theorizing. This is due to the prior knowledge I had about strategy and extreme contexts, and the fact that data collection and analysis did not occur in an iterative process.

Instead, a case study research design was employed, utilizing thematic analysis to address the research question. The answer to this question was developed through an in-depth understanding of four empirical cases of strategizing within extreme contexts. These cases, drawn from past events, illustrate how a particular organization and its members navigated different extreme contexts. As the phenomenon was uncovered through these cases, several research objectives emerged, each critical to addressing the overarching research question.

Sandberg, J., & Tsoukas, H. 2015. Making sense of the sensemaking perspective: Its constituents, limitations, and opportunities for further development. *Journal of organizational behavior*, 36(S1): S6-S32.

The first research objective in this study involves understanding the essential components of extreme context strategizing. This includes recognizing the unique characteristics of strategizing within environments that are defined by their extreme nature. The focus here is on recognizing how the novelty, severity, unpredictability, and high stakes of an extreme context shape processes that lead to strategic action.

The second research objective builds upon this understanding by delving deeper into how the sensory perceptions, moral emotions, and learning of organizational members influence strategic decisions and actions within an extreme context. This objective seeks to explore the complex dynamics of how individuals within organizations process their experiences and emotions, particularly when faced with moral dilemmas, and how these factors drive or hinder strategic responses.

The third research objective shifts the focus to the interplay between individual and organizational levels in the context of extreme strategizing. It examines how the dialogue between personal experiences and broader organizational frameworks leads to responses to extreme contexts. This objective is crucial for understanding how the individual level and the organizational level are interwoven, and how this interaction enables organizations to navigate and respond to the challenges presented by an extreme context.

These objectives collectively contribute to a more nuanced understanding of extreme context strategizing, highlighting the importance of integrating individual-level experiences with organizational-level processes and practices to effectively address the complex and morally challenging situations that arise in an extreme context.

2.5 Significance of the study

With the increasing occurrence of extreme contexts in the turbulent world in which we live, and organizations operate today, understanding better the process of strategizing in those particularly complex and dangerous contexts for the organizations and their members is of particular relevance for practice and research. Extreme context strategizing is a complex process that is not easy to observe, grasp, and explain. This study makes a contribution to both research and practice in shedding some light into what shapes and reshapes over time this multifaceted process with a multi-level model. More specifically, this study explains organizational strategizing by explaining the lived experiences of organizational members

through their sensing, thinking, behavior and learning faced with the moral and strategic dilemmas generated by an extreme context.

Strategizing is a knowledge-intensive process, and when extreme events occur leading to an extreme context, the unknown prevails and the realm of uncertainty takes over. It sweeps away assumptions, mental models and representations. In strategizing, the organization responds to the question '*what should be done here?*'. Although this question is critical in any type of context – whether extreme or non-extreme –, it is undoubtedly more difficult to answer in an extreme context which can be characterized by exceptionally intense unpredictability, rapid change and threat to the organization and/or its members. Faced with potential disastrous consequences, the organization must provide a strategic response to the extreme context.

Furthermore, in his review of the second edition of Weick's seminal work, *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, Colville (1994: 219) states that "organizing is about how we try to answer the perennial question of '*what's going on here?*'". The process of strategizing in an extreme context requires constantly answering the question '*what should be done here?*' in tandem with '*what's going on here?*' since knowing and acting are intimately linked, as evidenced by the expression used in the literature on sensemaking, according to which "people act their way into knowing" (Christianson & Barton, 2021: 3). In responding to the two questions simultaneously, the organization will often venture into unchartered territory. Extreme contexts, by enabling new priorities and new ways of responding to the moral dilemmas provoked by them, provide the opportunity to question, even denounce, and ultimately reflect on and answer the questions: "*Who are we?*" and "*What are we doing?*".

The model (**FIGURE** *23*) that I present in this study is built from the empirical data of four cases of extreme contexts that the organization MSF experienced in the past. While the analysis of past cases offers a new understanding of the past, and in particular of the specific cases selected, it also offers an understanding of the phenomenon studied here – extreme context strategizing – as the essence of a phenomenon can be captured despite the fact that each extreme context is utterly unique and emphasizes its unique set of strategic challenges for the organization.

3   Reviewing the literature

In this chapter I first review the literature on strategizing, then the literature on extreme context. As the literature of the former is significantly greater and I also need to consider the process-turn and the practice-turn in the broader context of social studies, the first subchapter is significantly longer than the second one. First, the meaning of strategy and the evolution of its understanding in the field of SM are detailed. Next, I explain why this study focuses on strategy as a process and not on strategy as something static or immutable. Furthermore, following the practice turn from social sciences to strategic management, the relevance of the SAP perspective is highlighted. Then, knowledge-based strategizing is introduced. A move away from the RBV of the firm to discuss the knowledge-based view of the firm and give knowledge and learning (i.e., the acquisition of knowledge) the central place they deserve in strategizing. Organizational learning is introduced with the distinction between individual and organizational learning, and an understanding of the different levels of organizational learning. Before attempting to theorize the process of extreme context strategizing through empirical study, the literature is also used as a starting point for understanding extreme contexts and reviewing research on extreme contexts. In particular, the critical process of sensemaking in extreme contexts is explored. Thus, the literature reveals the critical processes of sensemaking and organizational learning in strategizing in extreme contexts. Both processes happen with a combination of the individual level and the organizational level. However, the literature review reveals that focus is usually on one level of analysis. Therefore, the interplay between both levels in shaping extreme context strategizing is shown as an interesting direction for research.

3.1   Strategizing

This first subchapter introduces the process of strategizing, outlining the field in which this research falls and explaining why I speak of strategizing and not strategy. It explains how process view lies at the heart of the study of strategizing. Then, the logic of practice is introduced with first the turn to practice in Social Sciences. The work of social scientists such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens and Schatzki are outlined to explain how the turn to practice started from a critique of the two main traditions at the time and unearth the critical constructs of *habitus*, *human agency* and *social structure* in explaining the logic of practice. Similarly, the turn to practice in Strategic Management started with the critique to the lack of practice perspective of research in the field combined with the influence of the practice turn in Social

Sciences. The importance of the lived experience, the social and historical context and the internalized practices are highlighted. Nonetheless, it is discussed how both process and practice logics are not mutually exclusive and can be seen as a false dichotomy. One can account for practice, praxis and practitioners in the study of strategizing rooted in process philosophy. Lastly, this chapter discusses knowledge-based strategizing. The emphasis is put on the knowledge-based view of the firm because strategizing is seen as a knowledge-intensive process and it is explained why distance is taken from the notorious resource-based view of the firm. Organizational learning is discussed through the description of the different learning levels, the connection between individual learning and organizational learning and its connectedness with strategizing by addressing the temporal modalities of past, present and future. Further, strategic learning is introduced as organizational learning that enhances the organization's strategic capability (Kuwada, 1998). Emphasis is placed on the benefit to the organization of developing single-loop adaptive learning and double-loop generative learning. By mastering these two types of learning, the organization can become a learning organization.

3.1.1   The Process of Strategizing

This research falls within the broad area of Strategic Management (SM). The theoretical underpinnings of SM are relatively recent and diverse, making use of different disciplinary approaches and methods (Whittington, 1996). One of the central questions that still prevails and that scholars vividly discuss is how strategy is formed and, as a consequence, how we should study the formation of strategy (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2009; Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2005).

The term strategy – in Greek στρατηγός (*strategós*), from *stratos* ('army') and *ageîn* ('to lead') – is mostly translated as 'general' and takes its origin in the study of war. Interestingly, the term *strategós* was never used by the Greeks (Horwath, 2006). In the 5th century BC, the term *strategoi* was used to refer to a commander in Ancient Athens with political and military power . However, military strategy as a concept is actually rooted in Chinese narratives. The most known work is *The Art of War,* written in 400 BC by Sun Tzu (Horwath, 2006). In this book, Sun Tzu presents different military strategies and explains how they were successful in defeating enemies or why they were unsuccessful. In this influential book, Sun Tzu "provided a succinct exposition of planning, organization, tactics and the seizure of opportunities" (McKiernan, 1997: 791). For instance, he explained the difference between strategy and tactics, which is often misunderstood.

"All men can see the tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory is evolved." Sun Tzu

In military strategy, like in the game of chess, a strategy is envisioned to defeat the enemy and represents a fight between two minds (of army generals). Tactics can be used to support the becoming of that strategy. While strategy can lead to slow victory without tactics, using tactics without a strategy will eventually lead to defeat (Tzu, n.d.). This is an important distinction in comprehending the vital role of strategy to any organization.

This understanding may have led many authors to link strategy in business with the fight against an enemy seen as a competitive opponent. For instance, Horwath (2006: 3) wrote, "when no competition exists, there is no need to strategize". However, the understanding of competition differs depending on the type of organization. For example, for a non-profit organization, the enemy can be what conflicts with the purpose of the organization, i.e., what threatens its *raison d'être*. For the public interest organizations, the *raison d'être* lies in the interests they serve and defend (Pijl & Sminia, 2004).

Consequently, strategizing can be viewed as a fundamental element of organizational survival, making it an essential practice across all types of organizations. Understanding how this necessity manifests within organizational life is therefore a critical area of inquiry for management and organization studies (MOS) scholars. Four primary logics have been identified as foundational to strategic action. For many, strategy originates from conscious thought, where intentionality and consequential reasoning play a central role (Chia & Holt, 2023). The *causal logic* of an agent's intention is therefore often regarded as a key determinant of strategic success. As March (2011) points out, this narrow perspective on strategy, which prioritizes a logic of consequence, is predominantly taught in business schools, overshadowing alternative logics such as "the obligations of personal and social identities and senses of self" (March, 2011: 355-356).

Using the example of Don Quixote, March (2011) illustrates the distinction between actions driven by one's identity and those guided by the potential consequences of one's actions. This well-known literary figure provides an important lesson: "Quixote reminds us that if we trust only when trust is warranted, love only when love is returned, learn only when learning is valuable, we abandon an essential feature of our humanness—our willingness to act in the name of a conception of ourselves regardless of its consequences" (March, 2011: 356).

In this sense, Don Quixote emphasizes the critical importance of appropriateness and authenticity over desired outcomes. Chia and Holt (2023) identify three additional logics beyond *causal logic* that shape strategic action, where intention remains present but is framed in a more nuanced way: the *logic of practices*, the *logic of situation*, and the *logic of potential*.

The *logic of practices* puts "collectively shared habitus rather than conscious cognition/deliberate intention as the basis of effective strategic action" (Chia & Holt, 2023: 1). Intention is ascribed more to shared practices than to the individual agent projecting into the future (Chia & Holt, 2023). This logic will be discussed in depth in the following section through the strategy-as-practice (SAP) lens.

The *logic of situation* follows the process theory and involves the intentionality that emerges in the actions that serve the purpose of alignment with the environment (Chia & Holt, 2023). In this view, the sense of control is loosened to allow organizational flexibility in responding to the situation's affordances. Timeliness and patience are particularly important in understanding "the natural disposition of things themselves" (Chia & Holt, 2023: 11).

In addition, Chia and Holt (2023) introduce the *logic of potential* in line with Nietzsche's 'will to power'. This 'will to power' is expressed in the desire to become more than the state in which one is in. It is not about an independent unit; reality is expressed in the multiple wills to power that interact and struggle in an eternal state of becoming. The 'will to power', which is also the 'will to live', means constant evolving for every living thing, not self-preservation. It is not a question of growing in the sense of becoming bigger (Chia & Holt, 2023), but expanding to create multiplicity. The idea of self-overcoming – the characteristic of the *Übermensch* – is essential in Nietzsche's 'will to power'. In that 'self-determination' logic, strategy is depicted as a process of transformation as opposed to preservation, as a move away from the familiar. Furthermore, Chia and Holt (2023) invite strategy theorists to open up strategy to intentional agency, practices, situation and potential; these four logics do not necessarily preclude each other and the organization's strategizing is shaped by the different logics at play.

Indeed, the concept of formation of strategy has long varied across different schools of thought in strategic management. Already 25 years ago, Mintzberg et al. (1998) outlined the premises and critiques of ten distinct schools of thought in their seminal work. These schools include the design school, planning school, positioning school, entrepreneurial school,

cognitive school, learning school, power school, cultural school, environmental school, and configuration school. Despite their differing perspectives, Mintzberg et al. (2009) describe strategy formation as a process for each school (e.g., strategy formation as an emergent process for the learning school). Most of these schools differentiate between the formulation and implementation phases of strategy. This division has been framed as a search for alignment between the organization's internal and external environments, expressed through four key elements: 1) what the organization might do, 2) what it could do, 3) what it wants to do, and 4) what it should do (McKiernan, 1997).

Nonetheless, the focus of most studies has not been on how strategy is formed (i.e., on the process) but on 'strategic choice' (Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2005). More particularly, most of the literature has put an emphasis on rational choice with the study of different strategy scenarios that would be optimal under particular circumstances. The main objective was to look at what decisions should be made in specific contexts to achieve desired outcomes such as gaining competitive advantage. However, these situations need to be relatively stable and straightforward, excluding any radical change, high complexity or uncertainty (Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2005). This highlights that the main stream of research in SM has been mostly interested in strategy content, on the *what* rather than the *how*, and has put human intentionality as a strong element of strategy-making (Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2005). Fahey and Christensen (1986) have presented a substantive list of studies that focused on strategy content – on the *what* – and have overlooked the *how*. These studies are concerned with "decisions about the goals, scope and/or competitive strategies." And while they have provided important contributions to the field of SM, they only provide a snapshot of *what* strategizing is.

Several studies have taken a narrow approach, prioritizing strategy implementation over strategic thinking as the key to shaping management and creating value (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). Indeed, Prahalad and Hamel (1994: 5) highlight how practitioners have increasingly shifted focus away from strategic thinking, "more or less abandoning strategy as either unimportant or uninteresting". This trend, as it transitioned from practice to research, prompted a renewed emphasis on the importance of strategic thinking in the field of strategic management (SM). In response, Prahalad and Hamel (1994) underscored the need for new paradigms, which led to significant discussions in the 1980s including a special issue of the *Strategic Management Journal* dedicated to these emerging perspectives.

Tsoukas and Knudsen (2005) confront this dilemma of the field of SM, and raise the importance for SM scholars to think of both the ability for strategists and organizations to make intentional strategic choices, and the change processes that are part of real-life situations. Strategy *becomes* in a dynamic setting. Strategy evolves in context and is shaped by a constellation of human, social and environmental forces. Already in 1982, Mintzberg and Waters showed that the strategy that comes to life is not the direct result of intended strategy but rather a process subject to contextual changes and adaptation.
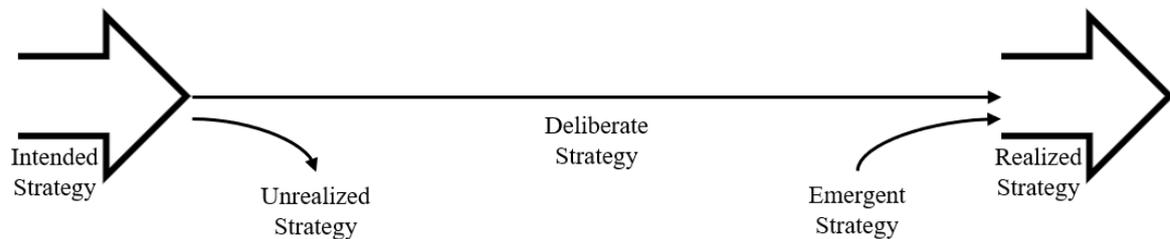
FIGURE 1: Types of strategies
Source: (Mintzberg & Waters, 1982, 1985)

Strategy's characteristics will, therefore, emerge in the course of time. As such, any strategy cannot be static i.e., it cannot remain the same. This is why many researchers have demanded a turn to studying strategy as a dynamic process (Mintzberg et al., 2003; Pettigrew, 1992; Takeuchi, 2013; Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2005; Van de Ven, 1992).

Despite the heterogeneity of the field, there is some consensus amongst researchers that corporate-level strategy means "consistent corporate action over time" (Tsoukas & Knudsen, 2005), suggesting that strategy is not a one-shot initiative, but rather an evolutionary process. Acknowledging this understanding of strategy involves accepting that strategy cannot be inert. The focus is therefore on the evolution of strategy in context and over time, on "how strategic decisions are shaped and implemented" (Burgelman et al., 2018: 3). Mintzberg and Waters (1985) described eight types of strategy from the most intended one ('planned strategy') to the most emergent one ('imposed strategy'). With these distinct descriptions, they broadened the understanding of strategy formation as either deliberate or emergent, and showed how strategy can combine deliberate and emergent characteristics. More generally, Weick's (1969) most cited and arguably most important contribution was his book *The Social Psychology of Organizing*, published three years after Katz & Kahn's (1966) influential book *The Social Psychology of Organisations*. As identified by Anderson (2006), one of the most frequently cited concepts in *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, and

Organisation Studies (three leading MOS journals) present in Weick's book is the use of gerunds in place of nouns. This concept is present in the very choice of the book's title and represents an impetus towards a shift in discourse in organization studies with the use of gerunds or 'verbal nouns' instead of nouns (Anderson, 2006) in order to shift the focus of researchers from the entity (e.g., organization, management) as something stable to the dynamic nature of the process (e.g., organizing, managing). Gioia (2006: 1711) further talks of a "Weickian view" offering a new perspective to researchers. Similarly, I discuss strategizing, not strategy.

Process research has become a recognized stream of research in SM and more generally in MOS. Process researchers' perspective is anchored in process philosophy and focuses on the becoming of strategy i.e., on the *strategizing* process.

At the ontological level of process philosophy, 'becoming' is central as the world is composed of processes that *become*, not merely things that *are*. As first stated by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus 2,600 years ago, "*pantha rei*" – everything flows. As he argued, although on a map the river may appear as an unchanging line, the water in it is running, which is why we cannot step into the same river twice. Reality itself is in constant becoming (Rescher, 2000). Since entities are in constant flux, process researchers are interested in looking at the evolution and activity of things over time. The work of Alfred Worth Whitehead was particularly influential for SM based on process philosophy:

> *"how an actual entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is. […] The subjectivist principle is that the whole universe consists of elements disclosed in the analysis of the experiences of subjects. Process is the becoming of experience."* *(Whitehead, 1929: 194).*

This understanding emphasizes that what strategy *is* can only be revealed through the analysis of *how* it becomes. More precisely, it is how people experience strategizing that will reveal the process. Furthermore, strategizing is only one of the social processes, and it unfolds in interaction with other unfoldings, which is the essence of relational process ontology on which the process view of strategizing is based.

At the epistemological level, it is the activity inherent in any phenomenon that makes it reveal itself to the investigator and therefore possible to study (Rescher, 2000), despite that entities experience moments of 'being'. Yet, the things that are inert do not interact with the

social world of becoming, therefore they are not much visible for the eye of the researcher. What is striking is the process – the transformation. According to Rescher (1996), what seems to be stable like organizations are nothing more than "stability waves in a sea of processes" (Chia, 2002).

One can examine what strategy *is*, inspecting its being at a particular moment in time, but this moment can only be really understood if seen through the lens of becoming over time. Like we cannot fully comprehend the death of the Roman Empire without looking at the process that led to this terminal event. Hence, rather than looking only at what strategy is at a specific moment, it is by looking at the emergence and development of strategy embedded in context that one will obtain a broader and more accurate view. This dynamic perspective would allow capturing the interaction between thinking, context and action, which is indispensable for the understanding of strategy. After all, as Tsoukas and Knudsen (2005: 340) stated, "more than in any other field in management studies, the study of corporate strategy is the study of reason in action". This understanding of strategy as a becoming entity also points out the uniqueness of strategy. No two strategies are the same. However, there can be a generalization about the essence of strategizing. As there are common characteristics to one species, specific contexts can share common observable features allowing some transferability of knowledge, a principle that is shared among a growing number of qualitative researchers.

To summarize, strategy is shaped and evolves over time. This section has developed an understanding of strategy as a dynamic and constantly evolving process. The following section focuses on the change that has taken place in the field of SM by conceiving strategy as an activity, emphasizing the critical role of social practices in strategizing, and describing the emergence and evolution of the strategy-as-practice movement.

3.1.2 Strategizing in Practice

The shift of focus on strategy-as-practice (SAP) is rooted in the influential work of social theorists like Bourdieu (1977, 1990) and Giddens (1984) who emphasized a new logic of practice, and elaborated so-called 'practice theories' (Rasche & Chia, 2009). For this reason, I first briefly introduce the practice turn in social studies before discussing in more length the turn to practice in SM.

The practice turn in social studies was born from the criticism of the primary two traditions at the time: the structuralist and interpretivist traditions.
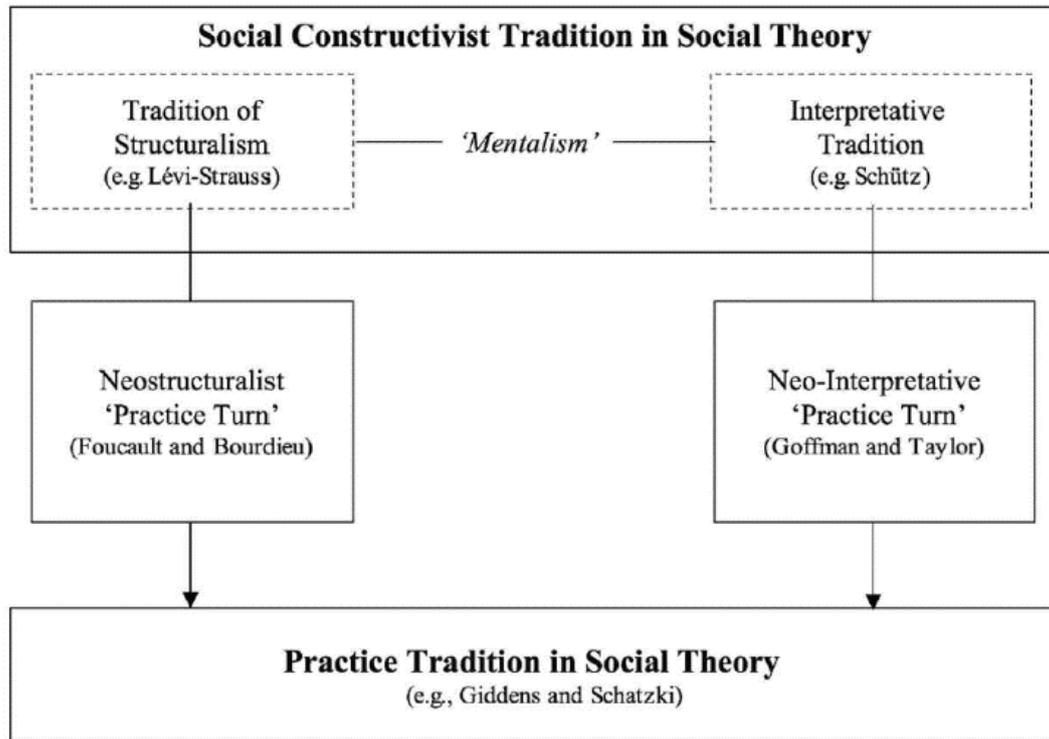
FIGURE 2: "A Genealogy of the Practice Tradition in Social Theory"
Source: (Rasche & Chia, 2009: 716)

According to Pierre Bourdieu, structuralism overly emphasized pre-existing social structures, while social phenomenology granted excessive power to the freedom of the individual (Maggio, 2018). To address this imbalance, Bourdieu tried to reform the field of social sciences by challenging its prevailing epistemology and methodology, proposing a new approach, a "theory of practice" as a means to explain human action (Maggio, 2018). In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu (1977) articulates the need for a theory that focuses on the dynamic and fluid nature of human actions within the social world and tries to formalize this approach by introducing new concepts, such as *habitus* (Maggio, 2018).

> *"The theory of practice as practice insists, contrary to positivist materialism, that the objects of knowledge are constructed, not passively recorded, and, contrary to intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured,*

structuring dispositions, the habitus, which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions" (Bourdieu, 1990: 52)

Michel Foucault, another influential French sociologist, rejected the core belief in structuralism – for example, shared by Claude Lévi-Strauss and Ferdinand de Saussure – that there is an 'objective' original structure composed of ahistorical and universal laws and rules governing human action (Olssen, 2003; Rasche & Chia, 2009). Foucault favored a materialist post-structuralist "approach which focused at the level of the micro-practices of lived experience" (Olssen, 2003: 192). For him, the 'signified' (or meaning) is not the direct result of the 'signifier' (e.g., the set of sounds that express a signified). Instead, meaning is created within a specific context which is social and historical. In this sense, he mitigates the power of language for practices (Olssen, 2003). Further, Foucault contributes to practice view by also extending practices to non-discursive processes, therefore opening the door to physical phenomena and emphasizing the essential role of the actor in engaging with practices and embedding the 'knowledge codes' in their daily routinized practices (Rasche & Chia, 2009).

As aforementioned, the turn to practice in social studies also originated from a response to the interpretivist tradition, mainly to social phenomenology. Social phenomenology applies Husserl's phenomenological philosophy to studying "the basic concepts of the social sciences" (Schutz, 1967: xvi). Alfred Schütz brings together Husserl's phenomenology with Weber's sociology (Wagner, 1969), and thus for him, the Individual and the Social are both expressed in human consciousness; the 'life world' (using Husserl's terminology) is therefore individual, intersubjective and interactional. Further, Erving Goffman and Charles Taylor both made a shift to practice tradition and acknowledged the physical nature of social practices, therefore, attempting to redefine the interpretative tradition in social studies (Rasche & Chia, 2009). For Goffman, meaning is not produced individually by one actor, but is achieved collectively. In other words, the actor is one participant who engages in the social practices which 'frame' the production of meaning (Rasche & Chia, 2009).

3.1.2.2   *The Practice Turn in Strategic Management*

Many organization researchers have demanded a turn to practice for studying strategy (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Tsoukas, 2010; Whittington, 1996, 2003) and more generally for understanding organizations (Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, & Yanow, 2009). Several SAP researchers have explained that the main

reasoning behind the turn to practice was to switch the focus towards the micro level as the response to the shortcomings of the process perspective (Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Whittington, 1996).

Practice and process can be seen as a false dichotomy in SM. This also explains why many scholars see SAP as beneficial to researching strategy as a process since it answers most of the critiques made to the process approach (Tsoukas, 2010).Johnson et al. (2003) provide six shortcomings of strategy process research: It (1) is based on top-level second-hand retrospective records too detached from the practice, (2) puts a strong emphasis on managers' roles in boardrooms in the strategizing process, potentially misrepresenting reality by missing or ignoring the roles of those who are in the action at the periphery, (3) does not directly support managers in implementing solutions in practice, in their daily strategic decisions, (4) creates a gap between process and content, putting content aside instead of considering it as an essential element of the research process, (5) often forgets to explicitly connect strategy outcomes to the strategizing process, and (6) often stays in the level of the particular, hindering the theory building and spreading of knowledge from generalizing the richness of the empirical data after rigorous and comparative analyses.

SAP scholars further suggest that researchers should get closer to strategy practitioners' day-to-day lives where strategy is made, implemented and changed (Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Whittington, 1996). For instance, Samra-Fredericks (2003) emphasizes the importance of getting as close as possible to the strategizing process, researching 'strategists-at-work' when they exchange and construct a common strategy for the future of their organization. This presence during strategic discussions allows the researcher to directly experience the strategizing process in the time when it is shaped rather than indirectly attempting to understand how it was constructed during post-factum interviews (Samra-Fredericks, 2003), taking the role of a witness who would know what happened when observing a murder rather than an investigator trying to identify the perpetrators and understand the enactment by putting back together the pieces of the puzzle post-facto.

Strategizing unfolds in a space of practices which are constantly shaped and reshaped. This is why many researchers have been interested in studying strategizing in practice. As a result, the field of SAP has gained much strength and understanding in the past fifteen years (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Miettinen et al., 2009).

However, Whittington (2006: 615) points out that practice-oriented studies have for the vast majority focused on one level – either the intra- or the extra-organizational level – although the "practice instinct is to resist the choice between micro-detail and larger social forces". Nonetheless, some researchers, for example Chia and MacKay (2007), propose to follow the impulse of the practice turn in social studies which is actually to abandon the dichotomy between the micro and the macro level, and to study strategy in the logic of practice.

Drawing from the work of Regnér (2003), who distinguished two modes of strategizing (i.e., inductive at the periphery and deductive at the center), Chia and Mackay (2007: 233) differentiate the "mindless practical coping" which is purposive and represents most of the undeliberate everyday strategizing from the "goal-directed action" (2007: 235) which is purposeful and represents a deliberate exception, pausing the ordinary mindless coping. Chia and Mackay (2007) emphasize what they call a 'post-processual' epistemological position, in which practices, not actors, are the main driver of strategy. They explain that the stories of the strategists cannot account for the practices and consequently neither can they offer comprehension of the strategizing process. This is because the retrospective explanations of the strategists cannot explain the internal logic of the practice (Chia & MacKay, 2007).

For instance, the ethnographic studies focused on the lived experiences of strategists like the one conducted by Samra-Fredericks (2003) do not really allow the researcher to dwell into the practice where strategy emerges. However, by '*being-in-the world*' as described by Martin Heidegger in 1927 (2010), the researcher can get an opportunity to dwell into the practice and understand its character and the strategizing process that derives from it (Chia & MacKay, 2007). This is also because "knowing is a mode of Dasein which is founded in being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 2010: 62). This is why Chia and Mackay (2007) recommend to SM scholars to change the focus of attention and consider the practices at the essence of strategy.

> *"For practice theorists it is the internalized practices or schemata of action (or what Bourdieu, 1990, calls habitus) that are the real 'authors' of everyday coping action."* *(Chia & MacKay, 2007: 226).*

Studying how actors in the day-to-day social practices rely on *habitu*s is necessary to reveal the 'logic of practice' in SM since *habitus* "resides in codes of behaviour that strategists learn and internalize (encompassing their beliefs and rituals); it is something tacit and unspoken but yet well understood and followed." (Rasche & Chia, 2009: 718). In other words, it

represents the "internalized practices" of people that allow for action (Chia & MacKay, 2007). These practices can become organizational routines when they are "repetitive, recognizable patters of interdependent actions carried out by multiple actors" (Feldman & Pentland, 2003: 95). Routines "embody a duality of structure and agency" (Feldman & Pentland, 2003: 95).

It is said that in strategy research, "practices have a virtual existence as largely unconscious yet shared and recognizable ways of doing things" (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016a: 271). Further, for Taylor the actor is not a "*detached* thinking subject" (Rasche & Chia, 2009: 720), and thus sensemaking results from the actor's engagement in the social practices where a "background understanding" is shared (Rasche & Chia, 2009: 720). As pointed out by Rasche and Chia (2009), SAP researchers should not ignore Goffman and Taylor's theories because they shed light onto the relationship between the enactment of strategy practices and how strategists develop their identity. Nevertheless, how strategists construct their practitioner identity while engaging in practices and making these practices in the process, remains under-explained (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Rasche & Chia, 2009; Whittington, 2006).

The structuration theory developed by the sociologist Anthony Giddens also influenced SAP scholars in particular with the concepts of structuration, agency and structure. On the one hand, his understanding of *human agency* affirms the relevance of studying the activities of people in practice because they shape outcomes (Whittington, 2010). As Vaara and Whittington (2012: 287) emphasize, "it is important to go further in analyzing how agency is constituted in a web of social practices". On the other hand, *social structure* is institutionally embedded and it has the power to either enable or constrain activity (Whittington, 2010). In fact, structuration makes the bridge between human agency and social structure, therefore Giddens calls for taking into account the meta level of institutions and the micro level of practices (Whittington, 2010).

> *"The basic domain of the social sciences, according to the theory of structuration, is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor any form of societal totality, but social practices ordered through time and space" (Giddens, 1984: cited in Whittington, 2010: 146).*

For SAP researchers, it is imperative to understand what practices are (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016a). For Theodore Schatzki, another influential practice theorist, practices are the sites of "organized human activities" (Schatzki, 2005: 471). More precisely, they are sites in the

sense of particular contexts which are interwoven to what they contextualize. This means that by investigating one – the practice itself or one episode composing it –, the researcher also reaches the other (Schatzki, 2005).

This description is in line with Vaara and Whittington's view on practices as "accepted ways of doing things, embodied and materially mediated, that are shared between actors and routinized over time" (Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 287). Jarzabkowski et al. propose a model of strategy practice which shows the "theoretical inseparability of practices (what), actors (who), and enactment (how)" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016a: 271). Practices are not "stand-alone phenomena", this means that any strategy practice perspective should encompass its three key components: practices, practitioners, and praxis (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, & Whittington, 2016b). Praxis is the "actual activity" that is guided by practices (Whittington, 2006: 615). In fact, the proper integration of practitioners and praxis into thinking about the process of strategizing is an important part of the legacy left from the practice turn in the social sciences that also influenced strategy research (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016a).
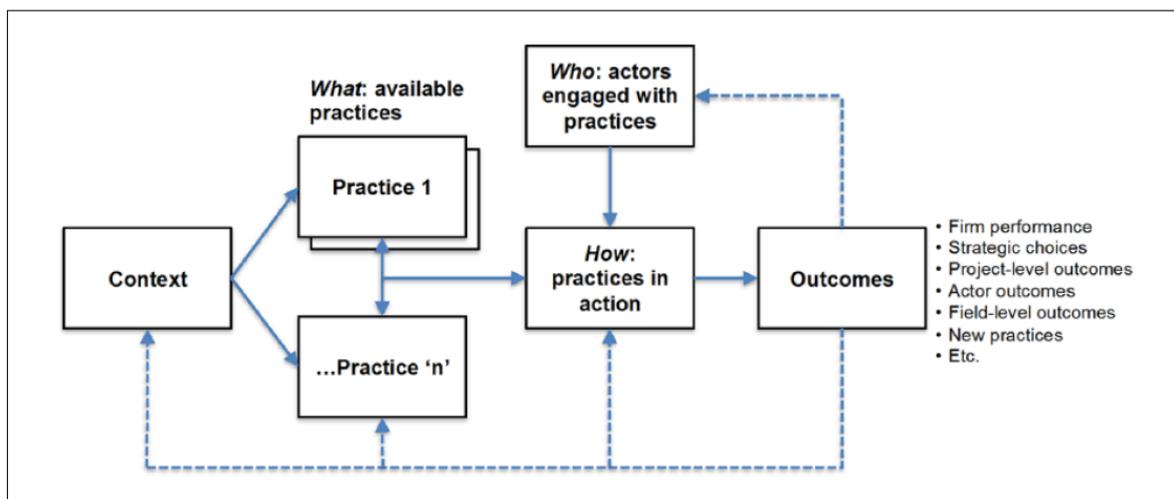
FIGURE 3: "A schematic model of strategy practice"
Source: (Jarzabkowski et al., 2016b: 251)

The distinct concepts developed by practice scholars such as Bourdieu (1990), Dreyfus (1991) and Ingold (2002) emphasize that agents and actions are shaped by and embedded within practices and broader practice systems (Chia & MacKay, 2007). In fact, practices serve as the surroundings in which individuals become educated and develop social skills. Therefore, practices are embodied in people and shape how and why people act (Chia & MacKay, 2007). In that sense, practice and action are interwoven. Consequently, strategy is indisputable from social practice.

Strategy process and SAP are therefore not incompatible approaches. While strategy process is anchored in process philosophy with two distinct process ontologies, a) reality is made of things and of processes which represent the changes of things, and b) reality itself is a process entirely composed of processes (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van de Ven, 2013), SAP is a perspective in researching strategy at the practice level of analysis, not a distinct philosophy, meaning that it can be rooted in process research (Johnson et al., 2003). What is always in flux can only be partially explained by causal relationships represented with arrows. They are interested in *how* the making and breaking of the strategy happen (Tsoukas, 2010), looking at the process in all its complexity, i.e. the strategy in becoming (Langley, 1999; Langley et al., 2013; MacKay & Chia, 2013; Mohr, 1982).

One key strength of the SAP perspective is explaining how the strategizing process can be enabled or constrained by predominant organizational and social practices (Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

Further, SAP was an ambitious movement with the revolutionary agenda "to broaden our understanding of what can be considered as strategy through a practice theory lens" (Jarzabkowski, Kavas, & Krull, 2021: 2). The interest in broadening the perspective on 'what' is strategy was also applicable to 'who' can be considered strategic actors such as influential people or groups which are external to the organization and its finances (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). However, it has been argued that, by applying the consequentialist perspective, SAP researchers have failed in revolutionizing the field of SM with a unique practice lens (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). SAP researchers have not yet succeeded in studying unexpected or unintentional strategic practices, and assuming the role of deciding what is strategic (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). To take on this role, SAP researchers need to rethink the notion of consequentiality and be able to label certain patterns shaped by practices as 'strategy' (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). The view of strategy as consequentiality is shared in both dominant perspectives of strategy as process and of strategy as performance, which assumptions have largely influenced SAP researchers in deciding *what* and *who* should be studied (Jarzabkowski et al., 2021). Although the perspective of strategy as process has been discussed at length, the view of strategy as performance is worth considering, as it has been highly influential in the field of SM. For instance, between 1980 and 2005, more than a third of academic articles devoted to strategic management in leading American journals focused on organizational performance (Guérard, Langley, & Seidl, 2013). However, Guérard et al. (2013) point out several conceptual problems in the strategy as performance literature, mainly the emphasis on

performance as a dependent variable and its measurement, and suggest rethinking performance as an activity through a performativity lens.

Nonetheless, Burgelman et al. (2018) propose a *combinatory* framework of the process and practice research traditions of strategy for future research. While most SAP researchers have either taken a *critical* stance towards strategy process research, because they have pulled away from practice and the impact of practices on practitioners and on praxis, or a *complementary* perspective by seeing value in both traditions and viewing SAP research as providing a micro-level unit of analysis within broader processes at work, the 'Strategy as Process and Practice' (SAPP) view proposes to *combine* the process and practice views (Burgelman et al., 2018). This new combinatory perspective discards the boundaries of each approach and separate units of analysis and ensures coherence of a new integrative body of research (Burgelman et al., 2018).
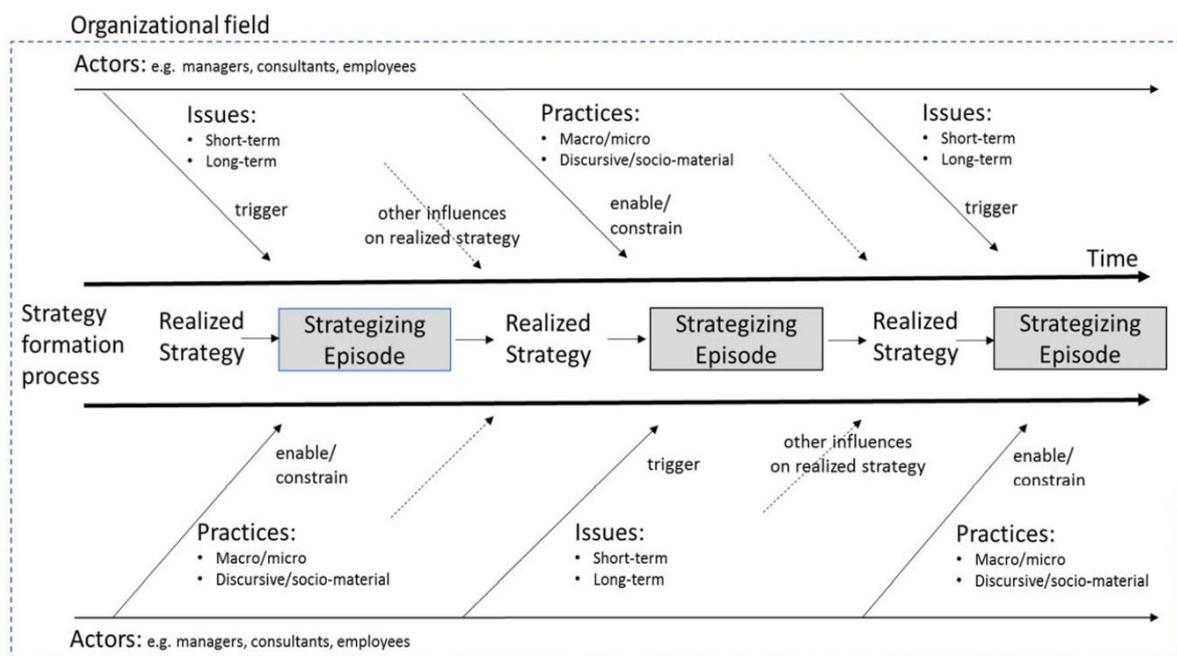
FIGURE 4: "Combinatory Model of Strategy as Process and Practice (SAPP)"
Source: (Burgelman et al., 2018: 41)

The SAPP model (**FIGURE 4**) developed by Burgelman et al. (2018) combines the central themes of strategy shaping in the strategy process and SAP views i.e., the role of actors, practices and issues in driving the iterations between strategizing episodes and enacted strategies.

In this section, I have discussed the rise of the SAP perspective in SM following the practice turn in social sciences. Moreover, this section has highlighted the importance of

bringing together process and practice, the micro and macro levels in the study of strategizing. While the three elements of praxis, practitioners and practices have been identified as essential in the strategizing process, it is worth taking a closer look at how these elements interact over time to shape strategizing. The following section introduces knowledge-based strategizing, highlighting the importance of knowledge and learning at both individual and organizational levels as integral to strategizing.

3.1.3 Knowledge-based Strategizing

This section highlights the importance of knowledge, its acquisition, sharing and institutionalizing for strategizing. First, the interest in knowledge in the field of SM has been evident in the knowledge-based view (KBV) of the firm. Therefore, the first subsection introduces the idea of the KBV starting from the resource-based view of the firm (RBV) as a historical predecessor. The following subsection then introduces the OL, as it is necessary to understand organizational learning, a central concept of strategizing today. Building on the knowledge-based view of the firm and the recognition that both learning and strategy are embedded in socially situated practices, it becomes essential to explore their interrelationship. Strategic learning is therefore introduced, defined as the process by which organizational learning strengthens strategic capabilities and alters the core assumptions guiding the strategic decision-making process (Kuwada, 1998).

3.1.3.1 From the RBV to the KBV of the firm in strategic management

In the RBV and the later KBV, strategy is derived from a theory of the firm. A theory of the firm "seeks to explain the existence and boundaries of the firm in relation to the market" (Phelan & Lewin, 2000: 305). As Grant (1996) made clear, there is no one theory of the firm but different theories of the firm. The most common view in SM is the RBV, also called the RBV of the firm which has flourished over the past forty years since Wernerfelt (1984)'s influential article and later with the first special issue of the *Journal of Management* in 1991 dedicated to resource-based inquiry. The RBV recognizes the central place of resources to achieve competitive advantage. Resources are "those (tangible or intangible) assets which are tied semipermanently to the firm" (Wernerfelt, 1984: 172). The RBV was much influenced by Penrose (1995), whose book was first published in 1959 (Barney, Ketchen Jr, & Wright, 2011; Kor & Mahoney, 2004; Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2010; Peteraf, 1993; Wernerfelt, 1984). More specifically, the RBV primarily focuses on creating and sustaining competitive

advantage with firm-specific isolating mechanisms, to which Penrose (1995) greatly contributed (Kor & Mahoney, 2004). Penrose observed that traditional theories of the firm failed to adequately explain firm growth, leading her to develop her own theory. In her theory, firm growth is seen as the result of managerial decisions, placing managerial agency at the core of the process (Pattit, Pattit, & Spender, 2024). Her work thus offers a theory of how innovative and effective management of a firm's resources drives firm growth and economic value creation(Kor & Mahoney, 2004).

Futher, Barney et al. (2011) discuss the most notable contributions to this theory of the firm, which include Lippman and Rumelt (1982)'s explanations of inimitability and causal ambiguity, Barney (1991)'s four VRIN characteristics –valuable, rare, inimitable and nonsubstitutable– of internal resources to potentially create sustained competitive advantage, and Miller and Shamsie (1996)'s empirical study which showed higher financial performance with property-based resources in stable and predictable environments and with knowledge-based resources in uncertain environments. At the heart of RBV is the explanation of how to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) through VRIN/O i.e., an organization's ability to obtain and perform internal resources that have the VRIN characteristics (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). It is a view that focuses on the internal sources (i.e. resources and capabilities) of the firm to make it more difficult for other firms to imitate them (Wernerfelt, 1984). It was developed in contrast to the industrial organization view initiated by Igor Ansoff Ansoff (1965)and popularized by Michael Porter (1980, 1981), inter alia, which looked primarily at what is outside the firm to explain firm performance such as the industry structure (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010; Zack, 1999). According to the RBV, strategy is less about product and market positioning and more about harnessing internal resources and capabilities to achieve and sustain competitive advantage and achieve financial performance (Zack, 1999).

Despite the popularity of the RBV, it has been subject to many criticisms, which Kraaijenbrink et al. (2010: 351) have classified into eight main ideas: "(a) the RBV has no managerial implications, (b) the RBV implies infinite regress, (c) the RBV's applicability is too limited, (d) SCA is not achievable, (e) the RBV is not a theory of the firm, (f) VRIN/O is neither necessary nor sufficient for SCA, (g) the value of a resource is too indeterminate to provide for useful theory, and (h) the definition of resource is unworkable". Kraaijenbrink et al. (2010) argue that the last three ideas deserve consideration to advance the RBV and provide new research avenues but they refute the first five critiques. For instance, they respond to (d) by explaining that sustaining competitive advantage does not mean retaining forever and that it

can be done "through advantageous "dynamic capabilities" or "organizational learning," enabling the firm to adapt faster than its competition" (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010: 354).

Further, (Spender, 1996; Spender & Spender, 1989) Grant (1996) introduced the knowledge-based perspective in SM. The knowledge-based view (KBV) did not emerge as a critique but as a contribution to the RBV and was even described "as a spin-off of RBV" (Barney et al., 2011: 1301). However, Whitehill (1997: 622) talks about "a new theory of competence-based strategy" in which competences are more valuable than resources for competitive advantage and emphasizes the critical importance of intangible assets -in particular knowledge- over tangible ones to achieve SCA.

> *"The knowledge and capabilities-based views (KBV) in strategy have largely extended resource-based reasoning by suggesting that knowledge is the primary resource underlying new value creation, heterogeneity, and competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996; Kogut & Zander, 1992)" (Felin & Hesterly, 2007: 195)*

From the KBV, knowledge is seen as the most valuable strategic resource of the organization, which has led to the growth of knowledge management in research and practice (Zack, 1999). For example, many organizations have become more interested in increasing their knowledge capital (Zack, 1999). Zack (1999)'s empirical study has shown that strategy is the most critical element in driving knowledge management, and he therefore emphasizes the importance of developing 'a knowledge strategy' to achieve competitive advantage. Indeed, knowledge of the organization is found on two levels, a resource and "a capability that integrates the activities of the firm at the organizational level and influences the process of knowledge creation and development" (Sanchez & Heene, 1997: 123). Further, for Whitehill (1997), the development of a knowledge-based strategy brings great internal benefits to the organization, primarily the ability to change and learn more rapidly, which ultimately translates into a competitive advantage. While many organizations have invested in knowledge management in the form of 'organizational memory' repositories, knowledge-based strategy goes further by focusing on the organization's current and future core competencies to create value and gain competitive advantage (Whitehill, 1997).

Nonetheless, Nickerson and Zenger (2004) argue that due to the many shortcomings of KBV, including how organizations effectively create new knowledge and capabilities, researchers have not yet succeeded in developing a knowledge-based theory of the firm, which

they claim to provide. Their theory relies on problem solving to create new and valuable knowledge for value creation. In pluralistic organizations i.e., those with "multiple objectives, diffuse power and knowledge-based work processes" (Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2007: 179), strategizing which "implies the capacity to influence organizational action" (Denis et al., 2007: 182) can be tricky mainly because the autonomy provided to individuals and their participation in the strategic decisions can inhibit collective action, create unrealistic strategies and dilute their implementation (Denis et al., 2007).

As predicted by Drucker in 1999, "the most valuable asset of a 21st-century institution (whether business or non-business) will be its knowledge workers and their productivity" (Drucker, 1999: 79).

> *"Managing organizational knowledge does not narrowly imply efficiently managing hard bits of information but, more subtly, sustaining and strengthening social practices"(Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001: 991)*

With the KBV, strategy is understood as a knowledge-intensive process (Göndöcs & Dörfler, 2022). In this stream of research, an important debate concerns the locus of knowledge i.e., individual or collective (Felin & Hesterly, 2007). Felin and Hesterly (2007) review KBV literature in terms of locus of knowledge and ask "what specifically are the primary, fundamental drivers of new knowledge and value creation?" (Felin & Hesterly, 2007: 197). The understanding of locus of knowledge implies a choice in level of analysis. The choice of individual or collective level of analysis leads to different assumptions, mainly in terms of homogeneity and independence (Felin & Hesterly, 2007). For instance, when the focus is on the collective to explain organizational outcomes, homogeneity is usually assumed at lower levels and the chosen level of analysis is independent of interactions at other levels (Felin & Hesterly, 2007). While it is easy to realize that there is some degree of heterogeneity at other levels and that some degree of dependence between levels cannot be denied, the choice of unit of analysis represents the researcher's focus on where he or she thinks explanations for the phenomenon under study can be found. Just as the driver looks at the road ahead while driving, researchers choose the most significant direction to look in order to understand and then theorize. Like the driver, the researcher has blind spots. The choice between the individual and the collective stems from distinct philosophical positions.

At the epistemological level, the "debate has been whether individuals or collectives should serve as the locus in explaining and predicting social outcomes" (Felin & Hesterly, 2007: 199). Methodological individualists argue for individuals as unit of analysis because they create and shape collectives, while methodological collectivists see outcomes as shaped by social facts; "or put in light of the knowledge locus problem, no individual-level, a priori knowledge exists without environmental stimulus and learning" (Felin & Hesterly, 2007: 202). Depending on the perspective, "organizational knowledge is either *emergent* or even *completely independent* of the individuals or parts that make up the whole or the organization" (Felin & Hesterly, 2007: 199).

Organizational knowledge is a questionable term. According to Dörfler (2010), the denomination does not make sense: agreeing with Polanyi's terminology of knowledge as personal (Polanyi, 1962) means accepting that there is no such thing as organizational knowledge. Grant (1996) also pointed out that knowledge resides in the individual and that the organization is concerned with applying knowledge, not creating it. More precisely, Dörfler (2004) makes the distinction between the 'active knowledge' which belongs to the knower, and the knowledge capital of the organization i.e., what can be put in a repository, which can only be passive. The latter can be codified because it is explicit. The result of the codification of the knowledge capital of the organization is part of the organization's memory. It is again Polanyi who made the distinction between explicit and tacit knowing (Polanyi, 1966). Yet, as stated by Tsoukas (2005), this broadly used classification since Nonaka and Takeuchi's publication (1995) is mainly misunderstood as an opposition. In case, the two types of knowing are not mutually exclusive. Tsoukas & Vladimirou (2001) go further; they accept the personal nature of knowledge described by Polanyi and blend it with Wittgenstein's idea of knowledge as a collective achievement (Bloor, 1983) to define organizational knowledge as "the capability members of an organization have developed to draw distinctions in the process of carrying out their work, in particular concrete contexts, by enacting sets of generalizations whose application depends on historically evolved collective understandings" (Tsoukas & Vladimirou, 2001: 973).

Because of the fast-changing environment in which organizations become, organizations must evolve and adapt. Therefore, the interest has shifted from what organizations know to how organizations learn.

"Learning involves the creation of processes to capture knowledge as it is generated so that it can be disseminated and built upon" (Yuthas, Dillard, & Rogers, 2004: 241)

3.1.3.2 Organizational Learning

"The requirement for organisational learning is not an occasional, sporadic phenomenon, but is continuous and endemic to our society." (Argyris & Schön, 1978: 9)

Organizational learning (OL) has been studied since the 1930s, but there is still an argument on the meaning of the term in the field of MOS (Visser, 2007). Furthermore, organization scholars mostly discuss three levels of OL. These levels originate from the work of Gregory Bateson (1972) whose research led to the observation that the experimental subject "learns to learn" from repetition of the experiment (Tosey, Visser, & Saunders, 2012: 297). Bateson first made the distinction between proto-learning (i.e., what one is first supposed to learn like walking or driving) and deutero-learning -from the Greek *deuteros*, second, that describes the learning of the context i.e., simultaneously learning how to learn (Lutterer, 2012). Following this first distinction, Bateson (1972) further developed a five-level learning model from zero learning to learning IV. In Bateson's model, each higher level takes the shape of a learning feedback loop with the previous levels. Tosey et al. (2012) synthesize these levels in the following figure.

Learning IV	'would be change in Learning III, but probably does not occur in any adult living organism on this earth'.
Learning III	'is change in the process of Learning II, e.g. a corrective change in the system of sets of alternatives from which choice is made'.
Learning II	'is change in the process of Learning I, e.g. a corrective change in the set of alternatives from which choice is made, or it is a change in how the sequence of experience is punctuated'.
Learning I	'is change in specificity of response by correction of errors of choice within a set of alternatives'.
Learning 0	'is characterized by specificity of response, which – right or wrong – is not subject to correction.'

FIGURE 5: "Bateson's levels of learning"
Source: (Tosey et al., 2012: 297)

The levels of learning were later translated in terms of OL. The most influential work was made by Argyris and Schön in 1978 with their book *Organisational learning: a theory of action perspective* that defines three levels of learning in organizations i.e., single-loop, double-loop and deutero-learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997; Tosey et al., 2012; Visser, 2007).

Single-loop learning is defined as a simple detection and correction of error (Argyris & Schön, 1978); it is the equivalent of the *Learning I* described by Bateson (Tosey et al., 2012). In an organization, this means that a piece of information indicating an error is received and a resulting simple corrective action is taken. Double-loop learning is a more complex detection and correction of error. For double-loop learning to happen, the correction of the error must involve a change in the "organisation's underlying norms, policies, and objectives" (Argyris & Schön, 1978: 3). Thus, double-learning equates to Bateson's *Learning II* (Tosey et al., 2012). Deutero-learning is trickier to understand because it has both been described as a type of double-loop learning and as a form of learning on a higher-order to single- and double-loop learning which created confusion in the understanding of the term (Tosey et al., 2012; Visser, 2007). As a response to the ambiguity of the term, Visser (2007) proposes a conceptual reformulation of deutero-learning which differentiates the concept from meta-learning and planned learning.

On the one hand, Visser (2007: 660) embraces the original definition of Bateson "of deutero-learning as behavioural adaptation to patterns of conditioning in relationships in organisational contexts". In that sense, deutero-learning is primarily a constant unconscious process of learning about the context through the recognition of patterns of conditioning, which is materialized by adapting one's behavior (Visser, 2007). Therefore, trying to manage deutero-learning in organizations is not an easy task and attempts to do so might backfire (Visser, 2007).

On the other hand, meta-learning is anchored in the theory-of-action perspective presented by Argyris and Schön (1978) and is about "cognitive rethinking, critical reflection, and inquiry" (Visser, 2007: 660). This means, that, to achieve meta-learning, the organization must reflect on how to improve single-loop or double-loop learning. Further, planned learning is understood as the embeddedness of meta-learning in the organization's routines, procedures, structures and systems (Visser, 2007).

However, Argyris' conception of deutero-learning is at the same level as double-loop learning (Tosey et al., 2012). Tosey et al. (2012) interestingly point out that despite the absence of the term 'triple-loop learning' in the work of Argyris and Schön, most scholars that were

inspired by their work write about triple-loop learning (Flood & Romm, 1996; Hawkins, 1991; Isaacs, 1993; Nielsen, 1993; Romme & Van Witteloostuijn, 1999; Snell & Chak, 1998; Swieringa & Wierdsma, 1992; Yuthas et al., 2004). Tosey et al. (2012) critically reviewed the literature on triple-loop learning and noticed that the contributions made so far lack explanation of the theoretical underpinnings which hinder the development of theory and make potential applications in practice difficult. From this review, they identified three distinct conceptualizations of triple-loop learning: a) triple-loop learning is characterized by a higher level than the single- and double-loop learning described by Argyris and Schön; b) triple-loop learning is understood as deutero-learning and the two terms become interchangeable; c) triple-loop learning corresponds to the *Learning III* level of Bateson (see ***FIGURE 5***) (Tosey et al., 2012). The review of these understandings has shown the tendency of many authors to discuss OL on higher levels, and has emphasized the challenge to put in place this level of learning with the potential damaging consequences of trying to do so (Tosey et al., 2012).

Individual learning must occur for any type of OL to potentially happen (Argyris & Schön, 1978). It is the organizational members who drive action in their organizations and are the actors of OL since "organisational learning occurs when members of the organisation act as learning agents for the organisation, responding to changes in the internal and external environments of the organisation by detecting and correcting errors in organisational theory-in-use, and embedding the results of their inquiry in private images and shared maps of organisation" (Argyris & Schön, 1978: 29). However, researchers need to take a broader perspective because "change and learning must be dealt with at the level of context and relationship and cannot be reduced to the individual level." (Visser, 2007: 660).

Already twenty years ago, Antonacopoulou and Tsoukas (2002) highlighted the prominence of time in organization studies because social phenomena happen in time and over time and are performed by people whose performance is shaped in the course of time. However, time has often been an implicit element of organizational research such as research on organizational learning (Antonacopoulou & Tsoukas, 2002; Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014; Swart & Kinnie, 2007). However, more and more studies explicitly discuss time's role in the learning process (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014).

More generally, we have seen multiple initiatives to better consider time and temporality in MOS with special issues such as the *Scandinavian Journal of Management* in 2013 dedicated to managing and temporality or the *Academy of Management Review* in 2001 focusing on the

temporal lens in organizational research (Hernes, Simpson, & Söderlund, 2013). According to Ancona, Goodman, Lawrence, and Tushman (2001), the temporal lens brings time from the periphery to the center of organizational research. This new perspective opens the way to many interesting considerations such as "timing, pace, cycles, rhythms, flow, temporal orientation, and the cultural meaning of time" (Ancona et al., 2001: 646) when studying organizational phenomena.

The review of the literature on OL and time by Berends and Antonacopoulou (2014) revealed that only 30 of 350 papers found from the search on ISI Web of Science, combining 'organisational learning' or 'learning organisation' and 'tim*' or 'temp* "analyzed OL in relation to aspects of time" (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014: 439). After extending the search of the literature (e.g., by adding terms such as 'past' with 'organisational learning), Berends and Antonacopoulou (2014) analyzed a total of 75 papers. This analysis of the literature showed a growing interest in analyzing time in OL with an increase of the number of publications between 1985 and 2013. The notion of time in relation to OL is considered along one of three dimensions: "duration, timing and the temporal modalities of past, present and future" (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014: 440) except on a few occasions where several dimensions were discussed (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014). Studies which discussed duration in organizational learning saw time as either an opportunity or a threat for organizational learning (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014). When duration was described as an opportunity, researchers discussed how organizations acquire experience or experiment new things, or see and understand the effects between actions and results which only with time can become learning (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014). When duration was described as a threat, it was about the forgetting of what had been learnt or the obsolescence of knowledge after a period of time (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014).

Swart and Kinnie (2007) look at two temporal frames where organizational learning occurs, the long-term or planned and the short-term (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014). They show the complementarity of the two distinct time frames for a company to undertake exploratory and exploitative modes of learning. "Exploration involves the pursuit of learning outside a firm's current knowledge domains, whereas exploitation involves the refining and deepening of a firm's existing knowledge" (Swart & Kinnie, 2007: 339). In MOS, there was a great interest in the balance between exploration (of new possibilities) and exploitation (of the old ways) (cf March, 1991) for organizational ambidexterity (He & Wong, 2004; O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2013; Tushman & O'Reilly III, 1996). The concept of organizational ambidexterity

was introduced by Duncan (1976) to describe the adjustment of structures through time to align them to achieve both efficiency and innovation (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2013). As indicated by the theory, many empirical studies showed the positive effect of ambidexterity for organizational performance (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2013). Already in (1999), Zack explained the importance for an organization to develop a 'knowledge strategy' to effectively combine and balance exploration and exploitation of the organization's knowledge.

As Berends and Antonacopoulou (2014: 445) emphasized, "only a few studies of OL have explicitly addressed the temporal modalities of past, present and future, but they have clarified that this element of time is essential for understanding OL". One of these studies is Hernes and Irgens (2013)' study of organizational learning under continuity. They argue that, despite the numerous studies focusing on learning when discontinuity -a discrepancy between the intention and the outcome or break in the flow of action- happens, learning also occurs under continuity and there is interest in looking at 'temporal agency', the managerial agency through temporal processes to keep activities going (Hernes & Irgens, 2013). Hernes and Irgens (2013) consider that an organization learns when the palette of potential actions of the organization has changed whether these actions are taken or not. Their focus is on how managers focus on past, present and/or future to keep things going and in doing so change the range of behaviors available to the organization. Therefore, it is not only interesting to study how an organization reacts to discontinuity, but also how an organization increases its "knowledge about the contexts for organisational learning" (Hernes & Irgens, 2013: 255).

The understanding of OL relies on an underlying perspective of organizations.

"It is clear that one would not make use of the term unless he or she believed that an organization was in an important sense something more than the individuals who happened at a particular time to be its members." (Argyris & Schön, 1978: 319-320)

Argyris and Schön (1978) identified six distinct views of the organization (as *group*, as *agent*, as *structure*, as *system*, as *culture*, or as *politics*) and the associated standpoints and understandings of OL. However, no matter the perspective of OL, it is often forgotten that, despite its positive image, learning is not always moral or right (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

OL has been understood by some as the creation and modification of organizational routines (Eisenhardt & Santos, 2002). Organizational routines are broadly considered as "the basic components of organisational behaviour, and the repository of organisational capabilities"

(Becker, Lazaric, Nelson, & Winter, 2005: 776). Since organizational change and change in behavior go hand in hand, Becker et al. (2005) advice researchers to look at the micro level and study how organizational routines change to understand organizational change.

> *"A dynamic capability is a learned and stable pattern of collective activity through which the organization systematically generates and modifies its operating routines in pursuit of improved effectiveness." (Zollo & Winter, 2002: 340).*

However, there is a disagreement between researchers on the capacity of organizational routines to drive organizational change. For instance, Becket et al. (2005) or Zollo and Winter (2002) state that organizational capabilities can be a source of learning and change, while Edmondson and Moingeon (1998) state that, although routines explain in part the organization, they are not the trigger of organizational change. For the former, "routines do not just preserve the past" (Becker et al., 2005: 777). On the contrary, for the latter, routines can embed past learning of the organization, but they cannot produce OL. Following Edmondson and Moingeon's (1998) definition of OL, it is the individual cognitions of organizational members that shape organizational adaptiveness by guiding behavior. In other terms, OL is a process involving people who iteratively think and act consciously. However, routines are powerful in influencing human behavior, which often happens unconsciously. This is why it is essential to develop members' mental models (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1998; Senge & Sterman, 1992) or cognitive maps for action (Argyris, 1985). Implementing new strategies often fail against mental models shaped by routines, which is why:

> *"the more profound the change in strategy, the deeper must be the change in thinking." (Senge & Sterman, 1992: 1007).*

Developing adaptive mental models is not an easy task but a needed one for the learning organization. One attempt which was implemented in several companies in the 1980s was the creation of 'learning laboratories' (Senge & Sterman, 1992). For example, the Hanover Insurance Claims Learning Laboratory showed that it can be successful in team learning when managers are engaged in the process of collaborative reflection and hypothesis testing (Senge & Sterman, 1992). As the old model of the traditional hierarchical organization was all about planning, managing, and controlling, the new model of learning organization is made by the vision, values, and mental models of its members (Senge, 1990; Senge & Sterman, 1992).

Clegg et al. (2005) provide a notable view on OL as an oxymoron in the sense that learning aims to add variety in contrast to organizing which aims to decrease variety. As a matter of fact, OL is paradoxically concerned with both repeating and creating new knowledge (Clegg et al., 2005). Clegg et al. (2005) understand learning, becoming and organizing as processes occurring at the boundaries between order and chaos. These boundaries break the ones of the organization. Organizations are continually changed and transformed; they are shaped by the interaction of becoming and learning. Therefore, the organization becomes through learning, and is comprehended as nothing more than an abstraction, "a momentary apprehension of an ongoing process of organizing that never results in an actual entity" (Clegg et al., 2005: 158).

While some researchers do not believe OL exists because learning is a human endeavor, others argue that "the organisation as a collective learns" (Örtenblad, 2005: 214). In that sense, the OL is the ability gained by the organization as one entity, and not as the sum of its employees, to gain know-how and perform collective action (Örtenblad, 2005). The example offered by Cook and Yanow (1993) demonstrates this view: only an orchestra as a collective can learn to play a symphony. When a new individual, someone who would already know his/her part in the symphony, joins the orchestra, he or she will need to practice with the orchestra to access this OL (Örtenblad, 2005). However, it is still the individuals' performance, their active participation in practice that fuels OL because it is a transpersonal process.

OL is a process that takes place at three levels: individual, group and organizational. The 4I framework developed by Crossan, Lane, and White (1999) shows the learning processes at work at these three levels: at the individual level, *intuiting* and *interpreting*; at the group level, *interpreting* and *integrating*; and at the organizational level, *institutionalising*. This framework makes it clear that intuiting can only happen at the individual level, that interpreting cannot be done at the organizational level and that OL rests on the combination of these four processes happening across levels and over time. However, it is difficult to know how to foster OL (Argyris & Schön, 1978). It is, therefore, essential to understand where learning happens. From reviewing the literature on OL at the time, Levitt and March (1988) described OL as the experiential lessons of history embedded in the organization's memory in the form of routines guiding behavior. While the old perspective on OL defined it as the "storage of knowledge in the organisational memory", the new approach on OL is a "social approach to learning" (Örtenblad, 2002: 224). As described by Brown and Duguid (1991), OL lies in practice because knowledge is socially co-created in context in the day-to-day practices. This explains the great

interest in practice-based learning, which addresses "the gradual acquisition of knowledge through the practical experience of individual organizational members" (Hernes & Irgens, 2013: 259).

Furthermore, the field of organizations and management has shown significant interest in the concept of Communities of Practice (CoPs) introduced in the situated learning theory presented by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in 1991, for two key reasons. First, most scholars acknowledge the critical role of CoPs in OL since "the knowledge of an organisation lives in a constellation of communities of practice each taking care of a specific aspect of the competence that the organisation needs" (Wenger, 2011: 4). Second, knowledge management has been "recognised as a valuable intangible asset in its own right and it is cardinal for decision-making and strategy building, the effective exploitation of which determines success for organisations" (Dei & van der Walt, 2020: 1). With this recognition, interest in managing CoPs to develop strategic capabilities has been high (Wenger, 2011).

> *"Pioneering, knowledge-intensive organisations have recognised that beyond the formal structures designed to run the business lies a learning system whose building blocks are communities of practice that cannot be designed in the same manner as formal, hierarchical structures." (Snyder & Wenger, 2010: 111)*

The introduction of this concept was the result of studying apprenticeship as a learning model (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger showed that apprentices do not only learn in the master-apprentice relationship but mainly develop through 'legitimate peripheral participation' in social interactions in local situated practices; therefore highlighting the social nature of learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2010, 2011). CoPs are viewed as social situated learning systems; an idea rooted in anthropology and the work of social theorists like Bourdieu, Giddens and Foucault (Wenger, 2010). CoPs are composed of three combined building blocks: the domain, the community, and the practice (Wenger, 2011). Further, Pyrko et al. (2017) explain how CoPs emerge from people who 'think together'. They draw from the concept of 'indwelling' described by Polanyi (1962) when explaining tacit knowing, i.e. " the process of immersing oneself in the particulars of subsidiary awareness by means of embodied activity until these particulars come together as a meaningful whole" (Gill, 2000: 52). Indwelling happens when the external world and the body (including the mind) of the knower merge to achieve performance (Pyrko et al., 2017).

3.1.3.3 Strategic Learning

Following the knowledge-based view of the firm and the above explanations that learning and strategy lie in the constellation of practices that are socially embedded, it is now important to discuss how the two relate. In this sub-chapter, 'strategic learning' is discussed. Strategic learning has been defined as "organizational learning that improves the strategic capability of the organization and changes the basic assumptions underlying the stable generation mechanism that structures the strategic behavior design process" (Kuwada, 1998: 719). The literature has identified four elements of strategic learning, "knowledge generation, multilevel focus, change and purposeful learning" (Wiewiora, 2023: 4). Strategic learning differs from organizational learning and knowledge management in involving two aspects: the deliberate effort to modify or adapt existing knowledge that has become ingrained in an organization's practices and routines and the coordinated integration of learning across different levels within the organization (Wiewiora, 2023).

In the perspective of strategic learning, Van Der Heijden invented scenario planning (Bradfield, Wright, Burt, Cairns, & Van Der Heijden, 2005; Burt & van der Heijden, 2003; Van der Heijden, 2011) which focuses on "the capability of organizations to perceive what is going on in their business environments, to think through what this means for them, and then to act upon this new knowledge" (Van der Heijden, Bradfield, Burt, Cairns, & Wright, 2009: 2). Analysis of multiple scenarios became widespread following the oil crises of the 1970s in both academia and the business world (Bood & Postma, 1997). Uncertainty and rapid, disruptive changes led organizations to use the scenario approach in the face of forecasting failure (Bood & Postma, 1997). The idea is to foster strategic learning by forecasting and analyzing potential scenarios.

However, forecasts cannot predict Black Swans, they are merely projections of small changes in the current situation. As introduced by Taleb (2005: 5), a Black Swan is "a random event satisfying the following three properties: large impact, incomputable probabilities, and surprise effect", therefore it is very improbable to predict a Black Swan event. Further, the prediction of certain Black Swan events – or extreme scenarios – precludes consideration of other possible scenarios which is why Taleb, Goldstein, and Spitznagel (2009) recommend that organizations focus on the potential consequences of Black Swans instead of trying to predict them. In that same line, it appears more interesting to promote strategic learning in the sense of long-run adaptive organizational learning (Thomas, Sussman, & Henderson, 2001).

Nevertheless, there is a distinction between the adaptive process from single-loop learning which is a necessity for the organization's survival and the generative process from double-loop learning which opens the door to creation. Strategic learning should therefore include both adaptive organizational learning and generative organizational learning which is "learning that enhances our capacity to create" (Senge, 2006: 14). Thriving in both, the learning organization is capable of not merely survival in the present but to engage in a continual transformative process for the future (Bratianu, 2015). This process also involves systems thinking due to the complexity of the organization and its environment.

The concept of 'learning organization' was broadly discussed and developed in academic publications in the 1990s following Senge's book *The Fifth Discipline: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organisation* published in 1990 (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008). This keen global interest was shared by businesses which led to a proliferation of tools and advice on how to become a learning organization (Gephart, Marsick, Van Buren, Spiro, & Senge, 1996), which have brought much discussion and advancement on the topic. However, it is still difficult to catch the essence of the learning organization. Already in 1998, Edmondson and Moingeon (1998) review the literature on OL, and show the diversity of approaches in studying OL depending on the unit of analysis, whether it is the *individual* or the

organization, and whether the objective of the research is *descriptive* or *interventionist*.

PRIMARY UNIT OF ANALYSIS

	Organization	Individual
Descriptive research	**Residues** (1) organizations as residues of past learning (e.g. Levitt and March, 1988)	**Communities** (2) organizations as collections of individuals who can learn and develop (e.g. Pedler et al., 1990)
Intervention research	**Participation** (3) organizational improvement gained through intelligent activity of individual members (e.g. Hayes et al., 1988)	**Accountability** (4) organizational improvement gained through developing individuals' mental models (e.g. Senge, 1990; Argyris, 1993)

RESEARCH GOAL

FIGURE 6: "A typology of organizational learning research"
Source: (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1998: 23)

According to Örtenblad (2004), due to the ambiguity and vagueness of the term from previous research, some organizations are wrongly called 'learning organizations.' While some researchers introduced this vagueness purposefully to allow flexibility of the concept to specific organizational contexts, others request a more precise definition of the term to help practitioners implement the idea and segment the organizations which are learning organizations from those which are not (Örtenblad, 2004). Attempting to offer a clear definition of the concept, Örtenblad (2004) presents an integrated model in which an organization is entirely a learning organization only when combining four key facets: "learning at work; organisational learning; developing a learning climate; and creating learning structures" (Örtenblad, 2004: 129). Furthermore, Garvin et al. (2008) present a concrete tool for businesses to assess learning within an organization and guidelines to become a learning organization. In their view, organizations need to work on three dimensions that should support and reinforce learning i.e., the environment, the processes and practices, and the leadership (Garvin et al., 2008). They further explain why organizations should be interested in becoming a learning organization, the main advantage being gaining

competitive advantage through flexibility and adaptability (Garvin et al., 2008). More recently, Hansen, Jensen, and Nguyen (2020) advocate for a reassessment of the relevance and applicability of Senge's theory with the concept of responsible learning organization. They argue that the concept of the learning organization offers substantial non-economic benefits and contend that the lasting value of *The Fifth Discipline* may lie more in its ethical implications for organizational practices than in its utility as a framework for achieving business success. Furthermore, Mishra and Reddy (2021) discuss the role of the leader's character in the link between organizational learning and learning organization.

Each organization can tend towards the learning organization by working on the five original "learning disciplines" that make its foundation: *personal mastery*–expanding the personal capacity of organizational members towards their desired goals and purposes, *mental models*–questioning how peoples' mental pictures of the world shape decision-making and behavior, *shared vision*–committing to a shared vision of the future and how to bring it to life, *team learning*–learning more as a group by sharing skills so that the result exceeds the ability of any member of the group, and *systems thinking*–thinking about what makes the behavior of systems (Senge, 2014: 6). These disciplines involve learning on three distinct levels: individual, group, and system. One of the key building blocks of a learning organization is the capability of its members to reflect and develop their thinking processes (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1998). This is because "the leverage for creating a learning organisation lies in the cognition of organisation members" (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1998: 22).

The disparity of views on what is or should be a learning organization and more generally the youth of managing learning organizations, can at least partially, explain why practitioners have struggled to translate the concept in practice (Senge, 2014). Another reason may lie in the clarification offered by Senge (2006: 10),

"You can never say "We are a learning organization," any more than you can say, "I am an enlightened person." The more you learn, the more acutely aware you become of your ignorance. Thus, a corporation cannot be "excellent" in the sense of having arrived at a permanent excellence; it is always in the state of practicing the disciplines of learning, of getting better or worse."

While it is undeniable that some organizations do a better job than others in OL, the concept of the learning organization resists exemplary organizations which are often

benchmarked by companies to copy and learn because "the learning organisation exists primarily as a vision in our collective experience and imagination" (Senge, 2014: 5-6). Thus, building a learning organization is a shared lifelong endeavor that involves a shift in how to think and act in an organization (Senge, 2014). In this sense, I would argue that the concept of the learning organization is integral to strategic learning.

As Chris C. Demchak stated, "it takes a lot of knowledge to run a complex system and even more when the system is surprised" (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015: 94). The next chapter of the literature review focuses on this element of surprise in the sense of an extreme context that is uncertain, challenging and has a high negative potential for the organization and its members.

3.2 Extreme Context Research

The second subchapter of the literature review addresses Extreme Context Research (ECR), a central focus given that this dissertation examines strategizing in extreme contexts. To build a foundation, it is essential to define what constitutes an extreme context, introduce a typology of such contexts, and clarify the related concept of extreme events. Within the field of Management and Organization Studies (MOS), this also involves exploring the relationship between organizations and extreme contexts, including a classification of organizations that operate in these environments. Additionally, this subchapter reviews the existing literature on extreme contexts in MOS, identifying five key themes: sensing, sensemaking, improvisation, ethical decision-making and learning. The final section integrates these themes to advance the understanding of extreme context strategizing.

3.2.1 Understanding Extreme Contexts

Hällgren et al. (2018) have conducted a large-scale review of 138 articles in MOS on extreme contexts published in top-tier journals spanning the period from 1980 to 2015. They observed that the literature is fragmented and uses a wide range of terms such as non-routine events, rare events, unexpected events, extreme situations and extreme environments (Hällgren et al., 2018).

First, to provide some clarity in the field, it is essential to understand what an extreme context is Hällgren et al. (2018) embrace the definition of *extreme context* offered by Hannah et al. (2009: 898):

"We define an extreme event as a discrete episode or occurrence that may result in an extensive and intolerable magnitude of physical, psychological, or material consequences to—or in close physical or psycho-social proximity to—organisation members. Going beyond an extreme event, we define an extreme context as an environment where one or more extreme events are occurring or are likely to occur that may exceed the organisation's capacity to prevent and result in an extensive and intolerable magnitude of physical, psychological, or material consequences to—or in close physical or psycho-social proximity to—organisation members".

Further, Hannah et al. (2009) identify five dimensions of extreme contexts which define the level of extremity experienced by an organization: 1) *location in time*, time is the main element in extreme context, the three chronological phases of preparation, in situ and post-event pose different challenges; 2) *magnitude of consequences*, the higher magnitude of undesirable impact, the more extreme the context; 3) *probability of consequences*, because a context is not qualified as extreme if the possibility of consequences is not perceived as high; 4) *physical or psycho-social proximity*, since the proximity –whether it is physical, psychological and/or social– of organizational members to extreme events influence behaviour and action; and 5) *form of threat*, which can be either physical, psychological, material, or a combination. Their understanding of extreme contexts is represented below. However, it can be argued that, in disrupted contexts, the phase of preparation is nonexistent and that the probability of consequences is unknown.
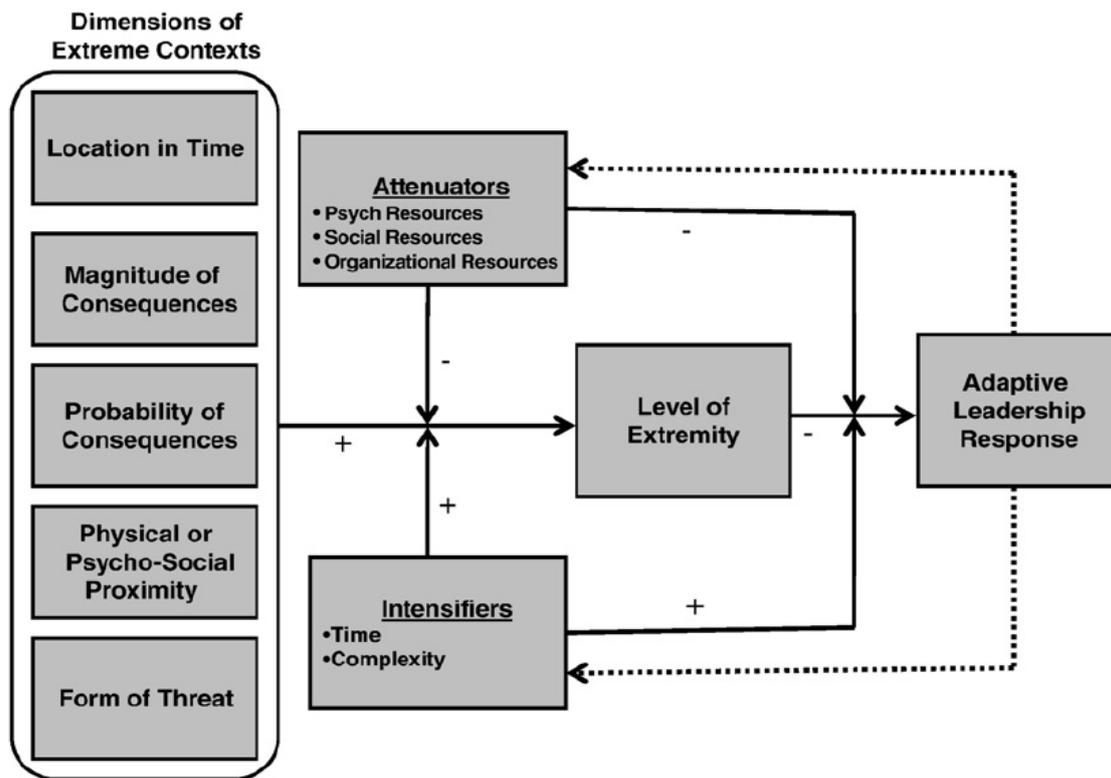
FIGURE 7: "Typology of Extreme Contexts"
Source: (Hannah et al., 2009: 899)

Although the term typology used by Hannah et al. (2009) does not seem to correspond to the figure presented above, some of the dimensions of extreme contexts presented in the figure highlight the fact that an extreme context can be characterized by uncertainty and complexity and represents a form of danger for the organization.

Any organization can be in an extreme context at a given time, but organizations are not on an equal footing when it comes to responding to extremity. More specifically, organizations can be classified according to their position with respect to extreme events. Hannah et al. (2009) distinguish between four types of organizations in relation to the frequency of experiencing extreme events, the degree of preparedness, and the subsequent potential consequences for organizational members, as illustrated below **TABLE** 1.

TABLE *1*: Classification of Organizations Experiencing Extreme Events
Source: own table, adapted from (Hannah et al., 2009)

Type of organisation	Frequency of extreme events	Probability of consequences for organisational members	Reliance on risk management procedures	Position towards extreme events	Typical example

Trauma organisation	Very high	Low	High	React	Emergency room
Critical action organisation	High	High	High	Engage or initiate	SWAT[3] team
High reliability organisation	Low	Medium	High	React	Nuclear power plant
Naïve organisation	Low	High	Low to none	Expect others to react	'Normal' organisation

Following this classification, the ability to respond to extreme events varies according to the type of organization.

The trauma organization is very often confronted with extreme events, but the risk is not directly on the members of the organization, e.g. the risk is first and foremost on the patients in the emergency room of a hospital (Hannah, Campbell, & Matthews, 2010; Hannah et al., 2009). Because operating in extreme contexts is the daily routine of trauma organizations, organizational members may require some level of detachment or coping mechanisms to remain efficient (Hannah et al., 2009).

The critical action organization (CAO) and its members are not only accustomed to operating in extreme contexts but because it is part of their modus operandi, they willingly accept the risks, sometimes even initiating extreme events. Organizational members of CAOs operate in dangerous situations and are in the front line. They are trained to work in such demanding conditions and are required to accept personal risk and commit to a certain duty that is explicitly part of the organization's ethos (Hannah et al., 2009).

Using this classification, the organization studied here, MSF can be categorized at the time of the cases studied as a high reliability organization (HRO). For this reason, HROs are described in more detail than the other types of organizations described here. The HRO is concerned with anticipation and plans for extreme events even if it rarely experiences such

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[3] SWAT stands for special weapons and tactics.

events. The concept of HRO was mainly developed by Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld (1999) who argue that,

> *"HROs warrant closer attention because they embody processes of mindfulness that suppress tendencies toward inertia"(Weick et al., 1999: 81)*

They claim that effective HROs share five characteristics: "a preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify interpretations, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and underspecified structuring." (Weick et al., 1999: 81). A commonly used example of HRO is a nuclear power plant (Bourrier, 1996; Coutu, 2003; Weick et al., 1999) because according to Weick, HROs work under harsh conditions but manage to avoid disasters through mindfulness i.e., the organizational members are alert to weak signals of change and they accept the complexity of the context and the organization without making the mistake of simplifying reality (Coutu, 2003).

The naïve organization sees extreme events as improbable and therefore does not prepare for such events (Hannah et al., 2009). In other words, this type of organization takes a naïve stance and simply hopes for the best.

However, organizations often encompass different levels of distinct organization types, for example, one department of an organization can be described as an HRO, and another department of this organization can be qualified as naïve organization (Hannah et al., 2009).

Second, under the umbrella term of extreme contexts, Hällgren et al. (2018) identified three further distinctions: *risky contexts*, *emergency contexts*, and *disrupted contexts*.

In risky contexts, organizations are hanging off a cliff because they are most of the time exposed to extreme events which are very likely to occur. When it is not just a high probability anymore, and an organization is experiencing extreme events, it can be either immersed in an *emergency context* if these events result from core activities gone wrong like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, or in a *disrupted context* if the events have nothing to do with the core business of the organization but threaten it to the core, for example, the shooting in the offices of the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo in Paris (Hällgren et al., 2018). A significant difference between these two types of extreme contexts is the possibility of preparedness; while with emergencies, an organization can prepare for extreme events, it is not possible with disruptions which catch the organization off guard (Hällgren et al., 2018).

The difference in terminology between extreme context and crisis has been explained by Hannah et al. (2009: 899):

> "whereas crisis involves the threat to a high priority goal, our definition of extreme contexts is predicated on a stricter qualification. In our definition, such threats must reach the threshold of "intolerable magnitude" where goals (e.g., life or safety) are not just of high priority but are imperative".

This means that crises might involve events which are not defined as extreme. Another difference is the response time; an organization has little to no time to respond when a crisis breaks out, whereas it is not necessarily the case with an extreme context (Hannah et al., 2009). We also observe a more extensive literature on crises and crisis management (Bundy, Pfarrer, Short, & Coombs, 2017).

There is growing popularity of extreme context research (ECR) in MOS, as shown in the following figure.

	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010-2015	Total
AMJ	2	5	5	11	23
AMR	0	3	1	1	5
ASQ	2	4	5	0	11
HR	1	2	17	5	25
JoM	2	2	0	1	5
JMS	8	3	5	7	23
Org Science	0	3	14	6	23
Org Studies	1	3	13	5	22
SMJ	0	0	0	1	1
Total	16	25	60	37	138

FIGURE 8: Distribution of Extreme Context Research Articles between 1980 and 2015 by Journal
Source: (Hällgren et al., 2018: 116)

This increasing attention into extremes might be due to the rising awareness of uncertainties and of the costs of extreme events on individuals, organizations, and societies; but also to the unusual occasion extremes offer to investigate "hard-to-get-at organisational phenomena" (Hällgren et al., 2018: 112). Nonetheless, ECR remains little researched in many fields, for example, in the leadership field (Hannah et al., 2009). Despite this, ECR has actively contributed to MOS (Hällgren et al., 2018). For instance, ECR has provided insights and understandings of organizational processes (Hällgren et al., 2018) such as sensemaking (Dwyer, Hardy, & Tsoukas, 2021; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010; Weick, 1993, 2010), change management (Buchanan, 2011), and OL (Lampel, Shamsie, & Shapira, 2009).

Nevertheless, the review of the ECR literature highlights a high fragmentation and a disproportion in the number of studies in the different types of extreme contexts. The majority of the literature in ECR is focused on emergency contexts, such as the Mann Gulch disaster (Weick, 1993), the Challenger (Vaughan, 1996) and Columbia space shuttle disasters (Madsen & Desai, 2010; Starbuck & Farjoun, 2009), the Three Mile Island nuclear accident (Stein, 2004), and the JR West rail crash (Chikudate, 2009). Only a few studies explore disrupted contexts (Hällgren et al., 2018), like the Black Saturday natural disaster (Shepherd & Williams, 2014), the Air France 447 crash (Oliver, Calvard, & Potočnik, 2017), the counterattack on Flight 93 (Quinn & Worline, 2008), or the stampede in the crowd in Torino (Gherardi, 2024). Further, the recent global crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic pandemic allow opportunities for researchers to study extreme contexts as they unfold (Rouleau, Hällgren, & de Rond, 2021).

3.2.2 Prevalent constructs in Extreme Context Research

3.2.2.1 Sensing in an extreme context

> *"Sensing is indispensable for constructing knowledge and should be employed on par with the intellect, particularly in today's complex and uncertain context" Bas, Dörfler, and Sinclair (2019); (Bas et al., 2023: 489)*

Bas, Dörfler, and Sinclair (2019) describe sensemaking and sensing as phases of intuition. They describe sensing as the spontaneous nature of intuition and sensemaking as the intentional one, describing an emergent and a deliberate part of intuition. Intuition has been defined as direct knowing, a form of knowledge acquisition that does not follow the typical step-by-step reasoning process associated with academic approaches to knowing but instead occurs through a process that appears to bypass these sequential steps (Dörfler & Bas, 2020). In that sense, sensing represents a form of direct knowing of the environment through the senses. Bas et al. (2023) emphasize that navigating the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment, managers often need to learn more rapidly, continuously adapting to the situation rather than preparing in advance, which demands both intellectual engagement and sensory knowing. Sensing is therefore critical in an extreme context.

Furthermore, some scholars have criticized the narrow focus on discourse and cognition in creating narratives for sensemaking and have pointed out the lack of attention in the senses when studying sensemaking (De Rond et al., 2019; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). In fact, the sensemaking process has been described as a mere cognitive process (de Graaff, Giebels, Meijer, & Verweij, 2019; Mumford et al., 2008). In that new direction, Cunliffe and Coupland (2011) take a new approach and investigate the role of embodiment in sensemaking to start "theorizing sensemaking as a *lived embodied everyday* experience" (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011: 64). More precisely, Cunliffe and Coupland (2011) have extended research discussing the role of emotions in sensemaking (Bartunek, Rousseau, Rudolph, & DePalma, 2006; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Myers, 2007; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) by studying embodiment, a concept which also integrates bodily sensations, felt experiences and sensory knowing. They show that sensemaking happens through both the intellect and the senses; body and context form an inseparable pair in the sensemaking process. They emphasize that organizational members' actions and sensemaking are informed by their embodied responses, so they encourage researchers to take a closer look at how this happens (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011). In fact, we usually feel things (such as changes in the environment or in others) before articulating them (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011). In addition, Antonacopoulou (2019) argues that 'sensuous learning' as a new theory, extends beyond sensory perception to emphasize the role of sensations in developing a form of 'intelligence', uniquely highlighting reflexivity as a crucial component in shaping practical judgment, character, and conscience in professional practice. Sensuous learning is rooted in social relations, inviting the contributions of others, as practical judgment reflects a balance between exerting control and surrendering it (Antonacopoulou, 2019).

Gherardi (2019) discusses embodiment as multiple, beyond the boundaries of the individual's body. She emphasizes the effects of affective resonance, affective contagion developed by Hansen (2004), and affective attunement for the research during ethnographic fieldwork. However, affective resonance, affective contagion and affective attunement are also at play between the individuals that together experience an extreme context. For instance, Gherardi (2024) illustrates how a seemingly routine event the public viewing of the Champions League on large screens in Piazza San Carlo, Torino, Italy escalated into an disrupted context. The disruption arose from the misinterpretation of contextual cues, compounded by the broader social backdrop of recent terrorist attacks across Europe. This created a sense of "phantom power" (Gherardi, 2024: 1), where the failure of sensemaking triggered widespread panic,

ultimately resulting in 2 deaths and 1,527 injured. Interestingly, Gherardi (2024: 11) describes how affect is shared in the sense that "our senses participate in the dynamics of affecting and being affected", highlighting the powerful role of embodied and sensorial knowledge in shaping collective behavior. This extreme context shows how actions can be driven by a dynamic interplay of affectivity, communication, and cognition, where bodily sensations and emotions co-produce responses that override purely rational decision-making (Gherardi, 2024).

Intuiting through sensing can be considered an instrument of sensemaking that should not be disregarded. The interest in embodiment in sensemaking research was already encouraged by Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) who draw from research suggesting that we experience in our body not only our emotions but also those of others and that there is much to look at in the loop between how bodily sensations can trigger sensemaking and how in turn sensemaking can affect the sensing of cues in the environment. This turn to embodiment was initiated by Varela, Evan, and Eleanor (1991) in their book *The Embodied Mind*, in which they developed the embodied cognition approach they also call 'enaction', which depicts the interdependence between world and embodiment. They criticize the objectivist orientation of cognitive science, derived from philosophical hermeneutics, which rejects the conceptualization of cognition as embodied understanding.

> *"The term hermeneutics originally referred to the discipline of interpreting ancient texts, but it has been extended to denote the entire phenomenon of interpretation, understood as the enactment or bringing forth of meaning from a background of understanding. In general, Continental philosophers, even when they explicitly contest many of the assumptions underlying hermeneutics, have continued to produce detailed discussions that show how knowledge depends on being in a world that is inseparable from our bodies, our language, and our social history–in short, from our embodiment."* *(Varela et al., 1991: 149)*

De Rond et al. (2019) further distinguish two bodily approaches to sensemaking i.e., one they call "of the body" approach which corresponds to the perspective of Cunliffe and Coupland (2011), and the other "from the body" approach that they develop from their empirical paper (De Rond et al., 2019: 64). The latter approach emphasizes the 'who' in the sensemaking process, with the source of sensemaking being "the holistic experience of being a body, including sensory experience entangled with emotional, physical, relational and moral aspects" (De Rond et al., 2019: 64). This understanding situates sensemaking in the body.

3.2.2.2 Sensemaking in an extreme context

Drawing on the key characteristics and concepts of sensemaking and several works on sensemaking that have had a significant impact on MOS, this topic is discussed in more detail than the other identified prevalent concepts in ECR.

Sensemaking in an extreme context can be characterized as "sensemaking under pressure" (Cornelissen et al., 2014: 700) because actions are risky and need to be quick and appropriate. Although it is expected in an extreme context that pressure originates from the context, it can also come from others and from the individual's perception of others' expectations (Cornelissen, 2012). Extreme events bring chaos and it is through sensemaking that order is restored. Further, this is an essential process to understand how organizational members understand their environments, enact them and make decisions.

> *"Organizations operating in extreme contexts regularly face dangerous incidents they can neither prevent nor easily control. In such circumstances, successful sensemaking can mean the difference between life and death." (Dwyer et al., 2021: 1)*

The concept of sensemaking has been one of great interest in ECR, especially in relation to decision-making and action. Sensemaking "is built out of vague questions, muddy answers, and negotiated agreements that attempt to reduce confusion" (Weick, 1993: 636). Sensemaking has also been described as "the process through which individuals work to understand novel, unexpected, or confusing events" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 58). In that sense, extreme events offer sensemaking opportunities. More precisely, it has been defined as "a process, prompted by violated expectations, that involves attending to and bracketing cues in the environment, creating intersubjective meaning through cycles of interpretation and action, and thereby enacting a more ordered environment from which further cues can be drawn" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 58). However, sensemaking after a novel, unexpected or confusing event shapes a new normal that may or may not be more ordered. Daft and Weick (1984) describe organizations as interpretation systems. Sensemaking implies people interpreting phenomena and producing meaning intersubjectively (Brown, 2005) because "organisational actors socially construct their realities" (Weick, 1995: cited in Monin, Noorderhaven, Vaara, & Kroon, 2013: 259). In that perspective, sensemaking is a way for an organization to respond to two critical questions: "'what's our story here?' and 'what do we do next?' and in doing so organizes their entanglement with natural phenomena" (Good, 2020, p. 18). This clear link between

sensemaking and action makes sensemaking a particularly interesting concept when researching strategizing in extreme context.

Weick's (1993) influential article of the Mann Gulch fire is a particularly interesting case for my research because it clearly demonstrates from a concrete and real example the critical role of sensemaking in extreme context strategizing and is particularly relevant for this research. In doing so, this case also provides lessons and directions for future research for both ECR and SM. For these reasons, this case is detailed in length. In his analysis of the deadly fire that occurred in 1949, Weick (1993) showcases how the failure of collective sensemaking brought fourteen smokejumpers to forego their professional identity after the leading fireman, Dodge, who realized first the immediate danger the group asked the others to drop their tools. In his analysis of this extreme case, Weick (1993) emphasized that being asked to drop their tools created an existential crisis in those who are no longer there to extinguish the fire. In that moment, they became regular people in danger caught in the middle of a fire, and the organization of firemen disintegrated. They left their professional identity and the organization and tried to escape the fire in an individual effort. In a state of panic, they used different tactics that led most of them to their deaths. However, two firefighters survived because they managed to recreate a dual social unit and make sense of the situation accurately (O'Grady & Orton, 2016). In the Mann Gulch case, the social construction of reality became especially difficult because of the contradictory cues sent and received by the organizational members. For instance, the firemen were sent to a 10:00 fire (i.e., the fire should be surrounded and isolated before 10 a.m. the next day) and some of the firefighters' actions were consistent with this (e.g., one fireman taking pictures of the fire) while they perceived some elements of the high intensity of the fire that were at odds with a 10:00 fire. Hanging on to the belief of a 10:00 fire was a failure of sensemaking that had catastrophic consequences.

Weick (1993) shows how the study and interpretation of an old case involving an organization in an extreme context has the potential to provide key lessons for contemporary organizations that often have to act as a small, temporary group and make fast decisions where the stakes are high. This article became extremely influential in MOS. According to Google Scholar, it was cited over 6,400 times. It showed the potential of extreme context research in revealing organizational processes – here sensemaking and decision-making – more clearly than in regular situations. As presented by Hällgren, Rouleau and de Rond (2018), extreme context research matters for MOS. As de Rond described in an interview, "extreme

environments crystalize priorities" and problems that are also present in normal environments tend to be more visible (Moore, 2021).

In his book, *Sensemaking in Organisations*, Weick (1995) discusses further the concept of sensemaking –"the making of sense" (Weick, 1995: 4) – and presents the seven properties of the sensemaking process: "identity, retrospect, enactment, social contact, ongoing events, cues, and plausibility" (Weick, 1995: 3). Sensemaking starts with a *sensemaker* because it requests a *retrospective* effort from an individual to reflect on inconsistent cues (Weick, 1995). Faced with improbable events, the individual is tempted to consider "it can't be, therefore, it isn't" (Weick, 1995: 1). Nonetheless, sensemaking happens at both the individual and the social level,

> *"Sense may be in the eye of the beholder, but beholders vote and the majority rules"*
> *(Weick, 1995: 6)*

That is, sensemaking involves *identity* and starts from an individual's reflection and interpretation when a situation does not make sense, however it is verbalized, develops as social activity and meaning must be constructed socially to be accepted by others within the organization (Weick, 1995). This means that sensemaking and interpretation represent two distinct concepts. However, they are often mistakenly treated as interchangeable words (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). In many of his works, Weick's raises his famous "'sensemaking recipe': 'How can I know what I think until I see what I say?'" (Anderson, 2006: 1675). This implies a weird loop between the forward act of interpretation as 'discovery', and the retrospective sensemaking as 'invention' which complement each other (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015; Weick, 1995).

Enactment, a key aspect of sensemaking is a concept introduced by Weick (1979) as "the process by which individuals in organisations act and, in doing so, create the conditions that become the constraints and opportunities they face" (Perlow, 1999: 58, cited in Andreson, 2006). In other words, sensemaking is a social construction process by which "we enact (make 'real') our environments" (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011: 65). As described by Weick (1988), enactment encompasses both the process itself and its "residuum" (Weick, 1988: 307) i.e., an enacted environment resulting from this social process. The understanding of enactment in extreme events as offered by Weick (1988) in his analysis of the Bhopal disaster is essential because it has changed the conversation about organizations facing extreme events from the

idea that a crisis happens to workers to the understanding that people enact the crisis and are actually part of it (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010). To take full account of enactment in crisis situations is to realize that people and their initial actions in response to the cues they have extracted from the environment change the course of the crisis because they create the issues, opportunities and constraints they will have to face next, thereby creating the path of the crisis (Weick, 1988). Another characteristic of sensemaking is *plausibility*, which represents the need to create plausible rather than accurate stories from the *cues* people have extracted from *ongoing events* in the context because of their own dispositions (Weick, 1995).

Many researchers have been inspired by Weick's work, have delved into the sensemaking process (e.g., Abolafia, 2010; Anderson, 2006; Boudes & Laroche, 2009; Christianson & Barton, 2021; De Rond et al., 2019; Gioia, 2006; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Mills et al., 2010; Nowling & Seeger, 2020; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015, 2020; Taylor & Lerner, 1996) and they have greatly influenced the field of MOS (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

Sensemaking in an organization is a key process, especially for organizations facing what Weick (1993: 633) calls 'a cosmology episode',

> *"A cosmology episode occurs when people suddenly and deeply feel that the universe is no longer a rational, orderly system. What makes such an episode so shattering is that both the sense of what is occurring and the means to rebuild that sense collapse together."*

Weick (1993) shifts the focus from decision-making to meaning i.e., the organization creates reality by making sense of what is happening – by making efforts to create order. Hence, sensemaking is an ongoing process that accounts for the organization as "an always-emergent order" (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015: S9).

A concept often discussed in connection with sensemaking is sensegiving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Monin et al., 2013; Pratt, 2000; Weick et al., 2005). Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) draw from a large comparative case study to identify what triggers and enables sensegiving for leaders and stakeholders. Pratt (2000) shows how organisational practices of *sensebreaking* – the destruction of meaning that creates a void of meaning that needs to be fulfilled – and *sensegiving* – the satisfaction of the newly created need for meaning – are used to manage employees' identification with the organisation; how these

practices combined can lead to strong and positive identification, deidentification, disidentification or ambivalent identification. Monin et al. (2013) describe a two-stage process starting with sensegiving as a tool for convincing and reassuring stakeholders, including employees, about value creation ideas and justifying changes, and then sensemaking constructively from the sensegiving received in the form of acceptance or resistance to the meaning given by top management.

An important distinction between sensemaking and sensegiving is that people *make sense of* but they *give sense to* as shown in the analysis of justice in post-merger integration provided by Monin et al. (2013). That distinction shows the prospective or future-oriented character of sensegiving and the retrospective nature of sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) introduced the concept of sensegiving in response to a limitation in the sensemaking perspective in terms of studying prospective sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015) and go as far as to describe sensemaking as incomplete without sensegiving, the making of meanings for a specific public (Weick et al., 2005). In the single case studied by Snell (2002), leaders used sensegiving as propaganda tool to convince employees of the becoming of a learning organization. However, for Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), the sensemaking-sensegiving duo is iterative for a CEO through the different phases of initiating strategic change since sensegiving is a means of influencing the sensemaking of others i.e., the CEO is focused on understanding (sensemaking for him/herself) before influencing (sensegiving to others) then understanding again before influencing again. We see from the perspective of Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) that "a "sensegiver" is also a "sensemaker", and vice versa; the two cannot be separated" (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015: S24) and this does not only apply to CEOs.

Further, sensemaking and sensegiving may even overlap which is one of the reasons why Cunliffe and Coupland (2011) discuss the concept of 'polyphony' (Weick, 2012). Polyphony describes the multiplicity of voices, the interpretations that people take into account and respond to in order to ensure narrative coherence, therefore narrative performance is both "responsive and contested" (Cunliffe & Coupland, 2011: 68) because of the entanglement of voices. Taking into account the multiplicity of actors in the organization, it is essential to understand that it is not a simple interaction between meaning-makers and meaning-givers; ""givers" and "makers" of sense do not interact but *intra-act*" (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015: S24). In other words, meaning is socially constructed (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), it is the result

of the sensemaking process in which an intertwining of sense is simultaneously and iteratively made and given by its participants (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015).

In taking into account the agents of the sensemaking process, Sandberg and Tsoukas (2015) make a critical distinction between first-order and second-order sensemaking, which is of particular interest when exploring strategizing in extreme contexts, both in the field where extreme events occur or are likely to occur, and at the organization's headquarters where sensemaking takes place at a distance. First-order sensemaking is carried out by those who directly experience the chaos and have to recreate order (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). This sensemaking is carried out before a second-order sensemaking, by those who, like the members of an inquiry team, in turn give meaning to the first-order sensemaking (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Cunliffe and Coupland (2011) further show the temporality of the sensemaking process, as past and present interactions and anticipation of the future influence how people continually create meaning, and they do so by seeking 'narrative coherence' over the course of time.

One stream of scholars looked closely at the importance of narrative to understand organizational sensemaking (Abolafia, 2010; Boudes & Laroche, 2009; Brown, 2003, 2005; Taylor & Lerner, 1996). This interest in narratives is understandable, as organizational sensemaking produces stories that organizational members tell and share as they make sense of their environment. Stories are vehicles for sensemaking and can help those who hear them to immediately create mental images (Maclean, Harvey, & Chia, 2012). For instance, Abolafia (2010) identifies the process of collective narrative construction that precedes action. This collective sensemaking is an effort to embed what has been institutionalized as appropriate within the organization and shape the environment (Abolafia, 2010). Sensemaking narratives allow to socially build dominant stories (Weick, 2012). To understand the sensemaking process of the failure of the Barings Bank, Brown (2005) analyses a narrative (the Barings Report) as sensemaking attempt from an inquiry team and reveals the power of such narrative in constructing a particular storyline and impose a specific version of what happened and the learnings to readers. Some researchers turned to the use of metaphor as sensemaking tool like Cornelissen, Oswick, Thøger Christensen, and Phillips (2008). While narratives offer a means of drawing together confusing clues into a coherent interpretation of events and potential actions, metaphors are useful in bridging the gap between the new and the known (Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2015). Furthermore, the use of narratives or metaphors for sensemaking purposes can be the result of improvisation (Weick, 1998).

3.2.2.3   Improvising in an extreme context

Improvisation, no matter the context (whether extreme or not) is a creative process (Fisher & Barrett, 2019). Weick (1998) uses jazz improvisation to describe how improvisers become storytellers receiving the immediate reactions of others for their irreversible acts of creation under time pressure. Although the term was borrowed from jazz and theatre, it is now quite common in organizational studies (Fisher & Barrett, 2019). In fact, it has been argued that improvising is one of the organizing's core elements since organizational actors improvise when they are faced with uncertainty (Cunha, Miner, & Antonacopoulou, 2017).

For Crossan (1998), improvising is about the strategic renewal of the organization and see improvisation as the source of a novel and useful response when existing routines are inadequate for the situation (Fisher & Barrett, 2019). Kayes, Allen, and Self (2017: 280) emphasized that in an extreme context "well-learned routines are no longer applicable or are applicable only in part". Thus, strategizing in extreme contexts most likely involves a certain degree of improvisation. More generally, in conditions of uncertainty, strategy "involves generation of knowledge and possibilities that are informed by distinct theories, new evidence, unique insights, and imagination" (Rindova & Courtney, 2020: 788), which creates fertile ground for improvisation.

Further, O'Grady and Orton (2016) identified improvising as a bridge between sense-losing and sense-remaking. Improvisation and bricolage describe transformations in the organization and are particularly at work during a cosmology episode when organizational members have to recreate meaning (O'Grady & Orton, 2016). "*Bricoleurs* remain calm under pressure and are able to create order out of chaos" (O'Grady & Orton, 2016: 115). As an example, it is through an act of improvisation –creating an escape fire and lying down in the ashes– that smokejumper leader Dodge survived the Mann Gulch fire (Weick, 1993).

Orton and O'Grady (2016) reconceptualized the concept of cosmology episode. They break down a cosmology episode through the comparison of their analysis of the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010 and the findings Weick (1993) developed from his analysis of the Mann Gulch disaster into five processes of resilience "anticipating, sense-losing, improvising, sense-remaking, and renewing (or declining)" (O'Grady & Orton, 2016: 109). Already in 2002, Orton issued the following warning "we may have spent too much time

studying sense-making, decision-making, and strategy-making, and not enough time studying strategy-losing, decision-losing, and sense-losing" (Orton, 2002: 27).

Sense-losing is described as a key process in a cosmology episode, for it is only when the cosmology is disrupted to the point of losing sense (or collapse of meaning) and there is a need to make sense of it again that we can speak of a cosmology episode (O'Grady & Orton, 2016). Similarly, there is interest in studying the collapse of strategy in extreme contexts and how strategy is reshaped through acts of improvisation.

Although, Mendonca and Al Wallace (2007) discuss 'emergency management improvisation' highlighting the critical part of improvisation in organizational life in case of emergency, which is one type of extreme context, they do not discuss the role of the senses in cognition.

3.2.2.4 Ethical decision making (EDM) in an extreme context

A recent interesting direction that has received some attention in sensemaking research is the role of sensemaking in EDM. This may be particularly important in extreme contexts, where moral issues are more likely to arise, as is obvious is the four extreme contexts studied here. Bagdasarov et al. (2016) have identified the role of sensemaking processes in the use of peoples' mental models for EDM. Looking at EDM for scientists, Mumford et al. (2008) argue that sensemaking has a key role in EDM because it is through sensemaking that people recognize the moral significance of the decision they have to make, it is through their mental models that they weigh up potential actions and formulate alternative decisions for EDM, and predict the potential consequences of these alternative decisions (for themselves, others and their work). In that sense, EDM can be qualified "as a form of sensemaking" (Mumford et al., 2008: 317). Mumford et al. (2008) developed a sensemaking model of EDM, represented below.
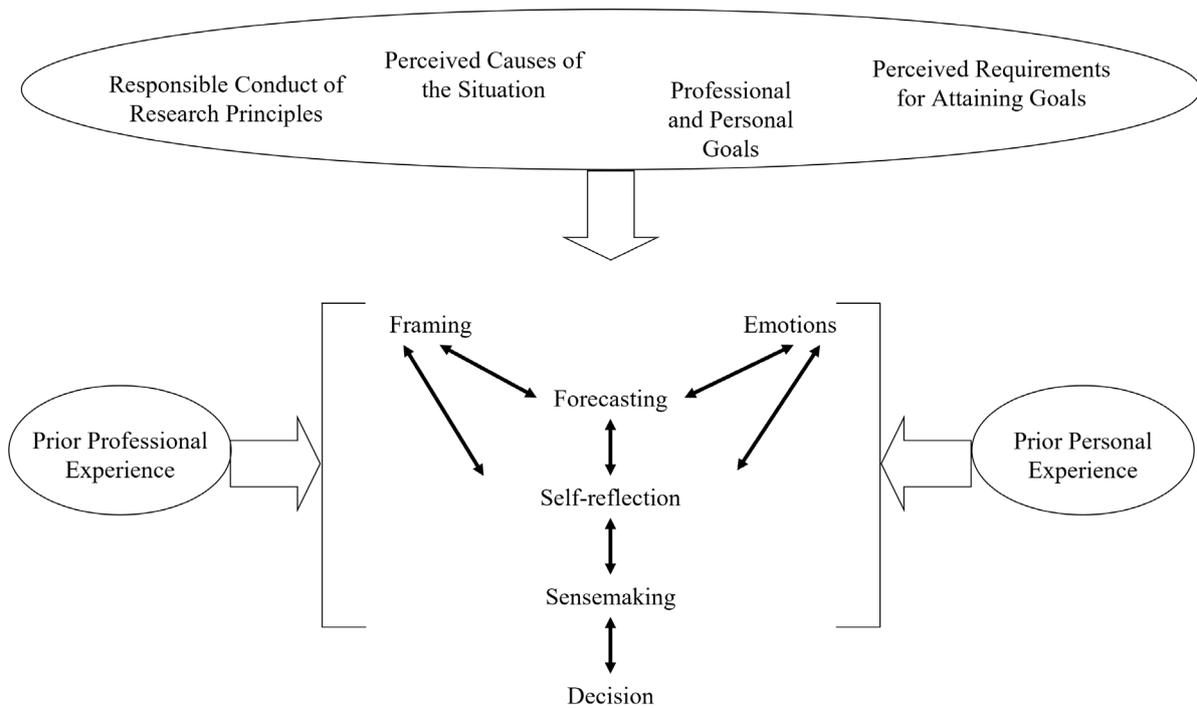
FIGURE 9: Sensemaking model of ethical decision making
Source: (Mumford et al., 2008: 318)

In this model, it is interesting to see that "framing the problem and experiencing a range of emotions" (Mumford et al., 2008: 318) play an equally important role in constructing or selecting the mental model for sensemaking and ultimately decision-making. Similarly, Dwyer, Hardy, and Tsoukas (2023) and Maitlis and Sonenshein (2010) have recognized the important role of emotions in sensemaking, which can go either way, as a facilitator or inhibitor.

Sonenshein (2007) proposes a sensemaking-intuition model as alternative to the rationalist perspective of sensemaking. In the rationalist perspective, "individuals use deliberate and extensive moral reasoning" to respond to ethical issues (Sonenshein, 2007: 1022).
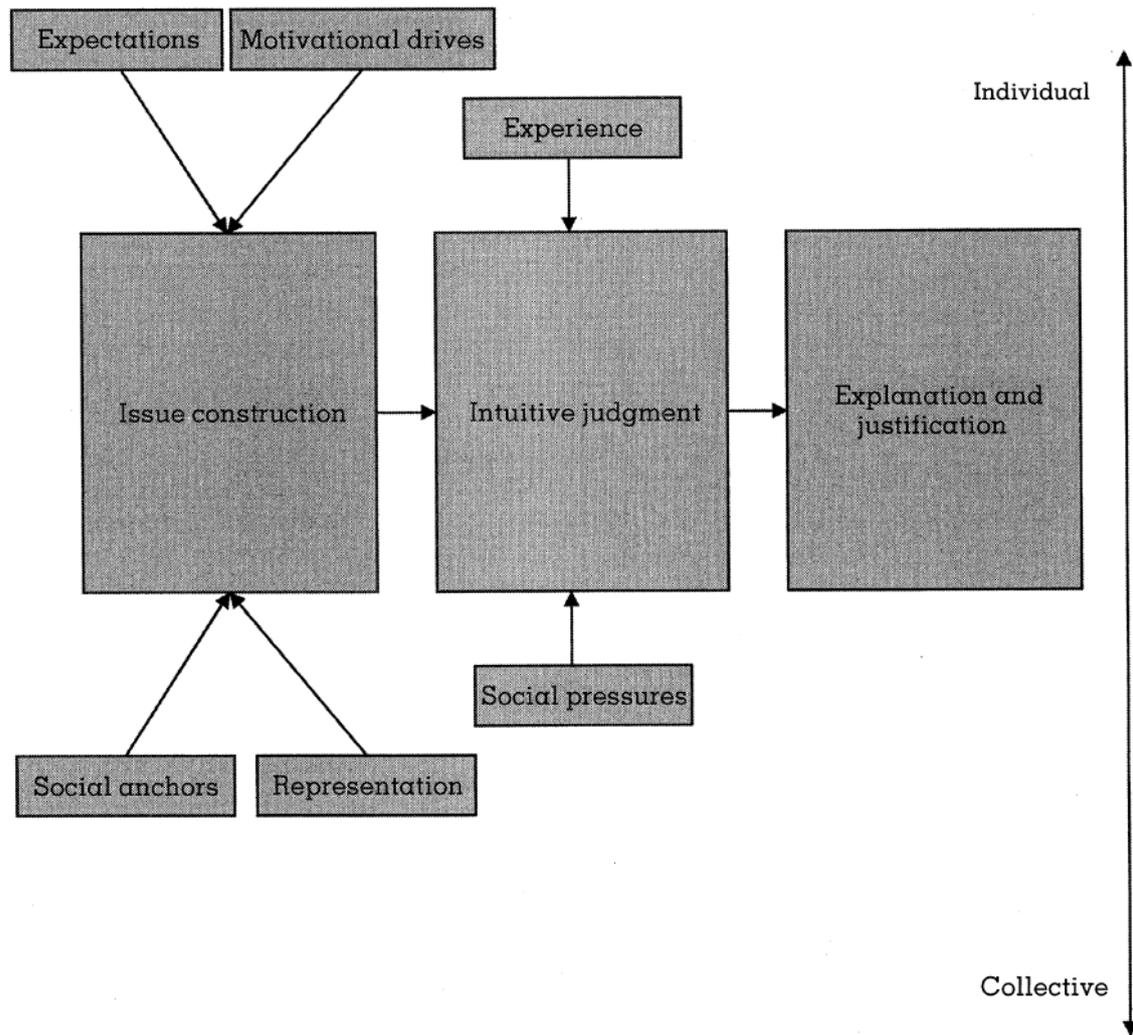
FIGURE 10: The Sensemaking-Intuition Model (SIM)
Source: (Sonenshein, 2007: 1035)

Sonenshein (2007) highlights that "researchers know little empirically about these processes of sensemaking, in part because of the research methodologies (scenario studies) frequently used to study responses to ethical issues" (Sonenshein, 2007: 1035).

Bagdasarov et al. (2016) discuss the relationship between EDM and creative thought which has been studied by Mumford et al. (2010). Mumford et al. (2010) establish the relationship between scientists' EDM and their creative thinking abilities by measuring creative processing skills with EDM in different scenarios with response options. Some scholars have also been interested in the relation between learning and ethics (Balotsky & Steingard, 2006; Gottlieb & Sanzgiri, 1996; Nielsen, 1993; Ritter, 2006; Trevino, 1992; Yuthas et al., 2004). The contributions of Balotsky and Steingard (2006), Ritter (2006) and Trevino (1992) focus on the importance of ten aching and learning business ethics to individuals and do not discuss organizational learning. However, Gottlieb and Sanzgiri (1996) examine ethical behavior at

both individual and organizational levels to discuss how to establish ethical standards. They explain three important layers of EDM: the leader's integrity and sense of responsibility, the organization's culture of open dialogue that encourages disagreement, and the organization's commitment to double-loop learning.

3.2.2.5 Learning in an extreme context

A compelling argument to researching extreme contexts resides in OL. Experiencing an extreme context represents a unique opportunity for OL which is particularly critical in knowledge-based strategizing as described before. Based on real-life, an organization can learn much from experiencing extremity because, "extreme contexts do showcase the best and worst of human and organizational behaviors, accelerating processes otherwise impeded by bureaucracy, power plays, and politicking" (Hällgren et al., 2018: 140). However, the impact of the extreme event(s) on the organization will influence the scale and scope of OL (Lampel et al., 2009). In other words, learning lessons from the past and implementing change is more motivated when the effect on the organization was great (Lampel et al., 2009). Since extreme events are more expected in specific fields, like medicine or emergency response, extreme contexts are more common in some organizations than in others (Hannah et al., 2009). Therefore, the organizations which experience extreme contexts more frequently provide more occasions to learn from. Nonetheless, while OL represents a common topic in risky context and emergency context research, there is again much less in the literature in terms of studying OL from case studies of disrupted contexts.

What has been named 'environmental jolts' by Meyer (1982) can benefit organizations and provide opportunities for organizational learning as he showed, using the example of the responses of nineteen hospitals faced with the strike of physicians for a month how different organizations confronted with the same environmental jolts respond.
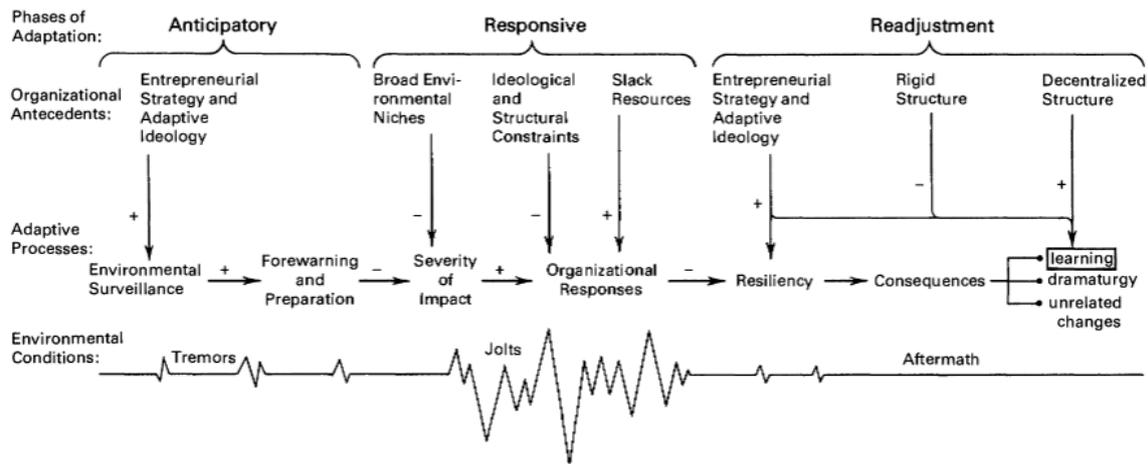
FIGURE 11: "Antecedents, dynamics, and consequences of organizational adaptations to environmental jolts."
Source: (Meyer, 1982: 534)

However, environmental jolts are described as sudden and unprecedented incidents that require organizational responses (Meyer, 1982) but cannot be compared to the threatening nature of extreme events to individuals and the organization. While environmental jolts take organizations by surprise, extreme events are seen as extremely unpleasant surprises and are more likely to cause a breakdown in learning. However, the idea that the new can ultimately take a positive form through organizational learning and transformation is of particular interest in the study of extreme context strategizing.

There is also an interesting link to explore between sensemaking and OL in extreme contexts. The study of organizational sensemaking in extreme contexts, such as the analysis of the Bhopal disaster (Weick, 1988, 2010), offers great potential for organizations to learn from the unexpected. The analysis of this extreme case shows that "alertness or sensing something out of the ordinary" may not be the problem that hinders sensemaking and strategic action in an extreme context (Weick, 2010: 539). Weick (2010) pointed to inadequate training and the loss of experts (lack of experience, oversimplification of tasks and misallocation of responsibilities to reduce costs) to explain the failed sensemaking and enactment that exacerbated the crisis in the Bhopal disaster. Further, the low probability of a disaster in a place that had been shut down for six weeks made people disregard cues, whether they came from the senses (such as smell),

> *"About 11:30 PM one of the operators, Mohan Varma, said, 'Hey, can you smell it? I swear there's MIC in the air'. The others replied, 'There can't be any smell of MIC in a factory that's stopped."* (Weick, 2010: 539)

or from the intellect (after looking at the data),

> *"During the tea break which started at 11:40 PM, operator Suman Dey came into the canteen from the control room and said, 'The pressure needle has shot up from 2 to 30 psig'. Hearing this, Supervisor Qureshi said, 'Suman, you're getting in a sweat about nothing! It is your dial that has gone mad' and continued with the tea break (Lapierre and Moro, 2002, p. 286)." (Weick, 2010: 539)*

The organizational members were unable to make sense of the unexpected extreme event and were therefore unable to react adequately and quickly enough. Experience, learning and training therefore appear to be essential for sensemaking and for "organizing for high reliability" (Weick, 2010: 546) in extreme contexts. In fact, Weick's analysis reveals that the five critical principles –*preoccupation with failure*, *reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations*, *commitment to resilience* and *deference to expertise*– for organizing for high reliability were nowhere to be found in the practices of the organization.

Resilience is another particularly interesting concept that has first received attention in MOS before more recent consideration in ECR (Williams, Gruber, Sutcliffe, Shepherd, & Zhao, 2017). This may be because ECR researchers are often more interested in analyzing and explaining the causes of a crisis than in how to withstand adversity or cope with uncertainty (Williams et al., 2017). "Resilience generally has been used to describe organizations, systems, or individuals that are able to react to and recover from duress or disturbances with minimal effects on stability and functioning" (Williams et al., 2017: 740). Thus, developing resilience as capacity for adaptation and recovery from the disturbances can benefit organizations to overcome the threatening situation and remain mostly intact (Williams & Shepherd, 2016). However, the literature on organizational resilience does not agree on whether resilience is a process or an outcome (Williams et al., 2017). While it is accepted that organizational resilience is developed over time, some see resilience as the returning to the state the organization was before the disturbance i.e., a bouncing back to the status quo (Williams et al., 2017). At the individual level, Muhammad Naeem, Qingxiong, and Hameed (2024) discuss the importance to empower leadership to influence positively psychological resilience towards more work engagement and less turnover intention.

However, Lengnick-Hall, Beck, and Lengnick-Hall (2011) describe resilience as the organizational capability to go beyond the prior equilibrium and thrive though new possibilities.

The emergence of organizational resilience studies and in this recent field the development of cosmology episode studies bring great potential for new understandings in ECR, in particular "on organizing, sensemaking, resilience and leadership judgment" (O'Grady, Moorkamp, Torenvlied, & Orton, 2021: 145). It is argued that organizational learning can be added to that list. In fact, Kayes (2015) explains that the organization builds organizational resilience through learning. Kayes (2015) sees the breakdown of learning as cause for organizational failure and advocates learning from experience as key organizational process; rebuild learning after its breakdown is critical.

3.2.3   Towards the understanding of Extreme Context Strategizing

I name extreme context strategizing the process of strategizing in an extreme context. In the previous two sections, I have explained what an extreme context is (and what it is not) and I have brought together the field of ECR with the field of MOS in five prevalent concepts that have been put to the fore in the literature. In this section, I go further and look beyond the five prevalent concepts individually and discuss efforts made in the literature to integrate them in understanding in part or in whole the process of extreme context strategizing.

The processes of sensemaking, ethical decision making (EDM), and organizational learning have been the subject of many studies in MOS as individual focus of the research. It would be extremely difficult and cumbersome to cite all the contributions that focus on each of these three organizational processes. The most important ones in ECR have been discussed in the previous section. On several occasions, two of these processes are discussed together in academic contributions.

Several contributions have brought together sensemaking and organizational learning (Bosma, Chia, & Fouweather, 2016; Calvard, 2016; Colville, Hennestad, & Thoner, 2014; Colville, Pye, & Brown, 2016; Dwyer & Hardy, 2016; Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2016; Moore & Koning, 2016; Thomas et al., 2001). The relationship between the two processes gained attention and was the topic of a special issue in *Management Learning* published in 2016. One of the contributions of this special issue discusses the relationship between sensemaking and learning with strategic learning (Thomas et al., 2001). Thomas et al. (2001) define strategic learning as an important capability of the organization to enhance performance. For them, sensemaking "rises to strategic relevance when guided by the procedural and philosophical underpinnings of strategic learning" (Thomas et al., 2001: 343). Further, they show the

advantage of having a system in place for sensemaking with the expression of a multiplicity of voices and interpretations of the events that are deemed of strategic relevance by top management with the example of CALL (Centre for Army Lessons Learned) (Thomas et al., 2001). Such system (integrating event set definition, data acquisition, interpretation, packaging) is described as an investment for future strategic opportunity (Thomas et al., 2001).

Furthermore, the role of learning for strategizing under conditions of uncertainty has been emphasized. For instance, Rindova and Courtney (2020: 792) state that "strategy making under uncertainty requires that we understand the sources and consequences of the different approaches to resolving knowledge problems". Strategy and management under uncertainty have been the subject of several books and academic articles (Courtney, Kirkland, & Viguerie, 1997; Furr & Eisenhardt, 2021; Oliver & Parrett, 2018; Spender, 2014; Wernerfelt & Karnani, 1987). While extreme contexts encompass the notion of uncertainty, not all uncertain contexts can be characterized as extreme contexts since uncertainty is not the only condition to the extreme (see 3.2.1).

The relationship between sensemaking and ethics has also –to a lesser extent– been discussed (Bagdasarov et al., 2016; de Graaff et al., 2019; Mumford et al., 2008; Sonenshein, 2007; Thiel, Bagdasarov, Harkrider, Johnson, & Mumford, 2012). When confronted with an ethical issue, they explain that, based on past experience, a mental model will be constructed or created to understand that ethical issue, and that this mental model will form the basis of the sensemaking that will then guide the decision (Mumford et al., 2008).

However, it is recognized that there is a lack of empirical studies to understand sensemaking when faced with ethical issues (Sonenshein, 2007). As presented in detail in 3.2.2.4, the sensemaking-intuition model provided by Sonenshein (2007) describes that individuals do not ignore equivocality and uncertainty when responding to ethical questions, but do so by engaging in sensemaking processes. Further, the construction of the moral issues is influenced by the individual's motivations and expectations (Sonenshein, 2007). However, the impact of the organization (its culture, history, framing and ethical model) on the response to a moral issue is not discussed.

In addition, de Graaff et al. (2019) discusses the relationship between 'sensemaking tactics' and the perceived moral intensity of the situation in military critical incidents and Thiel et al. (2012) provide a conceptual model of leader EDM linking sensemaking, leader

sensemaking strategies and ethical decision. Yet, their focus is limited to the individual level of the leader. However, the witnessing of the extreme events and physical presence in the field is particularly relevant to sensemaking, as more recent research has shown (De Rond et al., 2019).

(Rindova & Courtney, 2020) and (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015) have shown that HROs, through *mindful organizing*, can be particularly efficient at solving a problem early enough to prevent it escalating due to the interaction with other processes within the organization. They can do this because the members of these organizations are attuned to little contextual cues, small discrepancies that are perceived and interpreted in time, enabling constant adaptation. This requires expertise and a commitment to resilience. This can relate to examples of catastrophes that are about to strike and whose major consequences can be avoided if they are detected in a prompt manner. *Comprehending* the issue is therefore paramount (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

Research on extreme context strategizing is very compartmentalized. As detailed in the previous section, the literature emphasizes the importance of concepts such as sensemaking, ethical decision making, improvising, learning and resilience. However, these concepts are not linked in a coherent and clear way to fully uncover the process of extreme context strategizing.

3.3   Conclusion – Reviewing the literature

This chapter's purpose has been twofold. First, I have presented a review of the literature on strategizing by discussing its origin, definition, emphasizing its processual nature, the importance of practices and learning in strategizing. Second, I have introduced the extreme context literature by developing important definitions in the field and bringing forward prevalent constructs in ECR.

Despite the great advances in the field of ECR and in the field of SM, the understanding of extreme context strategizing remains thin. The literature review also revealed that ECR generally focuses on the causes of the extreme, revealing the reasons for failure, providing recommendations, lessons for the organization in question and others. Extreme context researchers generally concentrate on a specific process such as sensemaking. I have yet to find an evidence-based model of strategizing in extreme context; one that would meaningfully link sensemaking, organizational learning, decision-making and doing to explain the unfolding of the strategizing in an extreme context based on the analysis of a real case. This exploratory

study aims to propose the conceptualization of such a model of extreme context strategizing in an effort to better understand the essence of this complex and multifaceted process. As Weick has shown, there is much to be learned from the study of past extreme cases to advance both practice and research.

4 Methodological considerations

In this chapter, I present the philosophical framing that shapes this study, I present my choice of research methods and I describe the research design in detail. I explain how my initial plan to collect data shifted completely when I found a goldmine of data in the form of internal archival reports. I further discuss the conducting of research in extreme contexts and discuss some important ethical considerations relating to participants and researchers. I finish this chapter with the presentation of how I analyzed this secondary data with thematic analysis to create a data structure and eventually a dynamic model of extreme context strategizing.

4.1 Philosophical framing

In this section, the notion of paradigm is discussed before it is explained why I have rejected the dominant paradigm in MOS, namely positivism, in favor of phenomenology. I then describe the ontological positioning of the research before concluding this section with its epistemological framing.

The notion of paradigm was introduced by Kuhn (1962) as "a set of scientific and metaphysical beliefs that make up a theoretical framework within which scientific theories can be tested, evaluated, and if necessary revised" (Audi & Audi, 1999: 641-642). During the reign of the paradigm, called "normal science" by Kuhn, the paradigm determines for the field, the theories, questions, and ways of answering them until a shift of paradigm occurs (i.e., scientific change) which happens through 'revolution'. Although the notion was introduced for the natural sciences, social sciences adopted the term and the meaning of paradigm shifted to a philosophical positioning guiding researchers in their studies (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Metaphorically, a paradigm can be understood as a window through which the researcher sees a particular object of inquiry. The researcher acknowledges that entering a particular paradigm blinds us to anything that cannot be seen through that window. In that sense, the notion of

paradigm could be linked to Plato's 'Allegory of the Cave', because it expresses the idea that people are locked in a "cave". The knowledge claims that appear in any study are not only influenced but also defined by the cave in which one sits. Even though in Plato's cave, one could leave the cave, one would escape one cave to enter another. Similarly, when entering a new paradigm, the researcher's vision is transformed (Kuhn, 1962). The new lenses through which the world is now viewed might allow the person to achieve understanding of things that used to be unknown or misunderstood according to the old lenses. To say it in Plato's words, what was seen by the prisoners in the cave was their reality and truth, to us they are just shadows. It is thought that, in the social sciences, justified true belief only becomes knowledge through introspection, when it is embedded in their reflection and the researcher has recognized how their philosophical stance has influenced their understanding and findings.

4.1.1 Ontological and Epistemological Positioning

Although there was a significant shift away from positivism in social sciences including MOS, it is still the dominant paradigm (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015; Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Petit & Huault, 2008). Positivism was very successful in the natural sciences but it does not make a distinction when applying methods to social studies (Giddens, 1974). In his acceptance speech, the Nobel laureate Friedrich August von Hayek describes this dangerous "mechanical and uncritical application" of principles that were made for distinct fields as the "scientistic error" (Von Hayek, 1974). Positivism intents to find causal and mechanistic relationships, where the causes are isolable and bivalent logic applies, thus using well-structured methods of inquiry to obtain objective and value-free findings. Indeed, positivism is based on the ontological position of reality as objective. In this framework, the study and the researcher are independent from this objective reality in the sense that the researcher is using 'scientific methods' to find the 'objective truth'. However, I have four main reasons to dismiss positivism as an appropriate paradigm for my study, besides that it does not fit with my personal worldview.

First, positivism does not satisfy its own objectivity requirements and I reject the assumption that science can or should be value-free. Examining the history of positivism more closely means realizing that many scientists using the 'scientific method' actually embrace subjectivity, even in natural sciences such as physics. Positivism is about finding the truth that should be obtained by verifying hypotheses through measurements and experiments. This means that positivists regard it as impossible to know what cannot be observed and measured.

Positivism is objectivist and dualist (i.e., it separates mind and body, research and reality). Auguste Comte introduced modern positivism in the beginning of the 19th century, influencing many fields, and propagating the 'scientific' methods. In the 1920s, the logical positivism movement started to rise. I, as many, do not differentiate logical positivism from logical empiricism because of their fragmentation and blurry boundaries and the fact that even when differences are found, there are only minor (Creath, 2021). Two groups were very influential to the logical empiricism movement: the Vienna Circle and the Berlin Society for Empirical Society. Sir Alfred Jules Ayer formulated the verification principle according to which logical positivists accept that scientific knowledge can stem from not only verified facts, but also rigorous logic and logical positivism is both value-free and philosophy-free. However, the latter does not make sense and was rejected even by other positivists such as Dennett who clearly stated that "there is no such thing as philosophy-free science, just science that has been conducted without any consideration of its underlying philosophical assumptions" (Dennett, 2013: 20). The purpose of positivist and post-positivist inquiry is prediction and control (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), when my aim is understanding and explaining a phenomenon. Moreover, positivism can be seen as failing to offer the imagination and freedom needed to grasp the world, as Colville (1994: 221) argues in his glowing review of the second edition of Weick's *The Social Psychology of Organizing*:

> *"This was the shock of the new and its importance lay (and still does lie) in the licence it gave to those of us who found positivism stifling, unimaginative and not reflective of the everyday world in which we live."*

Second, I am interested in the phenomenon of strategizing as experienced by people. The researcher must try to get as close as possible to the experience in order to reach the subjective part of the experience (Stierand, 2009). It is meaningless to study the process of strategizing outside human mind, as the locus of the lived experience. Thus, I need a philosophical framing that focuses on lived experience and accounts for the human mind. Contrarily to positivism, phenomenology is a philosophy and a methodological toolbox that deals with the aspect of human mind and the lived experience. Phenomenology – the study of the lived human experiences – is a philosophy within the broad category of interpretivism, which was introduced by Edmund Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century and later redefined by Martin Heidegger and many others. Phenomenology thus seems to be a better fit with the purpose of this study.

Third, this study looks at the complex process of strategizing in specific extreme contexts. Achieving the meaning of a lived experience is a complex task that requires to consider the context in which the experience occurs. It is the confronting of the particular context with the internalized practices of the organization and past learning and experiences of the members of the organization that leads to strategizing in practice. It is normally not at the time of experiencing the context that we characterize the experience, but "we acquire a background of having lived through a given type of experience" (Smith, 2016). The context is one of the key elements of this study, it is the change of the type of context –from non-extreme to extreme– as it is perceived and comprehended inter-subjectively that makes it possible for the researcher to come to an understanding of the phenomenon under scrutiny. This is in contradiction with the positivist search for the context-free objective truth reachable through experiments or quasi-experiments. On the contrary, Finlay states that phenomenological researchers "aim for fresh, complex, rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived" (Finlay, 2012: 17). Phenomenology aims to look at the phenomenon itself anchored within its context, as lived by people in their life-world and under consideration of their individual *Dasein*. The *Dasein* is the term used by Heidegger (1927) for the human existence, a mode of being that is contextualized (Gallagher, 2022).

Fourth, the I aim to explore the intentional relationship between the organizational members as individuals, the organization and the extreme context, which is the basis of the strategizing process under investigation. This intent is at odds with the positivist understanding of the subject being detached from the studied object but fits the phenomenological awareness of a subject's consciousness towards an object in the world. Phenomenology recognizes that one is invariably conscious *of* something; consciousness is always characterized by intentionality, it is directed toward something, as though there is always an object of focus. (Moran, 2000) . This is what Husserl called 'intentionality', i.e., the experience "'intends'— things only *through* particular concepts, thoughts, ideas, images, etc. These make up the meaning or content of a given experience, and are distinct from the things they present or mean." (Smith, 2016). Phenomenology is a powerful philosophy enabling the researcher to "overcome the subject-object divide […] by finding a deeper meaning within subjectivity itself." (Moran, 2001: 16).

Having now provided the main reasons why I reject the dominant paradigm of positivism for this study, I now explain in more detail how a phenomenological lens (i.e.,

through ontological, epistemological and methodological positioning) is a more appropriate paradigm for my study.

I intend to look at one of the "ongoing processes through which the entire organisation moves, develops and unfolds" (Clegg et al., 2005) – i.e., the strategy in practice over time – in extreme contexts. I will do so through a phenomenological lens because I aim to achieve an in-depth and more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of strategizing in extreme contexts as experienced by members of MSF. The focus is on the lived experience, how one engages with the world to give meaning to this phenomenon. In other words, how organizational members engage with the context to make sense of what is happening, make decisions, and act.

The ontological question concerns the nature of reality, one aspect of which, among many other dimensions of ontology, is whether reality is seen as objective or subjective. In phenomenology, the subjective and natural expressions of reality are intertwined. The world is seen by Husserl as "the continuous harmonious flow of our experience" (Husserl, 2012: xxx). Hence, in phenomenology, what is essential is the human experience (Moran, 2001). Because people engage with reality through interpretation, intuition, understanding, and negotiation, the reality is subjectively experienced. In interpretivism, reality is socially constructed. Nevertheless, I do not share the more extreme ontological position in interpretivism taken in radical relativism that reality has no essence, no intrinsic properties. This view, initiated by Protagoras, a Greek Sophist, asserts that there are no objective truths about the world, only various interpretations (Audi & Audi, 1999). Instead, my philosophical framing belongs within *critical interpretivism* (Dörfler, 2023) which is essentially subjective but allows agreements between the knowledgeable about the nature of reality.

Epistemology originates from the Greek word 'episteme', which means knowledge, 'what we can know'. The epistemological interpretivist assumption that reality is comprehended through perception and interpretation is made. Phenomenology studies conscious experience from the subjective point of view (Smith, 2016). As a middle ground philosophy, phenomenology allows the researcher to achieve a certain degree of generalization when a precise comprehension of the essence – i.e., essential intrinsic qualities – of the phenomenon is achieved. It is believed, contrarily to positivism, that no mathematical proof is needed to make relevant claims that can be generalized about the phenomenon that is studied.

Generalizability, often explained through the concept of external validity, refers to the correctness of a model of a studied phenomenon beyond the context in which it has been studied (Calder, Phillips, & Tybout, 1982; Eisenhardt, 1989a; Gibbert, 2006; Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008; McGrath & Brinberg, 1983; Scandura & Williams, 2000). The objectivist idea of generalizability, needs to be understood in this study from the subjectivist-interpretive paradigm as transferability, the extent to which the findings "speak to real life events and contexts" (Symon & Cassell, 2012: 212). Furthermore, Dörfler and Stierand (2019) argue that transferability should not be pursued through representativeness of a population, as even when methodological rigor is applied—ensuring internal consistency, construct validity, and external validity—the findings may reflect the population but fail to capture the phenomenon under study. They highlight three key issues: population uniformity, technical feasibility of randomizing, and reference point of population and phenomenon, which undermine the common approach to sampling for representativeness. Instead, following Csikszentmihalyi (1997) and Gardner (2008), they suggest focusing on the 'extraordinary' as studying exceptional cases can better reveal the underlying phenomenon. In this spirit, MSF was selected as the focal organization in this study due to its extraordinary status, known for operating in extreme contexts as a HRO (see section 3.2.1). While transferability does not imply that the theorizing applies universally across all contexts, my theorizing can inform other extreme contexts.

4.2 Research Design

This section presents the methodological choices made regarding the research process, introduces the methods used in this dissertation. It starts by introducing the nature of research in extreme contexts, the strategies and methods used, some of which are more traditional and others more novel, in some cases even creative, alternatives for conducting research in this particular type of setting. Ethical considerations are then highlighted next. In particular, the vulnerability of the researcher is discussed at length, as there is no direct participant due to the methodological choice of secondary data as the primary data source (see subsection 4.2.3.1). Case study research, as the chosen research design, is introduced, and then the methods of data collection and analysis for this study are described in detail.

4.2.1 Doing Research on Extreme Contexts

4.2.1.1   Ethnography in ECR

Extreme context researchers often prefer to do research on extreme contexts in extreme contexts. For instance, ethnographers commonly believe that they should immerse themselves in the extreme contexts to make ethnographic observations and understand the studied phenomenon in the context. Field work in extreme context allows the researcher to also experience the extremeness of the context. For instance, De Rond et al. (2019: 1) were able to describe the body's role in sensemaking, both "of the body" and "from the body", in their study on rowing the Amazon, which the primary author experienced himself. Ethnographic methods are often preferred because they enable the researcher to achieve a thick, deep and rich understanding of a case's context.

In the field of SM, most SAP researchers, like Paula Jarzabkowski, also favor studying strategy in context in order to observe practitioners and get closer to the practice of strategy-making. Indeed, applying ethnographic research design in SAP research can involve immersing oneself deeply in a practitioner's practices in order to gain a "construction of ethnographic knowledge" of and about these practices(Brewer, 2000: viii).

However, ethnography is not always the researcher's preferred choice in ECR. For example, Geier (2016) decided to use an online survey with various fire departments in the United States of America to investigate the potential adaptation of leadership style in extreme contexts. Others may use highly creative methods, such as the use of science fiction by Buchanan and Hällgren (2019). More precisely, Buchanan and Hällgren (2019) used science fiction as a creative alternative when direct observation of extreme contexts may be either impossible or threatening to the researcher. They suggest that the study of films or TV series can be particularly interesting for researchers to use as primary data because they foreground narratives of the extreme or extraordinary (Buchanan & Hällgren, 2019).

Indeed, it is not always an option to apply standard ethnographic design and data collection methods such as participant observations and field notes. Access may be impossible for distinct reasons: the organization facing extreme events does not accept the presence of a researcher, the duration of the events is too short to organize data collection, the extreme context may be dangerous for the researchers, jeopardizing their safety and well-being, or the extreme

context no longer exists by the time the research could commence. When researchers want to study past extreme contexts, it is simply not possible to be in the field at the time of the extreme events. Furthermore, some analysis of extreme contexts, the strategy of the organizations involved and the repercussions can only be carried out after some time has elapsed, when investigations have been carried out.

There are many ethnographic data collection methods, such as participant observation. The researcher may also adopt the auto-ethnographic approach, drawing from personal experience. Nonetheless, it can be argued that the researcher can take the position of an ethnographer, even when he or she is not directly in the field to directly experience the context. In fact, actions, interactions in a specific organizational, social and cultural context can be observed in written documents. Weick used the term "armchair ethnographer" (Weick, 2007: 16) to describe his role in the study of the Mann Gulch disaster. Armchair anthropology can be flawed insofar as it relies on documents written by others with possible prejudices. In particular, it has been much criticized for its distance from the populations studied, for example in nineteenth-century British anthropological research. At the time, armchair anthropology described the position of researchers who used the writings of others, such as colonists, to describe indigenous populations; many problems arose, such as ethnocentrism and racism. The researcher's position and data sources are therefore factors that can make or break the research. In this study, a position similar to Weick's is adopted, which can be described as that of an armchair ethnographer. However, despite the expected distance from context in such a position, the researcher's vision can be very clear in understanding the phenomenon under study and despite the distance, accessing in a creative way the experience of the individuals in the extreme. After all, Weick's study of the Mann Gulch fire is one of ECR's most cited and influential studies.

4.2.1.2   Case Study Research in ECR

Case study research is also common in the field of ECR. This is easily observable with the number of extreme context studies that look at a particular extreme context (Chakrabarti, 2012; Chikudate, 2009; Dwyer et al., 2021; Heimann, 1993; Madsen & Desai, 2010; Nowling & Seeger, 2020; O'Grady & Orton, 2016; Oliver et al., 2017; Quinn & Worline, 2008; Shepherd & Williams, 2014; Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Stein, 2004; Vaughan, 1996; Weick, 1990, 1993, 2010). This preference for the study of a specific case can be understood based on the

researcher's interest in focusing on a case that is rich in empirical data, particularly relevant, and potentially insightful to the study of a phenomenon.

In ECR, with a single case study, data can be particularly rich because researchers can draw on inquiries and investigations carried out in the wake of an extreme event. Organizations themselves can conduct an internal review of what happened for organizational learning purposes (Dwyer et al., 2021). The public may also be interested in the consequences of a disaster, and public inquiries may be conducted to identify the 'culprit' i.e., to discover the causes of such an incident (Brown, 2003, 2005; Dwyer et al., 2021; Gephart Jr, 1993; Vaughan, 1996). This approach can be used to hold individuals or the organization accountable for their actions and/or the consequences of what can be described as a crisis. This sensemaking, which takes place after the extreme event, may be accessible to the researcher and provide an opportunity for analysis. For example, Vaughan (1996) used a collection of secondary data sources amounting to over 122,000 pages for her primary data sources. This wealth of data can be explained by the number of efforts made to investigate a disaster as large and notorious as the Challenger launch, which resulted in the deaths of all seven people on board and was seen live on television by millions of people, including countless American school children because of the presence of schoolteacher Sharon Christa McAuliffe on board of the shuttle.

For similar reasons, I have chosen a case study research design, having obtained a particularly rich data source that provided four rich cases to work with to study the extreme context strategizing of a single extraordinary organization over time (see 4.2.3.1).

4.2.2   Ethical considerations

The main data source of this PhD research is organizational archival reports. The vulnerability of participants is particularly important to researchers, and there are many factors to consider when involving people in a study. However, this study did not directly involve participants. For this reason, participant vulnerability is not addressed in this chapter. However, although this study did not directly involve other people, there are ethical considerations to be addressed; in particular, researcher vulnerability.

Researcher vulnerability and challenges related to trauma

The consideration of the researcher's vulnerability is significant and relevant to this research. I study cases such as pandemic diseases, famine, war crimes, and even genocide.

Research of phenomena where people have experienced trauma presents additional challenges because of their emotional dimensions and the ethical questions and ramifications of intruding on somebody else's situation when they are at their most vulnerable. Researchers have shared their reflections on the experience of conducted such research (e.g., Eliasson & DeHart, 2022; Jané, Fernandez, & Hällgren, 2022; Lund, 2012; Mavin, 2022).

Trauma has been defined as "an emotional response to an extremely negative situation" (Starčević, 2019: 1). The nature of such extreme situations means that trauma is relatively rare in most people's lives, but when it does occur, it often overwhelms the individual's coping mechanisms While multiple individuals may experience a traumatic event simultaneously, trauma is fundamentally a personal experience, arising when the triggering event "exceeds the individual's ability to cope" (Dalenberg, Straus, & Carlson, 2017: 15, emphasis added). To date, discussions on the challenges of researching trauma have primarily been concentrated in fields such as with specialized journals like *Trauma* and the *Journal of Trauma and Treatment* dedicated to these issues. However, these discussions are less common in management research, where topics are often more routine, and researchers tend to focus on optimistic futures. Nonetheless, the increasing frequency of traumatic events and the necessity of management responses highlight the importance for researchers in the management disciplines to be made aware of the emotional, ethical and methodological challenges that others disciplines (e.g., Campbell, 2013; Stoler, 2002) have shown are associated with researching phenomena where trauma is present. Learning about these challenges is not merely an academic exercise but is crucial for ensuring the health, well-being, and ethical responsibility of researchers (e.g., Dickson-Swift, James, & Liamputtong, 2008; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, 2007; Nikischer, 2019).

Interviewing individuals who have witnessed suffering and death is an emotionally straining process for both the interviewee and the researcher. The weight of trauma for researchers and historians can be extremely difficult to bear; for example historians can be traumatized by history they look into (Robins, 2021). More remarkably, even the analysis of secondary accounts can lead to significant emotional consequences for researchers, including feelings of depression, privilege, or guilt (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). Acknowledging these challenges is essential to prevent researchers from being overwhelmed by their emotions during the research process. Researching trauma can lead to ethical, methodological, and emotional

struggles, prompting researchers to reconsider the boundaries of their work and their roles within it (Brennan, 2005; Campbell, 2013; Fahie, 2014; Schweitzer & Steel, 2008).

Reflecting on my own vulnerability during the analysis process led me to first discuss the struggles I was experiencing with my supervisors and other scholars and later to organize a special issue on the theme of methodological, emotional and ethical challenges for the qualitative researcher investigating trauma (see Miralles, Lee, Dörfler, & Stierand, 2022). Conducting research on traumatic events requires specialized skills, knowledge, and awareness beyond what is necessary for more routine research. Traumatic events often occur in dangerous situations, which may put researchers at risk (Lund, 2012). In addition, encounters with the suffering and misfortune of others can leave researchers feeling exhausted, ashamed, angry, or guilty, potentially leading to secondary trauma or vicarious traumatization (Amstadter & Vernon, 2008; Connolly & Reilly, 2007; Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Dominey-Howes, 2015; Joinson, 1992; Nikischer, 2019; Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Researching traumatic events with those who have experienced trauma has been known to have negative impacts on the researcher manifest in emotional distress and sleep disorders (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

Campbell (2013) has reported how intellectual stimulation that led to research into trauma may be overtaken by emotional issues once the research is underway. This may generate additional challenges in decisions about the extent to which the researcher should seek to separate their emotions from the evidence when analyzing and reporting the research, or whether the emotions that were generated by the trauma research are an essential part of the evidence (e.g., Lund, 2012, p. 95). Bracketing (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021) does not provide sufficient support to deal with these highly intertwined emotional processes.

Despite these challenges, some researchers have successfully conducted studies involving trauma survivors. For example, Lund (2012) carried out an ethnographic study in Sri Lankan villages with people affected by a tsunami and displaced by war. In this research, observations and participatory workshops with the traumatized individuals and non-governmental organizations were key. Interviews with trauma victims have also been used in management research (e.g., Jané et al., 2022; Mavin, 2022), with evidence suggesting that trauma victims may find it cathartic and therapeutic to share their experiences with a non-judgmental listener (Seedat, Pienaar, Williams, & Stein, 2004). However, knowing when and how to withdraw from qualitative research on trauma is another challenge, requiring a balance between respect and safety for all involved.

There are, thus, clearly challenges for the researcher when using qualitative research methods to investigate phenomena that involve trauma victims. Emotions can play a central role in understanding the experiences of the informants and generate meaning from their narratives. Emotional intelligence is said to have a positive impact if one aims to "connect with participants, skillfully listen during the interview process, and more clearly understand the lifeworlds participants articulate" (Collins & Cooper, 2014: 88). Since "emotional responses can both contribute and distract from the research process" (Woodthorpe, 2009: 70), to mitigate emotional challenges, I have implemented several strategies. First, I talked to my supervisor after dealing with troublesome content. Second, I took a break when content was becoming too heavy; I found that switching off for a while helps to keep a necessary distance from the data and the informants' experiences when needed. Third, I maintained a research diary. I felt that starting to write a reflexive account of my research was very helpful. It was not a regular thing, I used it when I felt the need to. As an example, when I first read the commissioned report on the case of the Genocide of Rwandan Tutsi in 1994, several extracts of traumatic events were highly emotional. For example, the following extract is an entry in my research diary.

"In the organizational archives, I found the narrative of an MSF medical coordinator who tried to save a local nurse with whom he had been working from being murdered by physically intervening. He eventually could do nothing but to let her die or he would have died alongside her. She was Hutu so she was from the same ethnic group as the killers, but as she was seven-month pregnant and her husband was Tutsi, according to the Rwandan law, the unborn child was going to be Tutsi. This is why they both got killed in front of him and all the staff. These archives contain countless numbers of dramatic events so maybe this one sticks to me because I have recently given birth. I have been carrying this narrative with me ever since. I cannot shake off the feeling of powerlessness he had felt and expressed." (Research diary extract)

The above extract reveals the emotional impact the narratives present in the archives had on me as a researcher. The process of coding the data revealed that this feeling of powerlessness was also expressed in the archives by several MSF members. This emotional entanglement is defined as countertransference and is often experienced by psychologists when they are immersed in the listening process (Dalenberg, 2000). This emotional entanglement has further been acknowledged by other researchers who had examined secondary traumatic accounts in files or reports without direct contact with those who had experienced trauma and can result in "sleeping disorders, emotional changes and a need for social support" (Dickson-

Swift et al., 2007: 328). The analysis process has been an intellectual as well as an emotional one. I have thought as much as I have felt during the research.

> *"I feel angry about events that happened 25 years ago, which is ridiculous because I cannot change the past. I am so immersed in the data that I feel like I am part of the organization and that 'we' messed up. Of course, mistakes can be made, and communication can fail but this is an extreme life and death situation, and I am dismayed by the turn of events when one worker raises the alarm from the field, and it is dismissed in the headquarters. I have mixed feelings; I also feel guilty because this is the kind of deficiencies that I am looking for in the data." (Research diary extract)*

The above example is similar to what Campbell (2013) experienced. She reports that due to the traumatic nature of the research, the intellectual involvement in it was fast overtaken by an emotional one. Better understanding the roles and links between the intellectual and emotional involvements in research that involves traumatic experiences from extreme events is thus important when considering researcher vulnerability. Acknowledging the emotional challenges and preparing for them can help mitigate their impact, allowing researchers to navigate the complexities of studying trauma more effectively. This balance between intellectual and emotional involvement not only protects the researcher but also enhances the quality and ethical integrity of the research.

4.2.3   Methodological choices

> *"All research methods are closely connected to research philosophy and to the ways it is possible to bring forward new knowledge through research" (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015: 12).*

As Dennett (1995: 21) pointed out, "there is no such thing as philosophy-free science; there is only science whose philosophical baggage is taken on board without examination". The choice of methods used in this study stems from a deep philosophical conviction about ontology and epistemology, a conviction that I seem to share with a growing number of researchers. As Bansal and Corley (2011) stated, "the age of qualitative inductive research had arrived" (cited in Corley, Bansal, & Yu, 2021: 161) and over the last decade, qualitative interpretivist research

became increasingly prominent in high caliber journals (Corley et al., 2021). Qualitative approaches are better suited to capture complex and evolving phenomena with high contextual sensitivity (Block, Cruz, Bairley, Harel-Marian and Roberson, 2019). To unearth strategy's processual nature, I must investigate peoples' lived experiences in context and over time to be able to engage in theorizing that provides "a means to see in new ways" (Bansal, Smith, & Vaara, 2018: 1189), how strategy unfolds in people's lifeworld and how they live this experience (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989b).

I aim to build, not test theory. This research is abductive; the goal is not to confirm hypotheses and pre-determined models. On the contrary, I develop my understanding of MSF's strategizing process throughout the whole research process. Abductive theorizing based on qualitative data can allow the researcher to see new perspectives from the phenomenon under study, which is more difficult to achieve with hypothetico-deductive logic (Bansal et al., 2018). Therefore, my research process needs to be unconstrained by a priori theory (Eisenhardt, Graebner, & Sonenshein, 2016), to bracket, indwell in the phenomenon, and reflexively question "what is known and to do so creatively" (Corley et al., 2021: 161).

Methodological choices must be made transparent "in a way that creates an effective arrangement" that offers trustworthiness (Pratt, Sonenshein, & Feldman, 2020: 22). The methodological fit, that is the "internal consistency among elements of a research project–research question, prior work, research design, and theoretical contribution" (Edmondson & McManus, 2007: 1155) is implicitly a marker of high quality research.

The following sections describe the research methods selected for this study.

4.2.3.1   Case Study Research

Case study is one of the most frequently used research designs in MOS. That is mainly because case studies are used with the purpose to develop an in-depth and varied understanding of a complex phenomenon in a particular real-life context. However, "the case study survives in a curious methodological limbo" (Gerring, 2004: 341). There is a lot of confusion on what is a case and on how to use the case study method. First, it is critical that the researcher clarifies what a case is – whether it is a person, a group, a phenomenon, an organization or something else – so that the term case becomes meaningful. The case study can be generally understood as "an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar's

aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena" (Gerring, 2004: 341). In my research, I study the phenomenon of strategizing in an extreme context and for that I explore four cases of extreme context strategizing in which one specific organization was confronted with strategic dilemmas.

I am conducting an emergent case study, which means that, contrary to the usual assumption of orthodox case studies, the process is not linear but emerges during the research process (see Dörfler, Lee, Stierand, & Miralles, 2022; Lee, Stierand, Miralles, & Dörfler, 2022). In this chapter, I first discuss the orthodox case study. More precisely, I discuss the logical positivist epistemology and what has become the 'standard' for case study research due to some highly cited contributions. Second, I present the emergent case study approach and justify why this is the one I followed. Then, I describe the different steps of my emergent case study.

Lee and Saunders (2017) have introduced the distinction between an orthodox and an emergent approach to case study. On the one hand, orthodox case studies stem from logical positivism. The idea was to propose a research design in the philosophical movement of logical positivism that supports qualitative research into either contemporary phenomena in the real-life context or when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are blurry (Yin, 1981). Orthodox case studies are presented as a linear process.

Review literature and

define research question(s)

⇩

Design study

⇩

Prepare for study and
collect data

⇩

Analyze data

⇩

Write up and report

FIGURE 12: "Orthodox linear approach"
Source: (Lee & Saunders, 2017: 4)

In accordance with Yin's (2018) approach, an orthodox case study begins with a literature review in order to identify a research gap, which then leads to the formulation of research questions. This process is often viewed as mechanistic, with the research plan being carefully structured to provide a clear starting point, a set of defined steps, and a clear ending. The plan is meticulously controlled and followed by the researcher, who pre-defines what is of interest and what is not. Yin (2018) and Eisenhardt (1989) advocate for a linear approach to case studies, with limited allowance for iterations to correct errors; however, substantial changes to the research process are not generally considered acceptable. This approach is analogous to an experimental design, where reality is manipulated and any irregularities and deviations from pre-planned strategies are concealed. Successful implementation of orthodox case studies requires strict adherence to preconceived methods, which are seen as a means of achieving analytical generalizations comparable to oversimplified notions of scientific laws in the natural sciences. Further, following that approach, case studies are presented "to accomplish various aims: to provide description (Kidder, 1982), test theory (Pinfield, 1986; Anderson,

1983), or generate theory (e.g., Gersick, 1988; Harris & Sutton, 1986)" (Eisenhardt, 1989b: 535).

However, it is not appropriate to assume that a strict adherence to methods that are linear and inflexible can lead to a universal truth. This is comparable to the belief that empirically testing hypotheses is an objective and value-free way of producing knowledge. Instead, it is important to recognize that the construction and comprehension of scholarly knowledge is a social process that is dependent on culturally-specific protocols and the socio-historical context. Despite the growing consensus on these issues, there is still a prevailing emphasis on building academic knowledge through cumulative theorizing. In contrast, case studies that aim to provide unique contributions through contextualized understanding, including single-case studies, are often undervalued and deprioritized.

Emergent case study research differs from orthodox case studies in that it provides an account of all changes in direction, as well as the underlying reasons for these changes. This approach to research means that the process is no longer well-structured, with no predetermined starting point or predefined steps for progressing towards a stable finishing point for reporting findings. Emergent case study research is therefore non-linear, unstructured and more natural. It resembles how managers in an organization would naturally investigate a phenomenon. Emergent case studies can be seen as a series of events linked together by the thoughts and actions of the researchers, which can change (Lee & Saunders, 2017; Lee, Stierand, & Miralles, 2021).

Case studies ought to be regarded as idiosyncratic. Because of its uniqueness, idiosyncratic research seems to be at odds with the traditional principle of generalization. While the results of idiosyncratic research are not generalizable, it has been argued that the knowledge gained by researchers may be valid beyond the specific cases they have studied (Dörfler & Stierand, 2019).

4.3 Research Process

I now describe the steps of my emergent case study research.
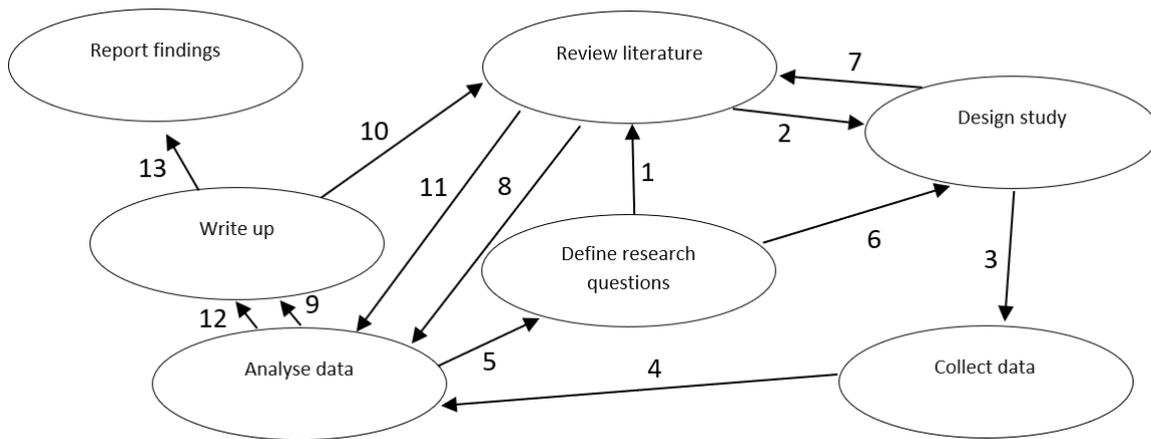
FIGURE 13: Steps of my emergent case study research
Source: Adapted from (Lee & Saunders, 2017: 7)

I began by defining a focus with a research question and then reviewing the strategic management literature, the organizational learning literature 1), before designing the study (2). I initially planned to conduct primarily semi-structured interviews and to add archival data as a secondary data source. I began collecting secondary data to learn more about the history, processes, and practices of the organization. I first looked for general information about the organization such as MSF's mission, principles and organizational structure. This first layer of information is presented in my description of the field and is a necessary first step to become familiar with the organization and the corporate strategy. I got in touch via LinkedIn with a former employee of the organization who had worked for the Swiss section (or operational center) and at the International Bureau for a total of ten years. She had also been in the field for three years on different missions. I conducted a short unstructured interview. This was not a prepared interview with an interview guide and the interview was not audio recorded. The purpose of this exchange was to pinpoint some potential areas of interest and to learn more about the organization from someone who had experience both at headquarters and in the field. I learned some important elements in terms of organization's practices. She explained that about 80% of the budget is dedicated to recurring projects, meaning that only 20% of the budget is for emergency missions. This can be quite surprising for the public because MSF is known as an emergency-response organization. In reality, only a small portion of activities relate to emergencies. She went in the field for one mission which lasted one year in a four-year project. For her, the decision-making happens in the headquarters, the strategy is centralized especially in risky contexts and that there is little autonomy in the field. However, there is constant communication between the headquarters of the section and head of the mission in the field. In addition, strategists working in the headquarters have experience in the field in operational

functions. She found that the context and networking in the field was really important to run the mission. In terms of the MSF movement, she explained that the 24 sections do not have a hierarchical relationship with each other or with the International Bureau. They only follow a common Charter. The five operational sections have the actual headquarters where operations are managed and they do not report to the International Bureau. The other 19 sections are mainly in charge of locally recruiting personnel, raising funds for the operations, communicating and networking. The International Bureau does not run operations and is mainly focused on lobbying. She gave me some details of her work in the field and the running of operations. When she worked in a location where several MSF sections were present (3 sections located in the same building), she experienced no coordination between the sections, no optimization for the MSF missions in that country. However, she shared that some projects inter-section exist and there are exchange platforms between directors of different sections; however, she felt that the coordination efforts could be much improved.

Then, I visited the organization's headquarters of the Swiss section in Geneva during an open session for potential candidates for field missions. The aim of this type of session is for potential future candidates to find out more about the organization before submitting an application. I was clear when I registered to this session that I came for research purposes and I introduced myself and my study briefly to the person who led the session. This helped me to understand the organization's structure better, the expectations they have for potential field recruits and to know how they introduce the organization and the fieldwork. This confirmed some information I had heard from the discussion with the former MSF employee (such as the small proportion of emergency missions in comparison to recurrent projects).

At this stage, I started to design an interview guide for MSF strategists in headquarters and for MSF field workers (3). At the same time, I was collecting secondary data and, unexpectedly, came across publicly available archival reports online, a case of which I started reading and which piqued my interest. The richness of the data was striking and I saw great potential for my research. I then chose some of these reports as my primary data source. The archival reports are called 'Speak Out' cases and hold a goldmine of data. These past cases closely look into missions of MSF under extreme contexts of different sorts (e.g., war crimes, famines, genocides) in several countries starting in the 1980s. The organization itself deeply investigated these cases. These investigations are due to the dilemmas posed on the organization's strategizing in extreme contexts. Some of these case studies then became the primary sources of this study. The main reasoning behind was that the organization itself

identified these cases as essential cases to investigate for internal learning purposes, as highlighted by the following introductory paragraphs at the beginning of each report:

> *"This publication is part of the "Médecins Sans Frontières Speaking Out" case studies series prepared in response to the MSF International Council's wish to provide the movement with literature on MSF témoignage (advocacy).*

> *The idea was to create a reference document that would be straightforward and accessible to all and help volunteers understand and adopt the organisation's culture of speaking out. […]*

> *These case studies were essentially designed as an educational tool for associative members of the organisation. With the hope of broadening their educational scope the studies are now being made available to the public for free."*

The archived reports are part of the organization's memory and remained internal documents for twelve years before the decision was made to share them with the public. This means that I had no difficulty in accessing these reports, free and available on the internet. This incredibly rich content revealing extreme cases of the organization's strategizing is a promising basis to study the organizational phenomenon of the strategizing process in extreme context of MSF. Hence, I have accepted the invitation of MSF to broaden the educational scope of these cases and selected four of these cases as the primary data for this research.

The selection of cases is critical for theory generation from case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989b). Intuitively, I started by reading the case of the Genocide of the Rwandan Tutsi in 1994. I may have been 'attracted' to this case study because it is difficult to imagine anything more extreme than a genocide and by the fact that I directly saw that there were several other cases with links to this one. This was easily observable with only the titles of the cases (e.g., another case was titled 'The violence of the new Rwandan regime 1994-1995'). In the very first pages, I realized the richness and power of this case, both in terms of the historical context and the dilemmas faced by the organization in terms of strategizing. In an interview given by the author of the archived reports, she explained that the first case she worked on was the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsi in 1994. It was the start of what later became a collection of specifically difficult cases the organization chose to investigate closely for the dilemmas/difficulties they posed. The first idea was to write a narrative of what had happened during the case of the genocide of the Rwandan Tutsi in 1994 because the different MSF sections (or operational centers) had

different interpretations of this case and it had created unresolved tensions between them. When the narrative did not provide the expected consensus, it was decided internally to rework the findings of the analysis of the data collected to create an archival report which would be more descriptive and provide numerous extracts as 'proofs' of the facts together with the interpretations of the organizational members that experienced the extreme context.

I did a first analysis of this case (4) and this led me to redefine my research question (5) and redesign the study (6). I was from the start interested in the dialogue between the field and headquarters in the strategizing process in extreme contexts and in organizational learning in and from the extreme. I had a specific focus for this research but it was broad enough to allow for inductive research with topics emerging directly from the data. However, the research question was enlarged in the sense that I was more open to such emergent themes and narrowed in the sense that I was now focusing on extreme context strategizing. Further, the initial methodological plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews and to use secondary data as a supplementary data source, as is often the case in qualitative research. I knew that this meant accepting a certain degree of loss of control over the data collected but I could recognize the potential of interpreting the data I already had in my hands. I made the choice, adopting a historical perspective, to find out everything I could from these archives to understand how the strategizing process of this organization had been shaped and reshaped in these four related extreme contexts.

I went back to the literature, in particular to find out more in the extreme context research literature (7) and rewrote my methods section to explain the emerged research design. Next, I analyzed the other three cases I had selected when I redesigned the study (8). The data analysis was lengthy due to the nature and amount of data collected. Specifically, I analyzed four internal reports representing 578 pages of archives. These archives are filled with descriptions of horrific events (e.g., the extreme events that occurred during the 1994 genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda) and stories of traumatic experiences. I experienced vicarious trauma and had to find ways to cope with the emotional challenges of conducting this type of sensitive research by recognizing how my emotions affected the conduct of the research.

I used the data structure, tables and timelines to begin writing up the analysis, mainly using an illustrative approach with vignettes (9). Some new topics had emerged during the analysis (for example, sensemaking was not part of the initial literature review), so I returned to the literature (10). After adding these new topics to the literature review, I returned to the

analysis with a better understanding of some concepts I had found in the data and analyzed again the four cases (11). I then focused on the final two steps (12 &13), writing up and reporting the findings.

For researchers considering an emergent case study approach relying exclusively on secondary data, a systematic yet flexible research design is essential. The following figure provides a methodological suggestion for approaching a similar study.
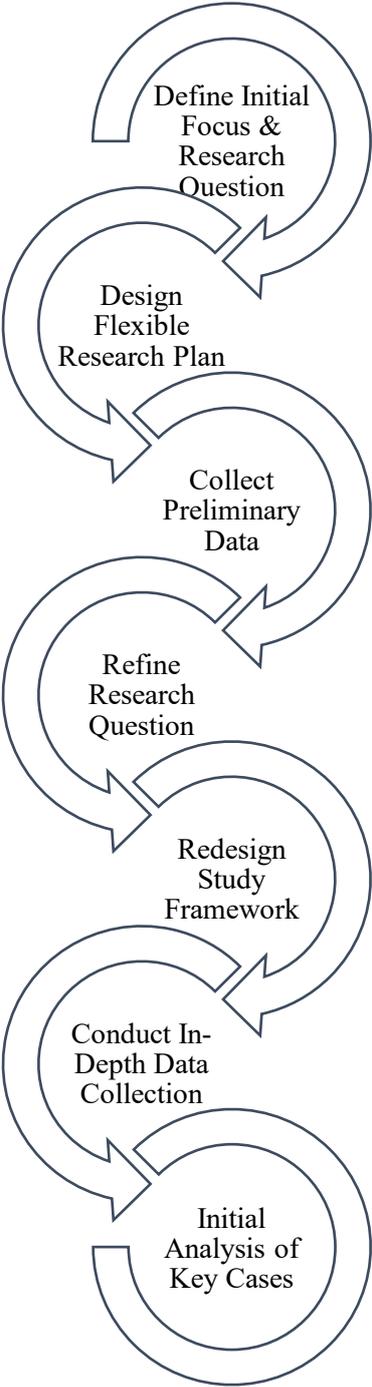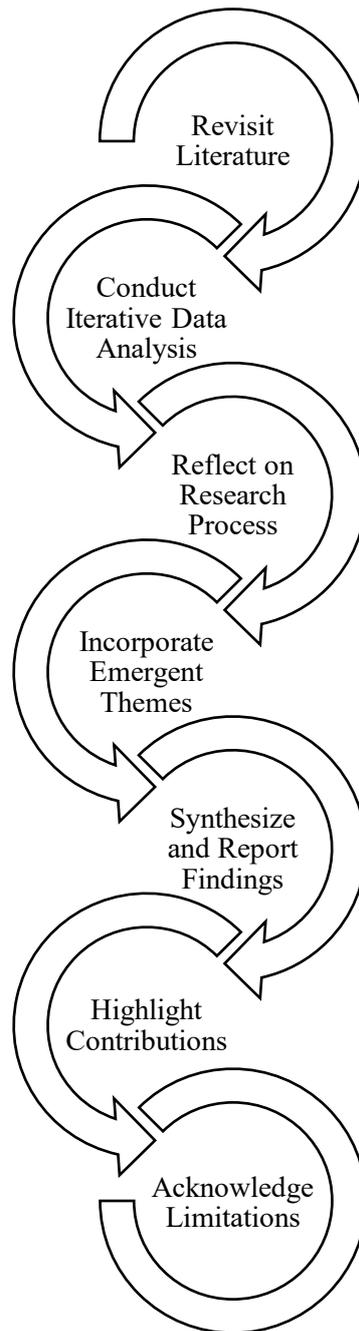
FIGURE 14: A Secondary Data-Centric Research Design for Emergent Case Studies

FIGURE *14* proposes that researchers begin by defining an initial focus and formulating a broad and exploratory research question. Conduct an initial review of relevant literature to identify interesting areas of research and establish context for the study. This foundational stage ensures the research is situated within existing scholarly discourse.

Design a study plan that is inherently flexible, allowing for adjustments as the research evolves. Focus on secondary data sources, such as archival reports, historical case studies, and organizational documents, as the primary means of exploration. This approach offers a rich

basis for understanding phenomena without the challenges of primary data collection. During the preliminary data collection phase, gather foundational secondary data about the organization and its practices. Use these materials to refine the research focus and identify areas of particular interest.

As insights emerge from the preliminary data collection, refine and adjust the research question to better reflect the evolving understanding of the subject. This stage necessitates openness to emergent themes, which guide the subsequent direction of the study. Redesign the study framework to align with these emergent themes, identifying the most suitable secondary data sources for further investigation.

Conduct in-depth analysis of secondary data, prioritizing archival reports or case studies that provide detailed accounts and are particularly relevant to the research question. An initial analysis of key cases should focus on identifying recurring themes, patterns, and dilemmas. Explore the dynamics between organizational practices, as well as the processes of interest, as they appear in the archival records.

Revisit the literature to integrate recent and relevant studies, particularly those related to the phenomenon under investigation. Use these insights to refine the theoretical framework and ensure it aligns with emergent findings. Conduct iterative analysis of secondary data to deepen interpretations and expand thematic insights. Employ analytical tools like data structures, tables, and timelines to systematically organize and illustrate findings.

Throughout the research process, maintain a reflective approach. Document changes in direction and the reasons behind these adjustments to ensure transparency. Address challenges, such as limitations inherent to secondary data, including the absence of contextual cues and potential biases in the original narratives. Integrate emergent themes identified in the literature into earlier analyses, ensuring the research narrative remains dynamic and cohesive.

When synthesizing findings, present them using illustrative techniques such as vignettes to provide rich, detailed insights. Highlight the implications of the findings for both theory and practice, particularly in understanding complex phenomena in organizational contexts. Emphasize the unique contributions of the emergent case study approach, showcasing its ability to capture nuanced, real-world phenomena through secondary data. Highlight how the results enhance theoretical frameworks and offer practical implications for organizations, providing actionable insights for practitioners.

Finally, acknowledge the limitations inherent in relying solely on secondary data. Critically evaluate constraints such as the absence of contextual cues or interviewer influence, and address challenges associated with interpreting these data, including potential biases and gaps. Reflect on the trade-offs made in the research design and their implications for the study's findings, offering a balanced and transparent perspective on the research process and outcomes. By adopting these methodological suggestions, future researchers can effectively use secondary data within the emergent case study approach to generate meaningful and impactful insights.

4.3.1.1 Data Collection Methods

The data set is composed of document secondary data. More precisely, the primary sources of the data set are organizational archival reports of four cases. The reports were published and shared publicly, so finding them was only a matter of search and serendipity. Qualitative research generally depends on access to individuals and spaces within an organization to collect data through observations or interviews (Yates, 2014). Access to appropriate data for research is usually negotiated and rarely an easy task. However, with my documentary secondary data, access is directly online with no restrictions on use or citation for future publications. Access is one of the reasons why archival data can be particularly interesting for qualitative researchers. For example, archival data may become available to researchers following legal or governmental proceedings or whistleblowing actions, thus providing unique opportunities to learn more about hard-to-get-at phenomena like corporate scandals or hard-to-reach organizations such as secretive or guarded organizations (Monahan & Fisher, 2015).

Interviewing is the most common source of data collection in qualitative research generally and more specifically in phenomenology (Bevan, 2014). The main reason is that "qualitative interviewing is a flexible and powerful tool to capture the voices and the ways people make meaning of their experiences" (Rabionet, 2011: 563). I have analyzed extracts from interview transcripts that I did not select. Even more importantly, I was not the interviewer. It is recognized that the interviewer has an important role in the interviewee's sensemaking by "facilitating perspective-taking on the part of interviewees by affording access to alternative cognitive frameworks (Sonenshein, 2007)" (Maclean et al., 2012: 24). Further, I did not have access to the contextual cues of the interviews because I was not present during the interviews that were conducted many years ago and I could not listen to audio recordings. The interpretation of the studied phenomenon also relies on the capacity of the researcher to

reach the subjective dimensions of the experience, also known as 'qualia' (Jackson, 1982). Qualia is subjective, it is what is consciously experienced but cannot be explained in words. Polányi introduced the notion of tacit knowing, he wrote "we can know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966). Therefore, intuition and introspection are necessary to fully comprehend the strategists' experiences of the strategizing process. I was aware of this loss of information when I chose to analyze archival reports and make it my only source of data.

It was undeniably a bold choice. However, it was no folly. The reason was both intellectual and intuitive. When case studies are historical and enough time has passed, it can be impossible to gain access to those who worked in the organization during that period and the observations in the organization do not provide the appropriate data to study these cases. In those instances, the researcher must find the appropriate data in archives. In addition, from the outset of my examination of the secondary data, I sensed that this was an excellent opportunity for an exploratory study of extreme context strategizing because of the richness and power of the data. The further I read, the clearer it became that it was worthwhile. Therefore, I embraced this limitation because of the richness of the secondary data that I found.

By collecting primary data for this study, I would have had more control over the data, but I could never have achieved to collect such amount, richness and powerfulness because of the time that had passed since the cases and my position as an outsider. Although the secondary data were created by an insider, this person did so in a specific social and political context and for a particular reason. The creation of these reports which became organizational archives had a purpose. This purpose evolved from the learning and understanding of organization's strategists to learning for newcomers of the organization. More specifically, the first case that was studied was the one of the dilemmas the organization faced during the Genocide of Tutsi in Rwanda because of the clash of interpretations from the different sections' boards of the organization and the consequent tensions that arose from the misunderstandings and divergence of opinions on the organization's strategizing, mission and purpose. The disagreements were so great that the organization found itself in a tough spot and thought to create first a narrative which later became the archival report. The objective was to clarify and enlighten what had actually happen and shed some light into the different perspectives of the field workers and boardroom members and come to a collective agreement i.e., bringing forward the diversity while bringing back some unity.

In addition, the insider of the organization who created the secondary data that served as primary data source for this study did not experience the extreme contexts that were explored in this study. She was not working for the organization at the time of the extreme events. Therefore, I am interpreting phenomena that were interpreted by someone who gathered data from colleagues and former employees that experienced them, making it a third layer of interpretation, with each layer subject to biases. In other words, I recognize that I provide a third-order narrative construction of the second-order narrative of organizational members' experiences present in the different cases studied. As Hernes and Irgens (2013: 262-263) point out,

> "researchers tend to focus on singular courses of action and assume that sense-making relates to that course of action only. This kind of focus is a result of a preference for what Cassirer calls 'the Eye of Science' (Cassirer, 1944; Irgens, 2011) and may be necessary to produce research results that live up to standards of rigour and relevance. Thus researchers practise what Shotter (2006) calls a thinking process 'from the outside', observing processes as happening 'over there'. As an alternative Shotter calls for an understanding of process 'from within', which is what practitioners experience"

The above quote states the difference between the researcher's external eye in observing processes "from the outside" which leads to a different understanding that the one experienced by those who understand "from within". This is in line with the SAP view that researchers should observe more closely practitioners to overcome this gap. As discussed in the literature review, researchers like Jarzabkowski favor ethnographic methods, which enable the study of strategy in context, in order to observe practitioners and get closer to the practice of strategy-making Indeed, ethnography involves immersing oneself deeply in a practitioner's practices in order to gain a thorough understanding of them and be able to represent them convincingly, drawing on "the construction of ethnographic knowledge" (Brewer, 2000: viii). My observing is even done from further afar because there is another layer where I observe the observations of another person who did not directly experience the process of extreme context strategizing in the studied cases. However, as discussed in the methods section, I take on a position of 'armchair ethnographer' where despite the distance with the practices and the recognition that the understanding is different than the one of the practitioner, the external eye of the researcher can build theory and bring new insights. Additionally, the secondary data used has been legitimized by the organization itself, which has chosen to share it with the public.

Interestingly, the analysis of historical data can reveal "the social, cultural, and institutional construction of organizational and managerial phenomena in historical context" (Bansal et al., 2018: 1192) therefore can provide insightful contributions for MOS. In addition, as emphasized by Corrigan (2022: 421) studying written documents can be considered a strength since "academic research is a text-oriented universe".

The archival reports I have used as my primary source of data are the results of internal investigations of extreme contexts which presented specific dilemmas for the organization.

TABLE 2: Selected extreme case studies for the dilemmas they posed to the organization and their interconnectedness
Source: 'Speak Out' cases from the organization's archives

Case study	Dilemmas identified by Doctors without Borders (MSF)
CASE 1 Genocide of Rwandan Tutsi 1994	Was it acceptable for Médecins Sans Frontières, as a humanitarian organization, to remain silent when confronted with genocide? Was it acceptable for Médecins Sans Frontières, as a humanitarian organization, to call for armed intervention – an action that would lead to loss of human life? Could MSF call on UN member states to pursue other means of action, thereby risking giving legitimacy to ineffective responses, given the nature of genocide? Launched just as France proposed to intervene in Rwanda, was there a risk that Médecins Sans Frontières' appeal for armed intervention would be appropriated for political gain?
CASE 2 The violence of the new Rwandan regime 1994-1995	Was it acceptable for Médecins Sans Frontières, having denounced the génocidaires' control over the Rwandan refugees in Zaire and Tanzania, to encourage the return of refugees to Rwanda, given the insecurity that potentially awaited them? Did MSF have a responsibility to alert them to what was occurring in Rwanda? Could Médecins Sans Frontières – after having issued a call for an international armed intervention to put an end to the genocide – now criticize the regime that had effectively done so, thereby risking accusations of favouring the génocidaires and supporting the revisionists? Should Médecins Sans Frontières keep silent in order to continue caring for detainees who might otherwise die in the appalling prison conditions?

CASE 3 Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania	Is it acceptable for MSF to assist people who had committed genocide? Should MSF accept that its aid is instrumentalised by leaders who use violence against the refugees and proclaim their intention to continue the war in order to complete the genocide they had started? For all that, could MSF renounce assisting a population in distress and on what basis should its arguments be founded?
CASE 4 The hunting and killing of Rwandan refugees in Zaire-Congo 1996-1997	Could MSF extrapolate from the little known conditions of these refugees and their health needs to speak out about their presumed current plight, despite the fact that it had no access to them? Given that MSF was being used to lure refugees from hiding, should the organisation cease activities in the area or pursue them, condemning manipulation in the hope of preventing massacres – but at the risk of endangering its teams and other operations in the region? Should MSF call for the refugees to remain in eastern Zaire, with its deadly dangers, or participate in their forced repatriation to Rwanda, where their security was not guaranteed either?

The archival reports are part of a particular research design. They were created to investigate specific dilemmas that the organization faced in extreme contexts for internal learning purposes.
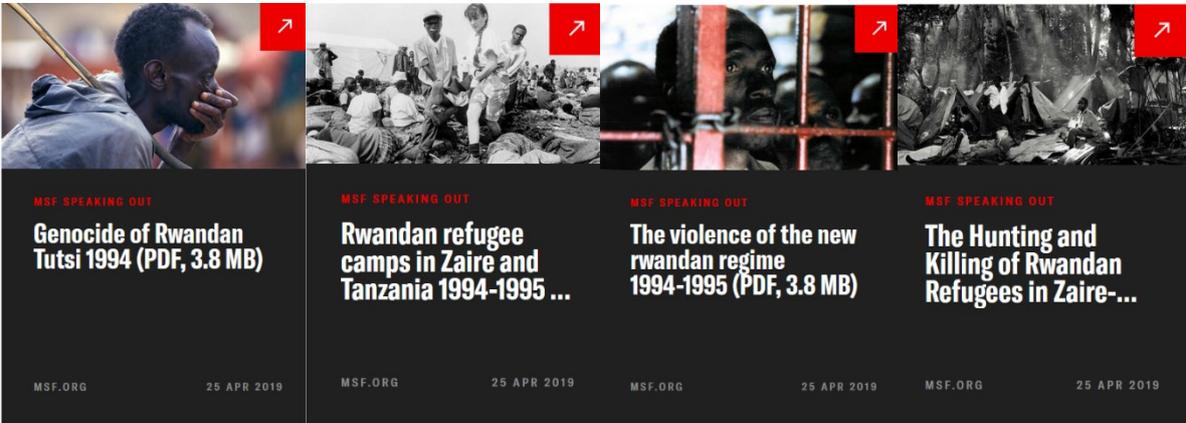
FIGURE 15: My primary source of data: four organizational archival reports
Source : https://www.msf.org/speakingout/all-case-studies

These four archival reports represent a significant amount of data amounting to 578 pages, each page including several extracts from archival data. The reports include timelines, extracts

of qualitative interviews, communications of strategists (from presidents, different directors, programme managers, coordinators, emergency cell workers), extracts of video transcripts, field diaries, press releases, newspaper articles, annual reports, situation reports, minutes of board meetings and communications; all punctuated by short descriptions of events from the MSF researcher. In other words, the data found in these archives is very heterogeneous. While the archival reports were created mainly by one researcher and were approved by the organization's editorial committee, the archival documents were created by multiple actors inside and outside the organization. At the same time, the heterogeneity of data makes it extremely information rich and a valuable data source for this research. Rix-Lièvre and Lièvre (2010: 93) speak of the "epistemological rupture" between acting and saying, therefore the researcher must "attempt to understand and/or explain [acting] by taking an interest in the relations between the actor's verbalizations and action". The richness of the archival data provides access to both the actors' verbalizations and the factual descriptions of actions in extreme contexts, enabling exploration of the relationship between the two. This abundance of data offers a unique opportunity to study the complex process of strategizing over time in such contexts. However, while data scarcity would limit the depth of understanding and theorizing, the sheer volume of data presents its own challenges, particularly in terms of the researcher's capacity for thorough analysis. This limitation influenced the decision to focus on four case studies and not include additional archival reports from other extreme contexts.

For the first case (i.e., the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi Genocide), I also had access to most of the archival data (e.g., situation reports, annual reports, newspaper articles) from which the extracts were taken before the organization removed the access to the archives, for an unknown reason. I focused on analyzing the archival reports but I read all the raw archival data from which the extracts were taken to which I had access. This helped me to better understand the choice of extracts that are in the archival report and was an important step for me towards achieving trustworthiness for the archival reports. Having access to the archival sources of the archival report allowed me to check the extracts and get a sense of the data sampling done to create the archival reports. This allowed me to triangulate the facts in the archival reports. I present below two examples of the archival raw data and the extracts found in the archival report.

FIGURE 16: Example 1 of the selection of archival data for the archival report
On the left: a newspaper article
On the right: one page from the archival report with the extract from the newspaper article framed in red

In **FIGURE *16***, we can see an extract of a newspaper article in the archival report because the newspaper article is about MSF at the time of the extreme events and therefore relevant to study the organization's reactions and actions in this extreme context. The selected extract was then translated from French to English.

B. Bugesera

Depuis le 28.06, la ville de Ruhango est vide, ainsi que l'hôpital (800 hospitalisés) qui a été évacué par les camions du FPR , et quelques camions MSF. Le 28.06, 60-80.000 personnes avaient traversé le pont.

Le mardi 29, c'est le camp de Kinavi (20.000 personnes) ainsi que le centre de santé abritant 250 malades qui sont évacués; 100.000 personnes avec bétail et bagages étaient signalées sur la route vers le pont, soient 25 km de files!

L'hôpital de Nyanza (CICR) a ensuite été évacué.

Au pont, 6 tentes dispensaires MSF ont été installées pour accueillir et traiter les patients qui ont en fait été déposés en masse à cet endroit par les camions évacuant l'hôpital.

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Leur état est parfois tout à fait alarmant, voire désespéré (déshydratation, épuisement, ...) ; un dispensaire local avec staff local fonctionne plus ou moins à Ruhuha .

MSF assure de plus la distribution d'eau (réservoirs à eau alimentés par un camion citerne et de 25.000 litres qui fait la navette) et de biscuits le long de la route et ramasse les personnes épuisées afin de les acheminer sur l'hôpital de Rilima .

Il est évident que ce déplacement massif de population en un temps record a fait nombre de victimes ... et on peut se demander si leur évacuation en urgence était tout à fait justifiée...

A Rilima, MSF a pu commencer ses activités le 28 juin : le médecin MSF de Nyamata et 2 infirmières MSF ont commencé à recevoir les patients. Un accord est passé avec le CICR : MSF aura la charge définitive de l'hôpital de Rilima et le CICR appuie avec ses équipes médicales (2 infirmières) lors de la phase d'installation.

Par la suite, le CICR devrait s'occuper de l'aide alimentaire (distribution générale).

Concernant le staff local qui travaillera au niveau de l'hôpital, le CICR nous fournirait leur staff local (protégé par les Conventions de Genève et sous protection du CICR donc); MSF essaie de saisir l'occasion pour renégocier avec le FPR afin que ce personnel puisse continuer à garder le même type de statut.
Au total ce sont 1.400 blessés et malades qui ont été hospitalisés à Rilima.

Le reste des équipes MSF accompagne les convois de camions de patients entre Ruhango et Rilima.

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de camions de p...

Les relations avec le FPR ne sont toujours pas faciles car les circuits d'information au sein même des différentes bases du FPR ne semblent pas toujours des plus efficaces; ceci a amené différentes problèmes sur le terrain (escortes non disponibilisées, retard dans la mission d'installation de Rilima, désorganisation du transport des blessés de Ruhango) ; les choses ont été discutées à Byumba avec le Capitaine Denys et le Dr Emile; afin de faciliter les circuits de communication , un officier de liaison sera détaché de Byumba pour MSF dans le Bugesera dans les jours à venir ; par ailleurs, notre chef de mission a établi un lien direct avec le FPR à Bruxelles.

C. MSF F

Une délégation d'un module de la zone FPR à MSF F est en négociation : le FPR à Bruxelles a marqué son accord à la condition que cela soit au commencement sous la coordination de MSF B et que les expatriés de nationalité française reçoivent l'accord préalable du FPR.
MSF F prépare donc cette mission en étroite collaboration avec MSF B. Philippe Biberson, Président de MSF F ferait partie de la mission de contact.

D. Situation en zone FPR

De plus en plus de questions sont soulevées concernant la situation des populations en zone FPR :

- on a déjà parlé des déplacements de population sous la contrainte ; il est clair que ces déplacements massifs de population sont difficilement justifiables si l'on tient compte de la situation de sécurité sur place : aussi bien sur Ruhango, Nyanza, Gitarama , Kinavi que Buyoga dans le Nord étaient des zones relativement calme quand le FPR a donné le mot d'ordre aux populations de bouger. Quelles soient les motivations du FPR dans ces mouvements de population (raison de sécurité invoquée, souhait évident d'améliorer le contrôle de ces populations), il est évident que les populations bougent contre leur gré et pour la plupart au détriment de leur situation personnelle et humanitaire.
- la pression exercée sur les populations par le FPR est de plus en plus évidente; les populations ont peur ; notre personnel local lui-même est soumis à de fortes pressions.
- des déplacés du camp de Kinali signale que des déplacés hutu ot été mis à l'écart par le FPR qui les ont ensuite battus à mort.
- des disparitions multiples sont signalées.
- les populations sont obligées de travailler sans salaire dans le cadre des différentes activités du FPR qui souhaite avoir la direction de toute activité dans la région sous son contrôle.
- les équipes parlent de régime "communist like" pour ne reprendre que leurs termes les plus doux.

MSF devra certes se positionner dans les jours à venir sur ces problèmes; mais il est aussi clair que MSF a une position de témoin privilégié, se trouvant la seule organisation avec le CICR dans cette région .

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MSF France position has been used by the media and politicians for their own benefit. Legal proceedings against the criminals could be considered, based on the accounts of MSF, amongst others. But we are not in a position to carry this through.

Our concern was not to be instrumentalised by people who wanted to intervene militarily... I heard a dozen times the complaint that "You called for Operation Turquoise." I would reply, "Did you ever hear us call for unilateral French military intervention to undertake humanitarian work? Where? Which document was that? Which of us made that declaration?" Confronted with all these fantasies, I referred them to dates, documents and declarations that were factual. After all, there was my interview on TF1 in May, and a cassette of the event. They could listen to it again and hear what one of the MSF leaders was saying at the time. The text of the appeal had been published in Le Monde, so there could be no ambiguity. We paid for the half-page ad to ensure that we controlled the message in Le Monde. The wording of the Appeal, which we published of our own accord, called for anything but Operation Turquoise.

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF France (in French).

On 1 July, MSF Belgium informed the press of the poor conditions and lack of preparation for the RPF- ordered displacement of thousands of people towards Bugesera.

Rwandan crisis – **Situation Report**, 28 June - 3 July (in French). D77

Extract:
Bugesera
Since 28 June the town of Ruhango has been empty, as has the hospital (800 patients), which was evacuated by RPF trucks and some MSF trucks. On 28 June, 60-80,000 people crossed the bridge. On Tuesday 29th, the camp in Kinavi (20,000 people) and the health centre accommodating 250 patients were evacuated; 100,000 people with cattle and luggage were reported to be en route for the bridge, with queues 25 km long. The hospital in Nyanaza was then evacuated. Six MSF dispensary tents were set up at the bridge to accommodate and treat the patients who had been dumped there en masse by the trucks evacuating the hospital. Their condition is sometimes alarming, even desperate (dehydration, exhaustion)... A dispensary with local staff is more or less operational in Ruhuha. MSF is also seeing to the distribution of water (water tanks supplied by a 25,000 litre tanker shuttle service) and biscuits along the road, and picking up exhausted people and taking them to the hospital in Rilima. It is clear that this massive population displacement carried out in record time has claimed a number of victims... and one wonders whether the emergency evacuation was really warranted... MSF was able to set to work in Rilima on 28 June: the MSF doctor in Nyamata and two MSF nurses started to receive patients. An agreement was made with the ICRC: MSF would have overall responsibility for the hospital in Rilima and the ICRC would provide medical back-up (two nurses) during the set-up phase. Thereafter, the ICRC would deal with food aid (general distribution). As for the local staff for the hospital, the ICRC will lend us their local staff (protected by the Geneva Conventions and therefore under ICRC protection); MSF attempted to benefit from this to renegotiate with the RPF, so that this staff could continue to enjoy the same status. In all, 1,400 sick and wounded people were hospitalised in Rilima. The remaining MSF teams accompanied the patient convoys between Ruhango and Rilima.
Relations with the RPF are still not good because the information channels – including between the various RPF bases – do not always seem efficient; this has lead to various problems on the ground (escorts unavailable, delayed set-up in Rilima, lack of organised transport to get the wounded out of Ruhango); we discussed the situation in Byumba with Captain Denys and Dr Emile; in order to improve the lines of communication, a liaison officer will be sent on detachment from Byumba for MSF in Bugesera in the next few days; in addition, our head of mission has established a direct link with the RPF in Brussels...
D. Situation in the RPF zone.
More and more questions are being raised about the situation of the people in the RPF zone:
- We have already mentioned the forced displacements: clearly, these massive displacements cannot be easily justified on the basis of safety on the ground: Ruhango, Nyanza, Gitarama, Kinavi and Buyoga in the north were relatively calm zones when the RPF ordered the people to leave. Whatever the reasons the RPF had for these population shifts (supposedly for reasons of safety, but clearly to exercise control over these people, it is obvious that the people are moving against their will and, for the majority, to their personal and humanitarian detriment.
- The pressure exerted on these people by the RPF is increasingly clear; they are afraid and our local staff has also been subjected to considerable pressure;
- Some displaced people in the Kinali camp said that some displaced Hutu had been singled out by the RPF, who then beat them to death;
- Multiple disappearances were revealed;
- People are forced to work unpaid for the RPF, which hopes to gain control of the whole region;
- The teams talk of "communist-like" regimes to put it mildly.
Admittedly, MSF will have to take a stance on these issues in the next few days; but it is also clear that MSF is well-placed to report on events, as it is the only organisation working with the ICRC in the region.

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FIGURE 17: Example 2 of the selection of archival data for the archival report
Above: screenshots from the situation report sent from the coordinator in the field to headquarters
Below: one page from the archival report with the extract from the situation report framed in red

FIGURE *17* shows the importance given in the archival reports to information from the field to headquarters with a large extract describing the situation and difficulties in the field. This type of extract is very numerous and particularly relevant to my study, because by recreating the chronology and story of the organization in the extreme context, I can clearly see the interaction between the field and headquarters in the development and reshaping of strategy.

As can be seen with these two examples, many archival documents are in French. Fortunately, this is no issue for me because it is my mother tongue. I could even check the reliability of the translation with a few examples. In addition, I could also go back to the archival raw data to get more details. On rare occasions, I found interesting elements that could not be found in the archival report. For example, the two below extracts in **FIGURE** *18* which I highlighted in yellow during the analysis of the archival data.
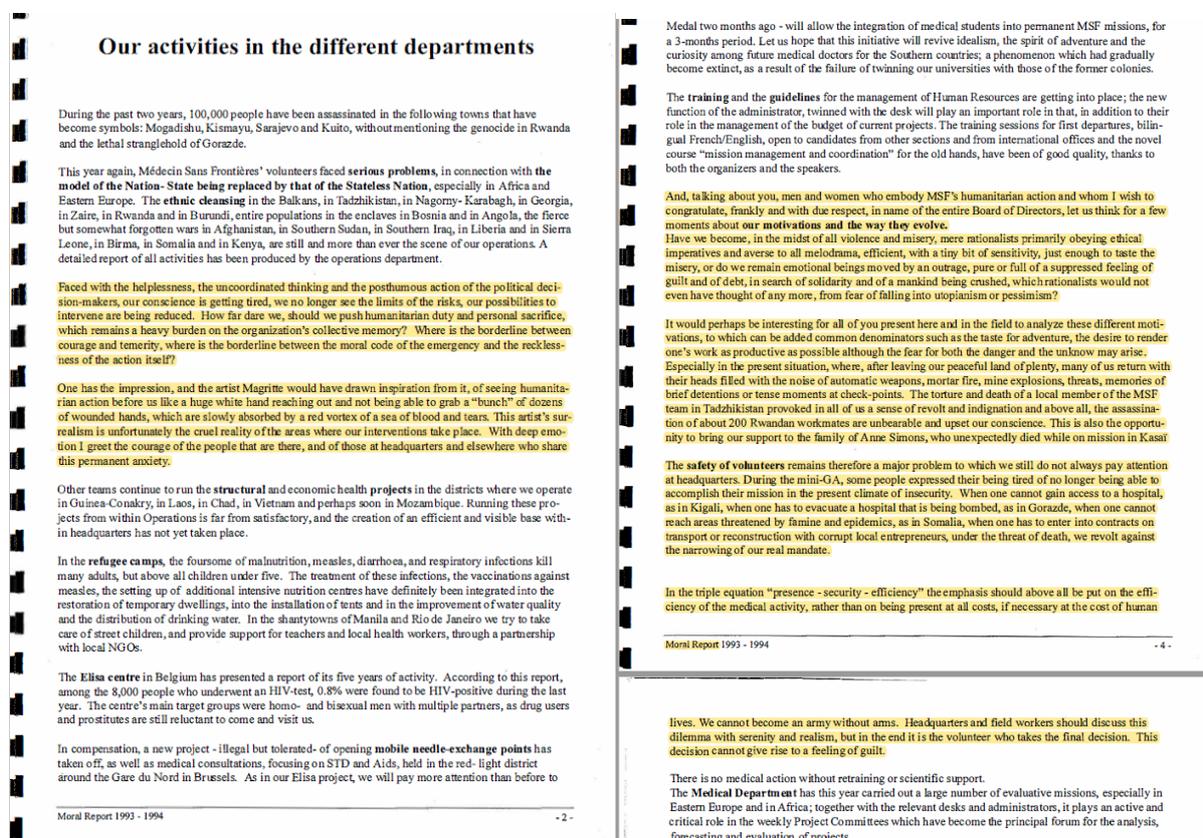
FIGURE 18: Extracts selected from the archival data, not found in the archival report

In addition, the archival data could bring additional information in the form of visual cues in the case of videos. In fact, for all cases, the archival data in the form of videos is still available online, so I had access to all the videos from which the extracts of the video transcripts in the reports were taken.

Witnessing killing at checkpoint - MSF Holland programme manager

ITW - Wouter van Empelen, MSF Holland programme manager; witnessing killing at checkpoint in April 1994 - filmed in Butare region in October 1995 (Dutch - English subtitled)

Bradol: French government's lack of involvement to stop the "genocidaires" - English

16 May 1994 - TF1 - Interview Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol - MSF France Programme manager on French government's lack of involvement to stop the "genocidaires" (French/English)

Internal debates about the qualification of genocide - English

The MSF Adventure – Patrice Benquet, Anne Valleys – MAHA Production 2006 - Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Programme Manager on internal debates within MSF France about the qualification of genocide (English)

MSF's Call for armed intervention to stop the genocide

FIGURE 19: Examples of archival data in the form of videos
Source : www.msf.org/speakingout/speaking-out-videos-genocide-rwandan-tutsis-1994

Again, we see with the video examples above the heterogeneity of the archival data. For instance, there is a press conference by the organization, an interview on national television

with a strategist working at the headquarters, and interviews with field workers directly in the field.

Archival data is usually collected as a supplementary data source. In particular, most studies on extreme contexts do not use secondary data as primary source of data. Accessing the unfolding of experiences that are *frozen* in time and captured in archival reports – i.e., 'unfreezing' the archival data – poses an important methodological challenge here. I acknowledge the dilemma of analyzing a process with archival data, which are static by definition and will remain *frozen* in a sense. Archival data may seem *frozen* in time and therefore may be perceived as stable, but I know that the archival data was once in flux and went through transformation (see Chia, 1995). In order to get to this flux and transformation, qualitative researchers usually interview the people who have lived the experience. However, extraordinary cases -like those I am interested in in this study- are so unique that they are not always accessible at the time of the study or the extraordinary character of these times is only realized at a later stage. Therefore, access to these cases is often obtained by exploring documents archived in the form of commissioned reports. The people involved during the real-life scenarios may not be accessible anymore or, like it is always the case when interviewing people about their experiences, their stories, tend to become blurred "post-factum reconstructions and re-organisations of a much more complex, messy, embodied, and non-linear process" (Stierand et al., 2017: 1), because the time that has passed between our interviewing and the real-life event could often be years or decades. Thus, I need to tap into the transformational and fluid character of the archival data found in the archival reports.

Archival data could also be used to triangulate observations, towards arriving at a more systematic interpretation that can lead to more trustworthy findings (Howard-Grenville, Metzger, & Meyer, 2013; Jay, 2013; Wright & Zammuto, 2013). Further, studies that exclusively use archival data can obtain additional layers of validation. For example, Wright & Zammuto (2013) consulted the archivist who gave them access to the archives, and Bingham & Kahl (2013) drew from historians' insights in their analysis. One way of unfreezing archival data is to gain additional contextual understanding by becoming 'engaged organisational historians' through ethnographic observations as described by Jay (2013). A second approach, the one I followed, which is both fascinating and very difficult, is to unfreeze the data without additional collection, i.e., using archival data only.

It is important to discuss this aspect of unfreezing archival data in order to tap into the temporal processual nature of the actual experiences when they occurred. Time is central in any process study, i.e. process researchers are not interested in looking at a glimpse of a phenomenon, but try to understand "how and why things emerge, develop, grow, or terminate over time" (Langley et al., 2013: 1). That is, on the one hand, I need to reactivate the passing of time in order to make the process emerge in front of me. At the same time, I need to deal with its history. Indeed, its existence in the past provides the context I need to understand in order to trustworthily interpret the process. Pettigrew (1997) called this the catching of "reality in flight". In extreme contexts, this catching is even more crucial since "people enact the environments which constrain them" (Weick, 1988: 305). Therefore, the centrality of time in this archival process study makes it a form of historical research (Gill, Gill, & Roulet, 2018). Building a story from this historical research entails more than presenting a chronology of events (Langley et al., 2013; Pentland, 1999). Indeed, as a process researcher I am primarily interested in uncovering and understanding the "becoming" of the process that explains the phenomenon I am interested in, i.e., answering the what, how, and why of its changes over time. Embracing the historical character of this type of research is still neglected in organizational research (Gill et al., 2018). Therefore, the theoretical framing for developing a methodological approach requires a substantial dose of researcher creativity that can also include proposing criteria, principles and techniques like those suggested by Gill et al. (2018).

On rare occasions, archives are the primary source of data and interviews can be conducted to supplement the archival data by providing background information and support for interpreting the archival data (Orlikowski & Yates, 1994). Here, the choice to use archival reports as a primary source of data is multiple. As noted above, the question of access was an important starting point. However, this did not mean that I was going to use these archival reports as my primary data source. In all honesty, the main reason for this choice is that the archival reports fascinated me. They disturbed my mind because of the extreme pain and suffering that transpires throughout these reports. At the same time, they fed my thoughts and I believe that this is an extremely important element in bringing new ideas into a field. The second reason is that the interpreted data allowed for in-depth study of particularly important cases for the organization, over a long period of months and even years, by following the organization as it was immersed in extreme contexts from 1994 to 1998. This allows me as researcher, to see processes unfold over that period. In the case of process studies, archival data, when researched and collected methodically, can offer more information than one-off data

collections. Unlike ethnographic observations, which are limited to the physical presence of the researcher, my presence in the field is not necessary to access the unfolding of actions and interpretations in the contexts under study. This is particularly important, not only because I am studying historical cases where my presence would not have been possible (e.g., I was not even three years old when the genocide started in Rwanda), but also because studying such extreme contexts while being physically present in the context can be risky. As a mother of two young children, I would not have chosen to risk my life to collect data. Furthermore, even if I were willing to go into the field in an extreme context (such as war) and could afford the travel costs for data collection, it is difficult to predict how much time I would have needed to stay in the field to collect data to study the process of strategizing in an extreme context. With archival data, I can study this process for a longer period of time than I could have spent in the field. While it is true that interviews are privileged to access people's cognitions and sensemaking, archival data can be much more powerful in revealing processes over a long period of time (Langley et al., 2013). Moreover, I am particularly fortunate to have access to some of this sensemaking described by members of the organization who experienced these extreme contexts in the extracts of interview transcripts. Organizational members have many stories to tell about their experiences. It is their experiences of the strategizing process that, through analysis, I am able to unfreeze from the archives. These stories reveal the lived experiences of the MSF members who must make complex decisions and act in extreme contexts promptly, therefore revealing in part the strategizing process and underlying organizational processes such as sensemaking and organizational learning.

It is critical to develop rapport with interviewees to discuss their experiences in extreme contexts (that may have resulted in trauma) and the organizational processes involved. Common methodological challenges often have to do with developing and maintaining a fragile relationship with research participants (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Fahie, 2014; Perry, 2011). For instance, Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) interviewed thirty qualitative researchers who have conducted sensitive health research to expose their challenges and coping strategies. The 'interviews with the interviewers' showed the significance of demonstrated caring through self-disclosure and reciprocity and revealed the vital role of emotion work in building and sustaining rapport by showing compassion, patience and empathy. The interviews extracts found in the archival reports are extremely deep and rich because the interviewer was an insider. She was a member of the organization which is helpful to build a relationship with the other members who had experienced the extreme events. As I can see from the transcript extracts, this legitimacy

and relationship was particularly beneficial as it facilitated very open, transparent and authentic accounts of their lived experiences. This was also because the interviewees were guided while being given the time and space to elaborate their thoughts and detail their experiences where necessary so that they could discuss their *lifeworlds* (Lebenswelt) which is what ties their consciousness to the objects of experience (Husserl, 1970; Ihde, 1986; Moran, 2000).

The extracts of interview transcripts provided in the archival reports are from interviews that were conducted years ago and could not be conducted now due to the long period of time that has passed since the extreme events. However, while recordings are a valuable tool to keep the phrasing of the interviewees, therefore, to preserve the meaning and ideas and are tremendously useful during the analysis process, I only have access to selected extracts of interview transcripts. I recognize that the transcription cannot be the carbon copy of the interview (Kvale, 1996), and that it is the interviewer who is in the best place to interpret the stories shared by the interviewees. Nonetheless, it is the interviewer herself who selected the interview extracts to tell the story of the strategic dilemmas the organization faced while immersed in an extreme context. As researcher herself, there is meaning in the selecting and displaying of the extracts. From these interview extracts and other data in the reports, I need to reconstruct the stories of the selected past cases to account for the becoming of the processes while I keep changing the socio-historical context for each process (i.e. locating it in the time when it unfolded), also investigating how the narrative of one context may become the antenarrative of another (Boje, Haley, & Saylors, 2016). This requires handling numerous timelines, socio-historical contexts, and the processes along which these contexts are changing. Therefore, if I can find active participants of these processes in their own times, I can gain at least post-rationalized personal accounts to contextualize the stories. If this is not possible, like here, I need to rely on the archival data, in which case a great deal depends on the quality of the writing of the archival documents. Therefore, it is vital to assess what has been called by certain researchers such as Dochartaigh, "the authority or reputation of the source" of the secondary data (Saunders, 2019, p.363). The author of these archival reports is still today the director of research at MSF International and has been working for the organization for twenty-three years. Furthermore, regarding the reliability of data sources, the validity and reliability of the archival reports were checked internally by an editorial committee, so that they were approved by the organization. And years after the creation of the archival reports, the organization chose to make them public for the world to see, thus giving a second stamp of approval to the content of these reports.

4.3.1.2 Data Analysis Methods

To analyze the data, I used a thematic analysis, which is a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2014). The purpose of thematic analysis is to search for patterns across the data set (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009) to draw interpretations from the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Thematic analysis is particularly flexible, which allows to formulate some pre-established 'a priori' themes based on the literature but also for emergent themes. Examples of the former are sensemaking and organizational learning and examples of the latter are moral dilemma and creating new practices. Notably, the a priori and emergent themes are not fully separable; for instance, I expected to find about double-loop learning from the data, but what I discovered shifted my understanding of this a priori theme in the sense that double-loop learning led to questioning the organization's raison d'être and contradicting interpretations, leading to opposite opinions of what should be done in the extreme context. The coding process was hierarchical, and I used Gioia's (Gioia, 2014a; Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013) approach to visualizing my data structure, which is visible on **FIGURE 22**.

As detailed before, the data collected is archival. However, one issue is that empirical research papers tend to report little about the analysis of archival data. More precisely, in qualitative research, archival data are often used as supplementary data sources and therefore tend to receive less methodological attention than, for example, interviews or field observations; the analysis of archival data, in particular, seems to be generally under-explained. Nevertheless, some qualitative empirical process studies, and arguably some of the most impactful ones, like those published in a *Special Issue* of the prestigious *Academy of Management Journal* in 2013 edited by Langley et al. (2013), explain the use of archival data in an exemplary way for the research community (e.g., Bingham & Kahl, 2013; Gehman, Treviño, & Garud, 2013; Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Jay, 2013; Lok & De Rond, 2013; MacKay & Chia, 2013; Maguire & Hardy, 2013; Wright & Zammuto, 2013). What is visible from this selection of papers, is that the analysis of archival data can be in part or in whole the building block of new theorizing in process research.

Examples include papers that mix narrative with visual mapping strategies (Gehman et al., 2013; Lok & De Rond, 2013), or grounded theory with visual mapping strategies (Howard-Grenville et al., 2013). From this admittedly very small selection of papers, I boldly deduce that at the heart of most of these analysis methods was some form of narrative approach (Gehman

et al., 2013; Jay, 2013; Lok & De Rond, 2013). This is not surprising since narratives have "the great advantage of reproducing in all their subtlety the ambiguity that exists in the situations observed" (Langley, 1999: 695). This is why narratives also play a role in this study. They are used to tell the stories of cases in such a way as to describe the critical processes that shape strategizing over time in extreme contexts, as explained with the use of illustrative vignettes in the fifth stage of data analysis. Before these vignettes could be created, a number of steps had to be taken in analyzing through thematic analysis the large amount of secondary data available. (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018) propose "five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding" for a thorough thematic analysis.

In the first step of data analysis, the archival data are compiled into NVivo, well-known and widely used qualitative data handling software which facilitates the analysis process in assisting the identification, the classification, and the mapping for analysis purposes. Then, the data is disassembled and first-order categories which represent the "informant-centric terms" (Gioia, 2014a), are created. Hence, these categories are grounded in the data and offer a trustworthy picture of the topics that emerged from the secondary data.

The second step of data analysis involves reassembling by identifying key constructs. For this step, in addition to using NVivo, rich tables are created for each case study in Excel (see

Appendix 11) with comments from the researcher, which provide details of interpretation and support the identification of key concepts with a distinction between proof and power quotes. The second-order themes are elaborated and aggregated, which correspond to "research-centric concepts" (Gioia, 2014a). They result from the researcher's efforts to understand the data by making relationships between identified first-order categories and disregarding other categories. Part of the analysis process therefore followed the'1st-order/2nd-order' methodological template developed by Dennis Gioia (Gioia, 2014b; Gioia et al., 2013). However, other more creative analysis methods are used in this study to generate theory from the empirical data.

The third step happened after analyzing the first case with the use of the data-handling software NVivo, I realized that I was losing a lot of meaningful links and that my understanding of the case was far from complete. I was missing the 'time' element which is crucial in process studies and especially when studying four cases that sometimes overlap in terms of timeline. I looked for ways to integrate the temporal dimension to my analysis. I decided to use a software to be able to create a timeline that could be easily modified, downloaded and could be accessible to the reader. Creating the timeline was a lengthy process, involving the identification of facts, decisions and actions taken over the course of the four case studies, not only by the organization studied here but by other stakeholders who had a bearing on the organization's strategic action.

FIGURE 20: Screenshot of the complete timeline of the four cases (January 1994–July 1998)[4]
Source: own figure created with the software time.graphics

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[4] Complete timeline accessible in *Appendix 2*

Kigali airport taken by the RPF.

OAU condemns 'crimes against humanity.'

Extreme Event:
RPF bombs the Kigali hospital complex, while the RAF bombs the UN HQ in the RPF zone.

Back from a mission in Rwanda, UN Human Rights Commission rapporteur René Degni-Ségui co
genocide can be applied to the Tutsi massacres and calls for the establishment of an internation

Alain Juppé uses the term 'genocide' in a reply to a current affairs question at the French
National Assembly, and suggests a summit of Heads of State for Rwanda's neighbouring countries.

Security Council Resolution 918 expresses «once again its alarm at continuing reports
of systematic, widespread and flagrant violations of international humanitarian law in Rwanda [...]

Arrests, killings, attacks, disappearances by the RPF in Rwanda.

ly provide military and financial aid for a multilateral operation if it is 'in America's national interest'.
ni accuses the Rwandan interim government of genocide.

Presence of genocidaires in the Benaco camp.
Killings of Tutsi in the camp.

nister Alain Juppé calls on the United Nations to give UNAMIR more troops.
ABC Nightline, Boutros-Ghali affirms that 'genocide' is taking place in Rwanda.

Some 20,000 people need assistance in Nyamata.

First exodus of Rwandan refugees in Tanzania.

Third extraordinary session of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva:
appointment of a special rapporteur, tasked with conducting an inquiry into the existence of any 'genocide.'

1994 may   1994 jun

25   1   5   10   15   20   25   1   5   10   15   20   25   1   5   10

Start a mission in the Benaco camp for Rwandan refugees in Tanzania.
Send someone from HQ.
Incomplete assessment of the context in the field.

At a seminar, the MSF-F Board decides to launch an appeal for international armed intervention to halt the

Observations in the field of the power in place in the camp
and the misuse of humanitarian aid by those in power.
Send several experienced MSF staff in the field icluding
management to assess properly the context.

MSF-B General Assembly:
State of shock following genocide of Rwandan Tutsi.

Strike of MSF expatriates in the Benaco camp

0 have fled Rwanda as massacres continue – MSF triples assistance to refugees this week".
d special plane to Tanzania to assist Rwandan refugees".
yumba.

MSF-B starts a new mission in Nyamata in
the Bugesera region

MSF doctor examines the 12 bodies.
Decision in the field to not testify at the military tribunal.
Request HQ's opinion on this decision.

y MSF-B president published on 28 April in 'De Morgen' is reprinted in 'Le Soir'.

MSF-B sends additional people and equipment to Kigali.

st sortie of ICRC/MSF France volunteers to gather up the wounded in Kigali.
SF-UK letter to 'The Guardian' rejects confusion between MSF and the right to intervene.

MSF-F Press release: «Massacres continue in Kigali».

MSF-B Press release: 'Rwanda emergency: MSF continues its work'.

Collection of testimonies from field workers of
human rights violations in Rwanda by the RPF.

MSF-F Press release: 'Almost 100 MSF staff murdered in Rwanda'.

MSF Speaks Out:
Call for international armed intervention to stop the genocide.

Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol (MSF-F Programme Manager) tells TF1 (French TV) news of
the 'planned extermination' and criticises French support for the Habyarimana regime.

Publication by MSF-F: 'You can't stop genocide with doctors' in 'Le Monde'.

MSF-UK Press release: 'UN reinforcement in Rwanda may come too late'

MSF-B and ICRC provide medical back up for the forced evacuation ordered by the RPF but hindered by APR s

MSF-F publishes open letter to President François Mitterrand in 'Le Monde', asking him to intervene
'against the planned, systematic extermination of the opponents of a faction supported by France

FIGURE 21: Screenshot zooming in on the shared timeline of three cases from 1 May 1994 to 1 July 1994
Source: own figure created with the software time.graphics

To enhance understanding of this part of the analysis, I have included screenshots that zoom into the timelines I developed specifically for this research. Creating these timelines was a creative approach to incorporate the evolution of the extreme context and of the organization's strategizing over time in my analysis, offering a tailored view of the temporal dynamics involved. In the extract of the timeline shown in **FIGURE 21**, red corresponds to case study 1, green to case study 2, blue to case study 3 and orange to case study 4. When descriptions are highlighted in the corresponding color to the case, the events occurred on a specific date. When descriptions are written under a colored rectangle, the events described took place over several days or weeks and the rectangle indicates this time period. Everything below the timeline represents actions and events related to MSF and everything above the timeline represents events, actions and decisions made by other stakeholders. The complete timeline is visible in Appendix 2 and its different parts in Appendix 3, Appendix 4,Appendix 5,Appendix 6,Appendix 7, Appendix 8 and Appendix 9.

In the fourth step of data analysis, from the iterative analysis process between identifying constructs and creating the timeline, a data structure (see **FIGURE 22**) is built, as a convenient image of the analysis process from the first-order categories grounded in data to

the aggregate dimensions I formulated. Nevertheless, this structure can only offer a "static picture of a dynamic phenomenon" and needs to be "converted into a motion picture" (Gioia, 2014a: 6). For this study, this means carving out a dynamic model of the strategizing process in an extreme context that emerges from a reflective and reflexive theorizing process by interpreting the secondary data, iterating between the 'parts and the whole' until achieving a meta-level understanding of the data in context. That is, how strategizing unfolds in an extreme context, using the example of Doctors without Borders in four cases of the past.

The fifth step of data analysis – an intermediate step between the data structure and the dynamic model – was used for two reasons. The first was to help the researcher make the data "come alive" (Jenkins & Noone, 2019: 12) to grasp how the phenomenon studied here unfolds dynamically with the creation of two new elements: individual timelines to represent the extreme context strategizing of each case (see *Appendix 12*) and illustrative vignettes. Indeed, while the first element is reserved for the researcher to support the comprehension of the strategizing in the complexity of each case, the second offers the reader stories that not simply give a summary of the selected extreme cases (for that, the contextual backgrounds of each case are provided in *5.2*), but together show the shaping of the extreme context strategizing.

Therefore, the methodological choice of using vignettes in the analysis of the data was made to support the analysis and illustrate the findings. The vignette technique was developed to collect qualitative data. More precisely, vignettes can be used to collect data by presenting research participants with situations that invite responses in particular scenarios (Jenkins & Noone, 2019). The use of vignettes to collect empirical data is particularly interesting for studying opinions, interpretations and behaviors on sensitive topics, where first-hand data collection can be particularly difficult (Jenkins & Noone, 2019). Vignettes can also be used for a completely different purpose in the analysis and representation of the data. That is because vignettes "are revelatory of particular concepts […] bringing them to life by describing an actual event or incident in an evocative way" (Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Lê, 2014: 280)". Therefore, using the vignette technique "can have the effect of helping researchers to make their data "come alive" by bringing research audiences closer to a direct experiencing of the issues under investigation" (Jenkins & Noone, 2019: 12). Researchers can attempt to offer this vicarious experience of the phenomenon under study to the reader with three types of vignettes as described by Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Anzul (2003): *portrait* vignette, *snapshot* vignette and *moving* vignette (Jenkins & Noone, 2019). In analyzing and representing my data, I do not use *portrait* vignettes that are used to present a particular individual as I focus on the process. I use

snapshot vignettes which show specific issues or phenomena and *moving* vignettes that are appropriate like in my case when the focus is on the process as they incorporate the unfolding of different events over the course of time. As pointed out by Jarzabkowski et al. (2014), vignettes are often used by organizational ethnographers. Although I am not conducting ethnographic research, I have chosen to use vignettes as they allow me to illustrate specific incidents and the unfolding of events and, in doing so, reveal both the extreme context and the strategizing at play within that context.

In the final step of data analysis, the dynamic model that captures the process of extreme context strategizing (see **FIGURE** *23*) is drawn. This conceptual model is based on constructs derived from underlying empirical data from the four cases.

To summarize, to create the data structure and later the dynamic model, I relied on nodes created on NVivo and rich tables to identify first-order and second-order themes, illustrative vignettes that provide narratives of the key constructs, individual timelines and the complete timeline that incorporates the four case studies.

4.4 Conclusion – Methodological considerations

In this chapter I have described the methodological considerations and choices I have made. I have presented the design, the process, and the methods of this study in the light of my philosophical positioning. Something that I realized more clearly with hindsight was that by using archival data as primary sources (Miralles et al., 2022; Miralles, Stierand, & Dörfler, 2019; Miralles, Stierand, Lee, & Dörfler, 2020), I have contributed significantly to the research methods literature, demonstrating how my research design and methods is capable of unearthing how the phenomenally complex past experiences of individuals in extreme contexts and how these experiences related to the unfolding strategizing process.

5 Analysis and Findings

5.1 Structure of the Findings

In this chapter, I present my findings resulting from the analysis of four cases of strategizing in extreme contexts for the organization MSF. I draw from the internal archival reports of these four cases. I found thirteen archival reports of the organization that were publicly available. Initially, I did not know how many cases I would analyze for this research. I chose to start with the case of the Rwandan Tutsi genocide in 1994 for two reasons: I am interested in extreme contexts, and I could not imagine anything more extreme than a genocide and I could directly see from the titles of the reports that there were three other cases related to it. The fact that the organization did not stop at investigating this one case was an indicator to me that this case had posed dilemmas for the organization that were unlikely to be resolved in subsequent years and extreme contexts. I was intrigued by the analysis of the organization's strategizing process in this case. Once I had done this, I had to study the other three cases to understand the strategic dilemmas in each case, to see the interconnection with the first case, and to compare and contrast the strategizing of the organization in these four cases. After an initial analysis of these four cases, I felt that I stumbled over a data goldmine and my intuition told me that I should simply follow my hunch. Now I am confident in what my supervisors meant when they said that all great research starts from an intuition (Dörfler & Ackermann, 2012; Dörfler & Eden, 2019).

First, the four extreme contexts are described in order to outline the contextual background of the four selected cases. I briefly summarize what happened at the time of the events and the relationship between the historical context and MSF's strategizing. The main dilemmas of the organization in terms of strategy in the contexts of the four cases are also introduced.

Second, I present my data structure and a table introducing the vignettes for each 2nd order topic. Like Jarzabkowski, Lê, and Feldman (2012: 913), I chose to "use representative data and vignettes to illustrate" the constituent sub-processes of strategizing in extreme contexts (see **FIGURE *23*** for the dynamic model) because providing detailed examples of all the events, discussions, decisions and experiences of the four cases would be overwhelming for the reader.

TABLE **3** introduces the illustrative vignettes and the cases from which they were derived for the aggregate dimensions. Then, I dive into the sub-process with the illustrative vignettes, drawing from the data the understanding of the strategizing in confronting the extreme context of each case. In other words, the vignettes bring my data structure to life.

Immersion in different parts – or case studies of interconnected but distinct extreme contexts – reveals MSF's strategizing process as a whole, and a better understanding of the whole, in turn, inform our understanding of each extreme case. In performing this hermeneutic cycle, I kept an open mind to reconceptualize extreme context strategizing, as I found that certain concepts could be noticed more easily in one case than in the other. I am convinced that the study of these past cases can produce significant information for the organization under examination – MSF itself –, but also for other organizations more generally. Indeed, extreme contexts are becoming increasingly common, and I believe that a better understanding of strategy in extreme contexts is already important today and will be a necessity for all organizations in the near future.

Third, I introduce a process model of extreme context strategizing (**FIGURE *23***). This dynamic, multi-layered process is explained in more detail in the constituent organizational processes of sensemaking under pressure, ethical decision-making, dilemma-driven doing and learning in and for the extreme.

5.2 Contextual backgrounds of the four cases

In this section, a brief description of the context and the major strategic issues facing the organization in each specific extreme context are provided. Contextual background is provided for the reader to understand the historical context of each case and the position of the organization within the context. Through these brief overviews of the context and the dilemmas MSF faced in this particular context, I reveal the uniqueness and interest of each case for me as a researcher in the study of extreme context strategizing. At the end of this section, a brief table gives an overview of the context of the four cases studied, and the main strategic issues that these contexts posed for the organization.

5.2.1 Case 1: The Genocide of Rwandan Tutsis 1994

The first case (Case 1) concerns the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda from April to July 1994. The genocide of Rwandan Tutsis started right after the death of the (Hutu) Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana whose plane was shot down on 6 April 1994. The Rwandan Armed Forces (FAR), the Presidential Gard and Hutu militia forces started massacres of Tutsis, first in the capital Kigali, which then spread to the rest of the country. The massacres were organized with lists of Tutsis and government-sponsored radio stations throughout the country issued calls to murder Tutsis. In about 100 days, over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus[5] were killed.

At the time, MSF had running projects in Rwanda and was therefore already in the field at the start of the genocide. This presence on the ground at the time the extreme context began is particularly interesting for studying the organization's strategizing process. This is because the organization did not start by recognizing an extreme context and going to the field to respond to it, as it would be the MSF typical modus operandi. Here, the organization unexpectedly found itself in an extreme context, which allows me to see the reaction before the response and the impact of the change in context on the organization's strategy in the field and at headquarters.

The organization investigated Case 1 to describe the events that took place in Rwanda and on the international scene, as well as the actions taken by MSF and interpretations of organizational members during this period. With this archival report, the organization has tried to clarify what happened with facts and to show the organization's responses in terms of actions, debates, interpretations and even conflicts that arose during this period. For the organization, these issues are linked to the moral dilemmas that arose at that time, linked to the confrontation of a humanitarian organization with genocide, and mainly to MSF's call for armed intervention for the first time in its history.

In Case 1, through the hundreds of extracts of board meeting minutes, situation reports from field workers, communications between organizational members, interview transcripts with board members and field workers and newspaper articles, the strategizing process of the organization appears in a unique way. Furthermore, Case 1 is particularly interesting in terms

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[5] The term moderate Hutus refers to Hutus who disagreed with the extremist policies of the government. They were considered traitors and were also targeted during the genocide.

of strategy, sensemaking and organizational learning because, at the time of writing this archival report, the organization was still divided over the interpretations and actions taken during the case.

Furthermore, Case 1 represents a time when the organization was confronted with not just any kind of extreme context, but a disrupted context, perhaps for the first time. In any case, the extent of the extreme in this case implies a cosmology episode that shattered many beliefs in an unprecedented way and divided the organization over strategic choices.

5.2.2   Case 2: The violence of the new Rwandan regime 1994-1995

The second case (Case 2) largely follows the first case in terms of chronology and focuses on the same country. In Case 2, the investigation covers MSF's work during the new regime in Rwanda, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), from June 1994 to January 1996.

Specific issues arise during that time, a) the constraints related to the call for armed intervention described in the first case, b) the call to refugees to return to Rwanda with massacres still occurring in Rwanda, and c) the difficulty to both speak out about the horrific conditions in prisons in Rwanda and get access to work there while it is not normally part of MSF's mandate.

Case 2 also reveals critical tensions. Firstly, tensions emerge between past strategic choices and potential future strategic directions: important constraints that had previously been overlooked become crystal clear in this case. Secondly, there are tensions between key organizational principles that come into conflict – especially advocacy and medical assistance – with the need to prioritize one mandate over the other.

5.2.3   Case 3: Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania

In this case (Case 3), MSF worked intensively in the refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania after hundreds of thousands of Rwandans fled during the 1994 summer. While medical assistance was undoubtedly needed (for example, during the cholera outbreak) in Case 3, the camps were not only inhabited by innocent Rwandan refugees. MSF field workers realized that genocidaires were present in the camps. Moreover, these genocidaires were running the camps and diverting the aid provided by MSF to prepare the reconquest of Rwanda.

In this context, MSF field workers were divided. Some sounded the alarm to stop all operations, even resigning when their warning was ignored. Others wanted to work to improve the situation. Finally, some believed in medical assistance above all: if medical assistance is needed, it is MSF's mandate to provide it, regardless of the difficulties or consequences. The division did not only happen at the individual level with people following their moral sense but also at the organizational level with the different sections (or operational centers) following different ethical models in their strategizing.

To improve the situation, MSF first requested an international police force inside the camps. The idea was to separate the genocidaires from the refugees and to end the control of the genocidaires who use violence to run the camps. Unfortunately, the international community did not intervene and the extreme context remained in the camps. After the failure of the advocacy strategy, MSF was faced with different alternatives, with at the end of the spectrum two opposing strategic choices: to stay and provide medical assistance in this context of aid diversion and violence, or to leave the camps and leave all the refugees (a majority of whom were children) in order not to participate in the diversion that helped arm the genocidaires.

In other words, Case 3 reveals an important moral and strategic dilemma for MSF. This dilemma concerns the provision of medical assistance to a population made up of innocent people and people who have committed massacres during a genocide, and who take advantage of the assistance provided to plan the perpetration of other crimes. While the organization follows the principle of neutrality in conflicts, the extreme case of genocide is unequivocal about taking sides. Continuing to provide aid which is then widely misappropriated means accepting to be used by the genocidaires to help the thousands of people who risk dying without assistance. The different strategic approaches to this dilemma are at the heart of this case study.

5.2.4 Case 4: The hunting and killing of Rwandan refugees in Zaire-Congo 1996-1997

The chronology of the last case I selected (Case 4) does not overlap with the other cases. This case takes place more than a year after the end of Case 3, but it is related to the other three cases because it concerns MSF's work with Rwandan refugees in Zaire-Congo in 1996 and 1997 who are still suffering from the consequences of the 1994 genocide (Case 1) and the forced exodus and closures of refugee camps (Cases 2 and 3). During the mass exodus of refugees,

MSF did everything in its power to provide medical assistance and aid to the suffering refugees and local populations. The medical needs were enormous.

However, access to people in need was extremely difficult for MSF in this extreme context. Attempts to reach refugees without the support of other actors created a new and particularly troubling moral dilemma. The ADFL and the RPA used humanitarian organizations such as MSF as bait for refugees to come out of hiding and after the humanitarian organization left, the refugees would be massacred. When the manipulation became obvious, the organization was faced with the dilemma of whether to stop its activities to avoid participating in the massacres or to continue with the necessary operations and speak out about the problem, while endangering the safety of members in the field. In Case 4, refugees were forced to flee across Zaire and return to Rwanda with no guarantee of a better fate there. MSF was faced with another moral dilemma: to help repatriate the refugees or to advocate for them to stay in Zaire with the dangers present in both countries.

Consequently, Case 4, which occurs chronologically after the three cases described above, without any juxtaposition of events, shows that moral-strategic dilemmas are still present three years after the genocide that represents the extreme context of Case 1. Indeed, learning from the extreme in the three previous cases, while it has reshaped mental models for sensemaking and created new practices, has not facilitated strategic action in the extreme. In Case 4, the question of renunciation when leaving the extreme is more relevant than ever.

Case	1	2	3	4
Time period	April – July 1994	July 1994 – January 1996	May 1994 – January 1996	1996 – 1997
Main source of the extreme context	Genocide of Tutsis and moderate Hutus	Violence in Rwanda	Violence in Zaire and Tanzania	Killings of refugees in Congo-Zaire and Tanzania

Main strategic issues	• Understanding the extreme context to adequately respond to it • Confronting moral dilemmas within the organization	• Conflicting temporal dimensions (past strategic choices and potential future strategic directions) • Conflicting organization's mandates	• Division over the morally acceptable strategic path (individual level) • Division over the right strategic path (organizational level)	• Accepting to work in an extremely limited capacity vs Renouncing (when enough is enough for some, not for others) • Defining the organization's activity

A better understanding of the contextual background to the four case studies enables the reader to see how the various elements that make up the data structure are anchored in the empirical data.

5.3 Vignettes: insights as stories synthesized from the data

This subchapter depicts the journey from the data to the dynamic model, which is the main contribution of my doctoral study. First, I present the data structure created from the thematic analysis of the data. Next, I bring the data structure to life by presenting the findings in the form of thirteen vignettes. These vignettes represent accounts of important aspects of strategizing in extreme contexts (i.e., the aggregates of the data structure) as they emerged during the four extreme contexts studied here.

5.3.1 Data structure

The overall data structure is presented below, following a thematic analysis. Appendix 1 is a table providing proof quotes (Pratt, 2009) for the overall data structure. This table is important to ensure the reliability of the data structure, as it provides quotations from the four cases for each first-order category. In that sense, it shows the data to the reader. However, it is not easily digestible. To present my findings in the most understandable way for the reader, I present them in the form of vignettes. These vignettes are grouped into three subjects which

correspond to the aggregate dimensions in the data structure. The first theme is *Sensemaking under pressure*. The second subject brings together three aggregate dimensions: *Ethical decision-making*, *Dilemma-driven doing by prioritizing* and *Dilemma-driven doing by creating* because together they explain decision-making and action following *Sensemaking under pressure*. It would be unpromising to try and tell stories for each of these three aggregate dimensions separately, as they are inextricably linked. Faced with a moral dilemma requiring a strategic response, prioritization and creation proved essential in the various cases studied. There were cases where prioritization triggered creation, or where the creation of unprecedented means led to the redefinition of priorities for the organization and its members. For this reason, I have chosen to retain the three aggregate dimensions as a group for several illustrative vignettes drawn from the four cases studied. The third subject of the vignettes is *Learning in and from the Extreme*. These themes will then be brought together in the dynamic model of Extreme Context Strategizing.

Before introducing the individual vignettes, the data structure is the starting point of the synthesis. It represents the static picture of the thematic analysis conducted in this study.

1st order categories | 2nd order themes | Aggregate dimensions

- Intuitive understanding from a field worker of the new reality of the extreme context.
- Field worker sensing the risks in the context before the extreme event occurs.
- Field worker knowing intuitively that MSF is being used for unethical reasons against its own mandate.

→ Individual perception of the context

- Failed sensemaking of extreme context by organizational members sticking to their mental models of the past.
- Failed sensemaking of extreme context by organizational members committing to the internalized practices.
- Action centered on second-order sensemaking at HQ based on the first-order sensemaking in the field.

→ Organizational frames and representations

Sensemaking under pressure

- Confronting the limitation of humanitarian aid at the individual level.
- Ethical decision of emergency pool coordinator to leave the field and resign from MSF to not participate in the rehabilitation of genocidaires through humanitarian aid.
- Ethical decision to collaborate with local authorities to keep activities running.
- Crisis of trust between field workers and HQ following specific actions leading to the resignation of field workers.

→ Individual sense of morality

- Confronting the limitation of humanitarian aid at the organizational level with MST ethos.
- Confronting ethical dilemmas at the organizational level.
- Crisis of trust between sections related to actions taken following different ethical models.

→ Culturally-embedded organizational ethical models

Dilemma-driven ethical decision making

- Acting fast with no planning or discussion.
- Tricking another MSF section to be in the field during the extreme event.
- Promising another section to collaborate on a mission without permission and having to back out.
- Imposing a veto or breaching the veto of another MSF section.

→ Individual misbehaving

- Calling for armed intervention for the first time.
- Filling the gap left by other organizations by doing things that are not part of MSF's mandate.
- Attempting a new 'Greenpeace type' action in an impasse.
- MSF striking in the field to force improvements in the context and avoid having to leave the field.

→ Unprecedented organizational actions

Doing by creating new pathways

- Field workers taking great personal risks to provide medical assistance or save lives.
- Field workers leaving for safety reasons.
- Field workers leaving for ethical reasons.

→ Individual sense of priority

- Putting medical assistance or the safety of field workers first depending on the understanding of the context.
- Headquarters placing field workers under the banner of the ICRC, suppressing the organization's voice and independence for medical assistance and security reasons.
- Headquarters imposing a 'silent diplomacy' strategy to the field.
- One MSF section telling another section what it is not allowed to do/say.

→ Extreme-imposed organizational priorities

Doing by prioritizing practices

- Field worker criticizing the organization's practices and rules applied in the extreme context.
- Field worker challenging the strategy imposed in the field.
- Crisis of trust between field and HQ leading to the resignation of several field workers.

→ Individual denouncing

- Acknowledging that the organization has made a mistake.
- Changing practices after learning about the dire consequences of applying the internalized practices and following the rules.
- Applying learning from past extreme cases to make decisions.
- Discussing the lessons learnt from recent failures in extreme contexts, the organization's objectives and strategic options in the face of dilemmas.

→ Extreme-triggered organizational learning loops

Learning in and from the extreme context

FIGURE 22: Data structure
Source: own figure

Before describing the vignettes in detail and using them as narratives to explain how the aggregates presented in the data structure above together make up the process of strategizing in extreme contexts, the following table introduces the various illustrative vignettes, linking them to a particular case.

TABLE 3: Illustrative vignettes of the aggregate dimensions

Aggregate dimension	Vignette
Sensemaking under pressure	Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1) Failed sensemaking of extreme context by organizational members committing to the wrong framing until the sensegiving from a field worker
	Vignette 1.2. (CASE 2) Failed second-order sensemaking at headquarters by ignoring a field worker's first-order sensemaking of the extreme context and moral dilemma for lack of trust
	Vignette 1.3. (CASE 3) Failed first-order sensemaking of extreme context by field workers committing to internalized practices until the second-order sensemaking from experts brought to the field
	Vignette 1.4. (CASE 4) Failed second-order sensemaking at headquarters by ignoring a field worker's first-order sensemaking of the extreme context and moral dilemma for lack of proof
Dilemma-driven ethical decision making, doing by prioritizing and/or creating	Vignette 2.1. (CASE 1) Creating unprecedented ways to change the extreme context for ethical reasons
	Vignette 2.2. (CASE 3) Division on prioritization for ethical reasons at the organizational level and at the at the individual level
	Vignette 2.3. (CASE 2) Creating unprecedented ways of operating in the face of moral dilemmas
	Vignette 2.4. (CASES 1, 2, 4) Prioritizing ethical issues beyond organizational boundaries by fulfilling the mandates of other actors at the individual level and at the organizational level
	Vignette 2.5. (CASES 2 & 4) Crisis of trust between sections related to conflicting ethical decision-making at the same moral dilemma
Learning in and from the extreme	Vignette 3.1. (CASE 1) Learning in the extreme from making sense of the extreme context
	Vignette 3.2. (CASE 4) Learning to change practices in the extreme context
	Vignette 3.3. (CASES 3, 4) Impact of learning from extreme contexts on decision-making
	Vignette 3.4. (CASE 4) Learning from strategic failures in the extreme for decision-making and redefinition of the organization's identity

5.3.2 Sensemaking under pressure

I have chosen to reuse the term '*sensemaking under pressure*' used by Cornelissen et al. (2014) to characterize sensemaking in extreme contexts. As soon as I had read the term in the paper, it resonated with this research in the sense that it felt like the right description of the process that is described in this section. As discussed previously in the literature review, the idea of pressure in the sensemaking process has to do with the potential risks in the actions derived from sensemaking (Cornelissen et al., 2014). In other words, *sensemaking under pressure* is constrained not only by the need to make sense and fully comprehend the context but also by the resulting actions that must be both timely and a good fit for the context to avoid as much as possible negative consequences that threaten the organization and its members.

5.3.2.1 Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1)

This vignette shows the commitment of organizational members at all levels of the organization to the wrong framing leading to failed sensemaking in the disrupted context that occurs at the beginning of the first case, namely the start of the genocide in Rwanda in April 1994.

The extreme context of Case 1 is referred to as a disrupted context because the organization experienced extreme events that were not related to the core business of the organization, in the sense that the organization was in the field on a long-term mission and what happened caught the organization completely off guard. In other words, the organization was not prepared for this extreme context. For the organization that was present in Rwanda before the assassination of the Rwandan Hutu president on 6 April 1994, a genocide in Rwanda against the Tutsis was unthinkable. In this vignette, we witness first a failure to make sense of the context which led to inaccurate sensegiving and thus to a failure to respond adequately and in a timely manner to the situation. This failure occurred at all levels: at the individual level, based on mental models, with an incorrect interpretation of events in the field; at the team level, the focus was on continuing ongoing operations and responding medically to known needs based on organizational norms; and, finally, at the organizational level, where questioning the context and making sense of it to guide action was not part of the organization's internalized practices.

At the individual level, members of the organization who experienced extreme events in the field misinterpreted the cues in context. Below is an example of what some field workers experienced in the field at the very beginning of the genocide.

Thursday 7 April. A Tutsi family is seeking refuge at our centre. Their house has been attacked. The man claims that he hasn't dared to sleep at home for a week… A bit later other Tutsi, seriously wounded by machetes and sticks, comes to the house begging for help. About 20 Tutsi are now staying on the premises. …In our ambulance, Maryse and I drive up the hill to the centre of Murambi until we come upon a crowd of Hutu, armed with knives and machetes, barring the road and ordering us to get out of the car. We are accused of hiding a Tutsi they are looking for. A few Hutu are becoming increasingly aggressive. … To the person who seems to be most amenable to reason I explain that we are only sheltering a Tutsi family, mainly women and children. I then ask what the person they are looking for has done. The crowd roars, "The President is dead, that's the reason!" …Someone shows me a hand grenade, asking me whether I know what that is. Finally we agree that they can search our premises. We have no choice but to give in. …On the way I ask what will happen to the man if they find him. "He will be killed" is the reply. …The group is threatening to attack the house if we refuse to hand over the man. …A little while later the man they have been searching for steps outside the gate, his hands up. A few hotheads immediately begin to beat him up. Maryse begins to cry. A few Hutu want to reassure her, saying that nothing will happen to her. "But you are going to kill that man", she cries. The Hutu order us to walk back to our car. Behind our back Godefroid, one of our guards, is dragged off. We call out that he belongs to our staff, but no one listens. The man who has been handed over is being beaten with sticks and hacked upon with machetes… When we arrive back home [we discover that] the Tutsi man surrendered to them has been killed between the banana trees." [Extract from 'Escape from Rwanda' from the diary of Jan Debyser, MSF Holland Project coordinator, Murambi - Rwanda, April 1994. Published in Ins & Out (MSF Holland internal bulletin) in June 1994.]

The dominant narrative in the organization when field workers are confronted with such cues (e.g., machete wounds) is that of war. This has introduced certain restrictions on members' cognition, making it much more difficult to question the context. In other words, the field workers saw what is usually identified as war wounds and the narrative became one of war between two ethnic groups. The field team had experience of emergency contexts but not of

disrupted contexts. The field team was used to war and ethnic conflict between Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda. When the members of the organization on the ground started treating the wounded, they expected a war and this is how they made sense of what they saw.

> *We were in a country at war, which is routine when you've been with MSF for a long time. Our Head of Mission was aware of the political situation. She knew that the Tutsi were being pursued more than the others, but not the extent of it. [Dr. Dominique Boutriau, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF Belgium (in French).]*

This sensemaking was facilitated by organizational members' mental models. However, the framing of the context as war was erroneous.

> *It wasn't a war. But that wasn't picked up in Burundi. It was viewed with that ability of MSF of getting used to certain situations, of seeing it as somehow normal: "After all, it's war, it's horrible, that's the way it is." A somewhat fatalistic attitude. Sometimes, there are those at MSF who think it normal that people can die without our knowing why. In Burundi, a lot of people were dying, but it was as if the MSF people thought it was normal because there was a war. They thought it normal that these people were refugees and that no one was asking why they had fled, what they had fled and who they really were. This attitude of accepting that "the world is tragic but at least we are here to help" is the reaction of an alien, of a saviour who's no longer interested in the nature of people's problems. I think the teams in Burundi and Rwanda were in hero mode. Massacres were taking place and it wasn't our problem. Our problem was to tend to the injured. [Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor (in French).]*

This type of sensemaking failure is awfully dangerous in extreme contexts as it can have dramatic consequences and lead very quickly to death. The effects of this context were terrible on the organization. This was the first time that local members of the organization were massacred. In a nutshell, field workers witnessed horrific acts, experienced traumatic events, the mandate of the organization was questioned and MSF as a movement found itself in a very difficult position, divided over moral-strategic dilemmas and struggling to make decisions.

At the organizational level, it was not part of the organization's internalized field practices to question or evaluate the context in which the organization operated.

What seems strange to me, in hindsight, is that we in MSF, did not know what was going on. We had a lot of people in the country yet I was not aware of information from MSF people that there was this tension in the country; that the Hutu were planning to kill the Tutsi. That means that we knew nothing about the context, so what exactly were we doing? The people working for MSF Holland in Rwanda were not typical emergency types. They were people for slow, calm situations, technical people who were not concerned by the political context. [...] To tell you the truth, until the day I left, even after I arrived back in Holland, I didn't know that it was a genocide. I had never worked before in a genocide. I didn't know what a genocide was. I knew what a war was. [Wouter Van Empelen, Emergency Cell, MSF Holland, in Rwanda in April 1994.]

In a context of (what was interpreted as and given sense to as) war, MSF's principle of neutrality was applied by the field workers. In line with this part of MSF's ethos, field workers treat all wounded people indifferently, without taking sides. Because "people enact the environments which constrain them" (Weick, 1988: 305), field workers enacted the 'war'. Sensemaking precedes action, so MSF's actions in the field were constrained by the context of 'war' in which MSF became embedded.

In addition, at headquarters, MSF strategists' understanding of the field context depends almost entirely on interpretations made in the field and the sense given by the field workers. The sensemaking-sensemaking duo in the field is essential to headquarters' strategists. They receive regular situation reports and interact with field workers to learn about events and needs in the field based on the sensemaking in the field. Field presence is therefore essential to understanding the context, both in the field and at headquarters. Headquarters usually assumes that the assessment made in the field is correct. Therefore, the sensemaking made in the field - in this case the misinterpretation of events on the ground and the actual dangerousness and complexity of the situation - is shared with the strategists at headquarters.

When the extreme events happened, the field workers were in Rwanda on a long-term mission. This situation is totally different from an extreme event (described in the organization as an 'emergency') that occurs somewhere in the world where the organization is not present, as specific organizational processes are now put in place to respond to emergencies, such as sending a team to the field to assess the situation and needs before starting or not a mission after this assessment. As the organization itself recognized, the field workers at the time were not "emergency type" workers. In other words, they lacked the competence and experience to

assess extreme events, inform headquarters accurately and act appropriately in a disrupted context.

At the beginning of this case, the organization was committed to the narrative of a war occurring between Hutu and Tutsi. Following this failed sensemaking, a new and more accurate understanding from an individual member of the organization emerged. The organizational norms blurred cues until one individual questioned this sensemaking with a new meaning. Here, it happened intuitively by one field worker. He then shared this new meaning with the organization, giving a new sense to the extreme context. The following two extracts reveal how this new sensemaking was perceived by other organizational members.

> *"I will never forget the moment when Reginald took the floor and couldn't string two words together. He started crying and said: "I can't… what I've seen is beyond telling. I have no activity report to give today". Then he pulled himself together and finally read his report. But he remained in tears for a while. And then Reginald wrote a paper that used the term 'genocide'. I did not think that the argument was very good, but he had sensed it. And in this business it is necessary that at a certain moment, people sense things. Afterwards it is important that the point is articulated, but first we need people who sense it." [Dr. Bernard Pécoul, General Director, MSF France (in French).]*

> *"The Belgians spoke of genocide. They spoke with intuition but without any political conscience. They did not use the legal, political descriptions we did." [Jean-François Alesandrini, Director of Communication Department, MSF France (in French).]*

Once the term 'genocide' came up, the reinterpretation of contextual cues happened quickly and it became clear to the organization that this extreme context qualified as genocide. Defining the context with the right label and correct meaning shifted the entire perspective of the organization. It led to prioritizing certain practices over others and creating unprecedented actions (see Vignette 2.1. (CASE 1).

5.3.2.2 Vignette 1.2. (CASE 2)

This vignette shows that the failure of (second-order) sensemaking at headquarters by ignoring a field worker's (first-order) sensemaking of the extreme context for lack of trust in him until his interpretation can no longer be ignored.

In Case 2, a strategist in the field (the coordinator for Byumba and Bugesera in Rwanda in 1994) shares his analysis of the context to headquarters with an extensive report to bring forward the reality in the field and the moral-strategic dilemma. He explains that providing medical assistance blindly to the abuses committed by the RPF means accepting to being involved in it and he asks the organization to do something about it. His report summarizes incidents with the RPF to urge headquarters to speak out. He also criticizes organizations like MSF for their participation and quietness on the matter.

My personal conclusions

• The RPF comes from Uganda, Burundi and Zaire –Tutsi– and is not representing the majority of Rwandan Tutsi. They are not liberating the country, but occupying it. Compared to the other side, which is even worse, they have all the sympathy they want. NGOs and governments are blind to the 'saviours'. "Please, give me a camp, please let us be on your side." Almost everybody accepts the dictate and fills in the forms the RPF presents them, accepts the system, the harassment, and the planned extermination of certain parts of the population.

• The RPF has no majority support. They rule by gunpoint and intimidation. I see a terrified population that obeys in order not to get shot. Nobody dares to open his mouth. Those who tried are dead now. They are planning to have and keep power. But they can only do by dictatorship and suppression. The new rule is that Hutu should not work… • The cover, that they care for their population, is a perfect smoke screen for gaining support from the Western world. In fact they only care for those who are super pro RPF, intelligent, and needed for the future or for the war. Soldiers are well fed, the political upper ten percent is in splendid condition, and the rest can die.

• There is enough proof of mass violations of human rights, executions and intimidation. This regime has nothing good in mind. If they tried to gain popular support, they would have more power and chance to rule for longer. Why are they not interested in popular support? • NGO presence is seen as difficult. All those white people that ask stupid question are only a burden. They try to control us, collect from us (more, more), spy on us and they try to block us from seeing something. Real interest for helping us to help them is not existing. "Wait 5 days for your 15 minutes meeting with me…" That people starve doesn't interest them. All sayings, the official attitude, the field lack of cooperation, the planned movements of the civilians they rule… it all looks like an official line, a dogma. In September the rain will be here. Cholera is around the corner.

No harvesting means starvation next year. Why don't they let us do our job? Why let children die in a massacre field? Why move the people all the time, till they are so tired and sick that they fall dead in the ditch? I think that this is a communist system based on the ideology of the Khmer Rouge. Move the people all the time and they will listen. Let them suffer, let their family die; nothing is easier to control than a weak and obeying population. RPF officials are extremely intelligent, have all the ins and outs planned. They have doctrines and guidelines for everything. They are ready for the press. They play the media game splendidly. They control and abuse the NGOs and they try to show to us that they are a good future with a human face for Rwanda.

Unfortunately we (the relief workers) are the only ones to evaluate the situation because we work and live (some of the NGOs) in Rwanda.

I see planned genocide appearing in front of my very eyes. Murder by planned starvation, by disease, nice and clean because they will look like the victims, the martyrs. I see a system that functions like the KGB. Spies around you 24 hours. Disappearances. Executions. Compilations of security files. No respect for human rights, no respect for NGO rules or ideologies. What conventions of Geneva? What 'no guns in the hospital'? The lies they throw over us are clearly recognisable because we see the truth. Most of the suffering in the RPF controlled zones has been created by RPF themselves. According to me, MSF should end its activities and open up in mass media coverage. Curing created disease, regardless of present and future for those people we cure, is making us accomplices of the crime. Questions that MSF will have to ask itself:

1. What do we want to achieve in Rwanda?

2. Do we accept the role of free of charge medicine supplier?

3. Do we accept that our rules of implementation are non achievable? That we have no control over our projects? 4. Are we doing good to continue to support a regime that violates human rights systematically? Do we allow them to use the MSF flag for cover and as a smoke screen for what really is happening?

5. Are we going to respond to emergencies that are created by dictatorship and contribute to the media role that the dictator wants to gain?

6. Do we stand up for the rights of the masses, by project implementation or by project ending, or are we busy sustaining our own existence?

7. Do we continue this way, now that not one of the working conditions is reached? 8. Haben wir es nicht gewusst ??? [Did we not know it?] [MSF Belgium Coordinator in

Rwanda, 'Summary of incidents with RPF,' MSF internal report, 9 July 1994 (in English)]

What motivated me to draft this report, was writing on the Mulindi meeting, preparing for Brussels the motivations for Eric Goemaere to come and support me. That's how I explained that things were not all right, making reference to the criticism in the report of the Mulindi things or the mistakes, the deliberate hate campaign against certain organisations, and the false figures that were in there. That's why I wrote that thing, to create an atmosphere within MSF that I, as a general coordinator, could not bare the responsibility for human rights violations which were happening under our flag and our cover because RPF was saying in Brussels: "MSF is there, so what are you talking about?" Human rights were violated, these people were deported and I was seeing them but and when I reported it, the desk was saying: The only thing that matters is to continue the program. [MSF Belgium coordinator for Byumba and Bugesera (Rwanda), from May to September 1994 (in English)]

This sharing of the sensemaking made in the field was motivated by the individual's moral sense. Nonetheless, when the alert is sent out from the field (how the context is experienced and interpreted in the field), the headquarters do not always decide to act on it. Here, following a lively internal debate, the decision was taken to do nothing and not speak out. This decision goes in direct contradiction with the organizational internalized practice of collecting testimonies to speak out. This may be due to the credibility issue of the MSF-B coordinator who wrote the report and/or the will to keep operations running in the field at all costs.

For me it is totally unclear. I understood that it was broadly discussed in Brussels, that there was a big polemic around the text I wrote which, of course, I didn't know at the time. Some of the things were facts like Dr Canissius being killed. But one of the general sentiments about this document was that 'the guy is overworked, he is not seeing things clearly and he has to be replaced as soon as possible, then we will have a good mission.' So when Eric Goemaere came he said: "that's the impression Brussels gave me. Yet I am seeing you and I am checking what you have written, I am checking what you have said and it's my opinion you are right." And after that nothing happened. I closed my mission and I went back home. [MSF Belgium coordinator for Byumba and Bugesera (Rwanda), from May to September 1994.]

I never saw that report… I had fallen out with MSF at the time [Pierre left MSF a few months later] [...] I just read a few paragraphs and not one jogs my memory. I have seen scores of reports. But I would remember that one if I had seen it… It's too bad that I never saw it, and it is strange that [the coordinator] never told me about it. There probably aren't too many people who have seen it… I do remember that [The coordinator] was a great guy, but he had some credibility problems… I can picture the scene: [the coordinator] arriving with the report and six other guys from headquarters saying, "he's nice but he gets on our nerves, he needs a rest." At MSF back then that's the end of the report. That's how things were. It might have happened like that... I really can't express an opinion on the context of the report because, out of context, it really doesn't mean all that much. […] I see here [reading from the report] that [The coordinator] is outraged because people went to the hospital with weapons. If I look back at the situation, even today, I say that's ridiculous. What's the problem? A hospital is no place for weapons, we all agree on that. But that's a rule you make when you can. It takes time... He uses the term "Khmer Rouge." That is a fear I shared, I already told you. But it was never confirmed, because I don't know of any other mass displacement inside a country after that. It wasn't institutionalized. […] It was just so incredible. There were piles of bodies! We didn't even stop if there was a body by the roadside. The RPF discovered the bodies when we did. The difference is that it was their families, and they were armed. If I were to exaggerate, I would say that they even showed some restraint! However, they did commit some atrocities. During the genocide, the Butare hospital was emptied of its patients, who were all killed. Then the RPF came and put two supposed culprits up against the wall. Executing them was an atrocity, too. Obviously, that's unforgivable, intolerable, but it was a particular situation. [Dr. Pierre Harzé, Director of communications, MSF Belgium until November 1994 (in French).]

Although the organization dismissed the member's sensemaking at the time, it later became clear that the moral dilemma it highlighted was still present. The organization eventually had to face it, as well as its choice to remain silent about it.

Brigitte: We have to understand what is going on if we are to be able to take action. It was important for MSF to stay in Rwanda in case the rumours turned out to be justified. Now we know the facts. The issue is to figure out how we can stop these things from happening or speak out about what we know. Jean-Hervé added that we knew the situation would be complicated. Thanks to Amnesty's and Africa Watch reports, we

can't talk about rumours anymore – these are facts. If we hesitate to talk about RPF abuses, that will damage our credibility and weaken our work.

Philippe: Whether we like it or not, we're not neutral on Rwanda. We're lending weight to the current government. The government is manipulating us on the refugee return issue and to lend it credibility. We're silent about the massacres — we've taken a wait-and-see position — because we're trapped in the 'genocide framework'. If we want the teams to keep their ears and eyes open, we've got to say clearly:

- That genocide doesn't allow you to do whatever you want and it must not force us to swallow lies we don't have to swallow…

- Which networks to use when you have information. In this setting, taking positions in the media is dicey. It's not easy to explain things to the public and given the short timeframe, we won't be able to mobilise people again. [Extract of Minutes of the MSF France Board meeting, 28 October 1994 (in French).]

5.3.2.3 Vignette 1.3. (CASE 3)

This vignette shows that (first-order) sensemaking can also fail when field workers commit to internalized practices until (second-order) sensemaking is delivered by experts at headquarters who visit the field to share their understanding.

In the two previous vignettes, we see that sensemaking under pressure starts in the field. However, it can also originate from headquarters. In this extreme case, the field workers started the refugee camp missions in what I would call an 'emergency mode' i.e., they were working in an all-hands-on deck situation, with such a large influx of refugees, trying to avoid the malnutrition and diseases common in refugee camps. They were trying to prevent a bad situation from the past without realizing that the context was not a typical emergency context but a context disrupted by the genocide in Rwanda which led to the exodus of not only innocent refugees but also of those who committed atrocities. This created new challenges beyond the necessary medical assistance.

The whole approach to the aid program in these camps was based on the bad experience that we had with the Burundian refugees the previous year both in Tanzania and Rwanda. The aid system did not function well - there were breaks in the food pipeline, which caused terrible malnutrition. Our entire operational approach from the outset aimed to maximise assistance to the Burundian and Rwandan refugees, a systematic

distribution to all children less than 5 years old to prevent malnutrition. In Benaco we were reacting to the previous crisis …

I was already working for MSF in Tanzania when the refugees arrived in Benaco at the end of April 94. We got on a plane and went up there on the second day. We saw them arrive and we witnessed the entire set-up of the initial mission… It was the first time that I had ever seen such a large influx of refugees. I had never seen so many people, or such a big emergency. We just dived headfirst into it all. For sure, there were problems in Rwanda. I had understood the exodus, I could see that the refugees were organised, but I didn't realise that they were killers.

I shook hands with the mayor of Rusomo, a notorious killer, and with other people. Of course I could tell they were organised. It was obvious. They grouped themselves in communes. In a camp of 150,000 people, the Tanzanian Red Cross and the Rwandan Red Cross food distribution took place without so much as a fight. A week and a half after their arrival, we put together a measles vaccination campaign with a coverage rate of 90%. The level of organisation and the amount of people mobilised was incredible. We had noticed the organisational structure of the camp, but I wasn't quite able to add up the facts. I was in daily radio contact with an officer from UNHCR, who was at the border and who kept saying, "They're there; they're going to bust through." We didn't quite understand what it was all about. We knew that the RPF was behind the refugees, so we thought the refugees were fleeing the army's advance and that they had been blocked at the border by the Tanzanians who wouldn't let them in. We didn't understand that it was their own army, the FAR, that was blocking the way, and who then finally let them through. In reality, it was an organised exodus…we knew about the genocide; we had read about it, been told about it, but it wasn't really clear. You almost have to witness those kinds of things to understand them. We were running a camp; there were 35 or 40 people in our team; it was crazy. We worked like maniacs; we were completely immersed in what we were doing. [Nicolas de Torrente, MSF France administrator in Tanzania, November 1993 to June 1994 then MSF France Coordinator in Rwanda, August 1994 to March 1995 (in French).]

The above quote shows that the focus for MSF field workers was the medical assistance and the medical needs in the field, not the assessment and proper understanding of the context. At first, field workers did not realize what was happening in the camps, despite the contextual clues of the political structure that ran the camps.

The movement had been well organised with lists, etc. The local leaders have total control of the population. For example, the NGOs asked that the population not drink the water from the lake because of the risk of infections, and within hours not a single person was going to the lake - this has never been seen before. The refugee camp has become a heaven for the FAR, shielded by the civilian population. [Extract from Minutes of the international meeting of Operations Directors, Paris, 15 June 1994.]

Action preceded sensemaking in the field because the context was assumed and not assessed. Sensemaking actually came from headquarters following the correct understanding of the genocide that was taking place in Rwanda. The position of headquarters is central to receive information from the different operations and sensemaking in the field. This provides key elements to be able to make sense of the context well. Here, the chronologies of Cases 1 and 3 overlap. The sensemaking in the field in Rwanda (Case 1) influenced sensemaking at headquarters which then led to the reinterpretation of contextual clues in other countries at the time, here in Tanzania (Case 3).

It wasn't until Bernard Pécoul [MSF France General Director] came in early June and started explaining to us, point by point, what had happened in Rwanda, that the link between the exodus and the genocide became clear. That's when we started to understand the genocide, who had committed it, the strategy they had used and so on. We put together what had happened in the camps and what had happened in Rwanda. [Nicolas de Torrente, MSF France administrator in Tanzania, November 1993 to June 1994 then MSF France Coordinator in Rwanda, August 1994 to March 1995 (in French).]

Sending a headquarters strategist to the field was a necessary step to give sense to the context, help field workers interpret contextual clues accurately, begin to understand the problems this created and to respond to the complex context in which operations were taking place.

Emergency Coordinator Maï Saran went into the field himself and clearly told us on the phone, "These people were victims of violence before coming here? I find that hard to believe! They all have the same tale; it's a completely stereotypical story. They look pretty healthy, they have all of their belongings with them, and when you ask them about the massacres they witnessed, it's always 'a friend of a friend of a friend' who saw it."

Maï was very sceptical and his opinion carried a lot of weight. Thierry Fournier and several other headquarters staff were also over there during the initial phase. They were more removed from it than the field workers. A debate started among us, which seems normal to me. [Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Programme Manager (in French).]

However, even after headquarters started the discussion about this potential big issue, the focus remained in the field on the mission, especially later with outbreaks of dysentery and cholera. We see here a prioritization in the action of medical assistance in the field again, despite the understanding of the context. The realization and proper consideration of the moral dilemma to run operations in this context came after.

Benaco was a huge responsibility. The people there were definitely at risk of becoming very ill. The refugees were fine in the beginning, but things went downhill around August. The dysentery and cholera epidemics didn't happen right away. The volunteers were very concerned, because they were familiar with the poor state of the Burundian refugees in Tanzania, Rwanda and Zaïre. We were afraid of a health disaster in the camps. When the camps were first set up, all of the team's energy was focused on that issue. A few weeks later, when we told them to look around and realise that it wasn't going to be a simple rescue operation and that the power structure in the camps was going to cause us a lot of problems, the volunteers were still focused on trying to save people, trying to protect them, and so forth. They couldn't really handle that kind of discussion. [Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Programme Manager (in French).]

5.3.2.4 Vignette 1.4. (CASE 4)

This vignette shows that failure of (second-order) sensemaking at headquarters can also happen by ignoring a field worker's (first-order) sensemaking of the extreme context and moral dilemma for lack of proof.

Another example of the complex sensemaking under pressure happens in Case 4. In this extreme context, MSF is trying desperately to provide the needed medical assistance to the Rwandan refugees in Zaire-Congo in 1996-1997. What began as a rumour became increasingly evident to some field workers, but without tangible evidence.

I suggested three or four times that we leave and close the mission. I remember talking to Lex (Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director) in Kigali around Christmas. I presented my arguments. My information on the massacres around Chimanga, statements from the people who'd escaped, the fact that we'd been used as bait… I have a very clear recollection of their questions and their thoughts. "Did you hear the killers? Are you sure this was a massacre? You had stories from villagers saying they arrived two days later and killed people but you don't have any eyewitness statements." After the problem with the figures, they were very, very cautious. Things were completely paralyzed!" [Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency intersections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).]

However, it later emerged that this sensemaking was correct and that MSF had been used as a decoy to lure the refugees out of hiding. This had terrible consequences because by trying to help the refugees, MSF was actually showing the ADFL where they were and massacres were committed right after the organization left.

Along with UNHCR and ICRC, we reached the conclusion that we'd obviously been used as bait. On 1 December, during a meeting of MSF, ICRC and UNHCR, the ICRC representative said, "It's not ICRC's tradition, but if we are going to continue working together … we can't treat refugees and later learn from villagers that they were shot after we'd left. There are problems here. We've got to do something." The UNHCR delegate was an Italian, very technically minded, but had sent fairly strong reports to Geneva. The Banyamulenge authorities found out about them. We said to ourselves, "Maybe we (UNCHR, MSF and ICRC) should withdraw and announce to the world that this is not acceptable. They're killing people five kilometres away from our base and we can't do anything about it."
Just as we were making that decision, in the middle of our meeting, the Alliance liaison officers opened the meeting room door and said, "You want refugees? There are 5,000 on the road! Get to work!" On a micro level, what happened to us in Bukavu was identical to the massive return of refugees driven from Goma to Gisenyi that took place on the day that the threat of military intervention was announced. In our discussions with the authorities, it seemed clear that they were increasingly uncomfortable about the killings. They knew that we were preparing to react and take a position against them. So they opened the floodgates and shoved 5,000 refugees in our direction as a bone to gnaw on. At that moment, we thought that these 5,000 were the first wave of 200,000

refugees whose whereabouts no one knew and for whom we had to prepare, and they had already left for Tingi Tingi …! We said, "We want to work," and that's what we did. We had still lots of problems, -- pressure for authorization for the trucks to circulate, but that changed our strategy entirely. It was only later, when things had calmed down a bit, that we began witnessing the same events. We said to ourselves, "we're in the same situation as two or three months ago. Why did we stop paying attention?" … I had on my conscience the fact that my actions and decisions had helped the AFDL group and the Rwandan army to kill 10,000 or 15,000 refugees. It's difficult to say that. We tried to set up our little clinic here, our little operation there, and that's exactly where they disappeared. Afterwards, when we thought about it, we realized that we had indeed been used as bait. We didn't even manage to reach and treat many of them because they always crossed very quickly into Rwanda. [Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency intersections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).]

This extreme case demonstrates the crucial importance of sensemaking in extreme contexts. Misinterpreting the context can place a responsibility on the organization and its members that can be difficult to recover from, both at the individual and organizational level.

5.3.3 Ethical decision-making in response to moral dilemmas

Following sensemaking under pressure comes the confrontation with a moral dilemma. A classic dilemma is a situation in which an important choice must be made between options that have (more or less) equally undesirable or desirable outcomes[6]. A moral dilemma is a situation in which an agent is condemned to fail morally because (s)he believes (s)he should act for moral reasons but is faced with several mutually exclusive actions. In other words, whatever the choice of action, not being able to do both (or more) actions means not doing something that the agent thinks (s)he ought to do, whether it is because of their moral point of view or because of the consequences of their choice: moral failure is inevitable (McConnell, 2022). Thus, moral dilemmas are about three things: agency, decision-making and moral standpoint. Faced with a moral dilemma, an agent makes a moral judgement and to do so, needs to doubt to respond to the dilemma because "doubt incorporates some of the most complex issues of the human mind, including sensing and understanding, and it may well be indispensable for our

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[6] According to the definition found on the Oxford English Dictionary (https://www.oed.com/dictionary/dilemma_n?tab=meaning_and_use)

moral decisions, for our moral development, perhaps the central component of the moral mind" (Dörfler & Cuthbert, 2024: 5592).

I argue that moral dilemmas for organizational members are also strategic dilemmas because agency, intentionality and consequentiality (even without knowing the exact consequences), three key constructs in strategy are inherent in moral dilemmas. In the four cases studied, I have identified moral dilemmas for the members of the organization MSF that can therefore also be characterized as strategic dilemmas. This is why I call them '*moral-strategic dilemmas*'. To respond to these dilemmas, I observed two key processes which are illustrated in the following vignettes: *creating new pathways* and *prioritizing practices*. This means that the course of action taken as a result of understanding a moral and strategic dilemma is the result of creativity and/or prioritization. When creativity emerged, we saw members of the organization trying new things and the organization embarking on unprecedented actions to find novel ways of responding to the situation. When prioritization took over, it came from the realization that the organization's guiding principles or practices were mutually exclusive or in total contradiction, and the choice was made to prioritize one over the others.

5.3.3.1   Vignette 2.1. (CASE 1)

This vignette shows that the organization may create unprecedented ways to change the extreme context for ethical reasons because depending on internalized practices would enact the extreme context in an unacceptable way for the organization.

Once the organization accepted the context for what it was – a genocide – (see Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1)) the disruption in the organization was total.

> *Publicly and internally MSF is in a mess and we need to clarify our position. [Extract from Letter from Philippe Biberson, President of MSF France, to Théogène Rudasingwa, Secretary-General of the RPF (in French).]*

Traumatic experiences, strong emotional reactions and loss of strategy became the new reality of the organization. Many members of the organization were traumatized by the extreme events they experienced or witnessed first-hand. When several members in an organization

experience such trauma, it also has strong impact on other organizational members who are exposed to "secondary traumatization" (Hällgren et al., 2018: 113), for instance at headquarters.

"I will never forget the moment when Reginald took the floor and couldn't string two words together. He started crying and said: "I can't... what I've seen is beyond telling. I have no activity report to give today". [MSF Speak Out Case 'Genocide of Rwandan Tutsi 1994' p.30]

Furthermore, there is no way to keep doing 'business as usual' or simply rely on the organization's internalized practices. The organization sets its priorities and finds new ways to maintain its activities. Here, we see how prioritization and creation go hand in hand. We first observe the prioritization of the organizational principle of providing medical assistance while ensuring the safety of staff. Maintaining activity in the field in this extreme context comes at a price. In this case, this priority led MSF to create a new way of being in the field by renouncing its principle of independence for the safety of its staff. Team security was more than ever a top priority for the organization. Of course, security is always important to an organization like MSF because of the risks inherent in emergency contexts. Field workers are aware of the risks they face when they go to the field in contexts that may be volatile or even at war. The organization always tries to mitigate these risks for field workers, especially for expatriates who do not fully understand the local context. However, the idea of ensuring staff safety takes on a whole new meaning in a disrupted context and when local staff members have been killed. More than 200 local MSF staff were killed during the genocide. So, the danger was very tangible and real. It was in fact the first time the organization had experienced such a loss of life. Some expatriates were evacuated, sometimes because of their nationality (for example, Belgians were targeted during this period and headquarters requested the immediate evacuation of all Belgian staff), other times because they wanted to (because they feared for their lives or were traumatized) and asked to leave this hellhole. However, at the organizational level, the same choice was not made. In fact, it can be argued that most of the actions taken in the months and years that followed were part of a 'stay at all costs' perspective, a 'savior attitude'. The principle of organization that emerged was that of medical assistance. It was preferred to one of the key principles of MSF: independence. When it proved impossible to maintain staff in the field and ensure security without sacrificing the organization's independence, it was abandoned. The moral-strategic dilemma led MSF to work, for the first time, under the banner of another organization, the ICRC. MSF's desire to remain in this extreme context was stronger, so the organization agreed to send field workers to the field, but they no longer represented MSF.

Potential for confusion: the work has to be done exclusively under cover of the ICRC. For reasons of safety - it is best not to mention MSF when speaking on the radio. [Extract from MSF Situation report - Rwanda n° 7, 14 April 1994 (in French).]

We knew that the ICRC was going in and that they needed surgeons. Fairly quickly we offered to go with them. They accepted, but they asked us to be identified as ICRC people, without the MSF logo. [Dr. Marc Gastellu, Deputy Director of Operations, MSF France (in French).]

This posed a serious problem for one of the critical organization's internalized practices of speaking out because losing independence meant agreeing to remain silent. This strategic choice hampered MSF's possible strategies and restricted its scope of action.

We had placed our teams under the banner of the ICRC and we had forbidden ourselves to speak, of course. We weren't allowed to. That was the agreement that had been struck with the ICRC. It was for Philippe Gaillard of ICRC to speak about the situation. No one else spoke… What's more he gave a very good account of what was going on. There was no MSF statement as such, but in any case I always thought that if we could have spoken on behalf of MSF, we couldn't have put it any better than he did… So either due to the gravity of the situation or because of our cowardice, we accepted that Philippe Gaillard would speak and that we would not. And then at a certain point, when Jean-Hervé was over there, we started to think, "What are we doing? [Jean-François Alesandrini, Director of Communication Department, MSF France (in French).]

Other unprecedented actions were taken in that context. The most notable one – the call for military intervention in Rwanda – was taken a couple of months later. For the first time in its history, MSF, a peaceful organization with one of its principles being neutrality (for instance meaning that they treat opposite sides of war indifferently) called for armed intervention. This raised several questions for the organization as for the first time, a peaceful organization was calling for an armed response. This showed that priority was given to changing the context and not to internalized practices or norms of the organization. Indeed, it was an entirely new strategic action to call for military intervention. In this extreme context, this revealed the creative use of MSF's practice to speak out; this time not only to denounce or critically explain what has been seen and experienced in the field, but to ask others (whether governments or

other organizations such as the UN) to act in a specific and new way, in this case to send military to stop the genocide.

We said: "Even if it means supping with the devil, MSF is calling for armed intervention. [...]" [Dr. Philippe Biberson, President, MSF France from May 1994 (in French).]

This issue had been hotly debated and opposing views had clashed. The organization was used to debating and discussing until consensus was found to make big strategic decisions. However, such extreme contexts reveal that unanimity can rarely be found and the strategic course is imposed by some to others.

There was no unanimity at MSF France. There could be no unanimity. It was a real dilemma. The discussion was introduced with a paper from François Jean. After debating it, we decided to speak out in public. It was the French section of MSF that decided to launch this Appeal. There was no unanimity. The arguments against the Appeal tended to be of the type: "we are a humanitarian organisation. It is unnatural for a humanitarian organisation to call for armed action, to incite others to kill people." That is how I interpreted the arguments of those who were against the Appeal. [Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF France (in French).]

Despite the moral dilemma of being a peaceful organization calling for an armed response, which ultimately means the loss of life, it became clear that the situation was not one of war where MSF would have chosen a side (which contradicts its principle of neutrality). In fact, what fueled this strategic course was the fact that in case of genocide, according to the organization's ethical model, the right thing to do is to stop it, despite the resulting loss of life. It was the moral emotions of the individuals and their engaging in reflexive practices that made them choose this action and defend it at the organizational level. The disrupted context required creativity to change the context into one in which the organization could operate, transforming the disrupted context into one of emergency.

It was important for us not to be used as an alibi again. We started to discuss it. "Is this reasonable behaviour? If not, then we have to suggest another way. And faced with genocide, that means using force to stop those responsible." …Our message was clear here: you can't stop genocide with doctors and a few biscuits. The states involved in this situation can't be allowed to pretend that the problem has been dealt with because

aid agencies have been sent to the refugee camps in Tanzania, or because ICRC and MSF teams were present in Rwanda. This was a different type of problem calling for a different response. This was our main concern; other concerns were secondary. But it was such a big concern that it overcame the resistance of those amongst us who said: "An aid agency shouldn't be calling for violent action". Besides, what we were really saying was "It's not war that we should be calling for, but a police operation. These people are outlaws under the terms of international conventions". Françoise got out the 1948 Convention and quoted the passage requiring the States to intervene. What we were saying was: "Stop them… implement the Conventions that you have signed up to, and don't try to persuade us that we'll be doing humanitarian work. [Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF France (in French).]

After rediscussing the call in MSF-France headquarters, the organization accepted that this strategic choice was in fact not in contradiction with its identity because armed intervention was the only possible response faced with genocide. MSF-France took the initiative, and other sections eventually did not oppose the call.

And faced with genocide, that means using force to stop those responsible." …Our message was clear here: you can't stop genocide with doctors and a few biscuits. The states involved in this situation can't be allowed to pretend that the problem has been dealt with because aid agencies have been sent to the refugee camps in Tanzania, or because ICRC and MSF teams were present in Rwanda. This was a different type of problem calling for a different response. This was our main concern; other concerns were secondary. But it was such a big concern that it overcame the resistance of those amongst us who said: "An aid agency shouldn't be calling for violent action". [Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF France (in French).]

The decision to launch this creative action can also indicate a strong reaction due to the failed sensemaking at the beginning of the genocide, the strong criticism made by organizational members towards their organization and the high level of extremity of this context (e.g., high consequences for the organization). Some organizational members took it very personally to 'fix the problem' and felt somehow responsible to enact change in the extreme context.

We were in the context of genocide where an army was using its weapons to exterminate a section of the civilian population. In military terms, this was not a complicated intervention, since it was not a question of stepping in between two armies, but of preventing an army from murdering civilians. Military intervention is complicated when there are several enemies. The use of force posed no great dilemma. As a humanitarian worker, the fact that humanitarian agencies call for armed intervention poses no great problem for me, because when faced with genocide, there is no alternative. There can be no humanitarian position towards genocide. What could such a position be? We could have decided to weep and instead of knitting mittens or sending sacks of rice we could have knocked up a few coffins and sent them to Rwanda. We could have followed up the 'sack of rice for Somalia' operation with a 'coffin for Rwanda' operation in every school! Every child could have made a little coffin and sent it!

Moreover, the moral problem of military intervention to put a stop to genocide is clearly defined by international law, which includes an international obligation for armed intervention. To call for armed intervention to deal with genocide is not anti-humanitarian. We wondered about it at MSF, of course, but we decided that it was not a problem. [Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor (in French).]

Also, for the first time, MSF used funds to pay for an article printed in the French newspaper *Le Monde*. The reasoning behind this new action was to control the printed message that advocated for the French government to take responsibility and act. Although the amount of money spent is anecdotal, this is not normally part of the way MSF, which receives its funding from donors, is spent.

It was a bit scary because Jean-Hervé and I went out on a limb a bit there. Not everyone at MSF agreed on the open letter. The pros and cons of spending 70,000 francs [around 10,000 euros] on a page in Le Monde were discussed. The fundraising director said, "You can't just spend money like that. What will our donors say?" The idea was to look ahead and start to formulate what we would say a month later: "You don't treat a genocide with doctors; you don't respond to a humanitarian crisis with a stethoscope." Even without mentioning genocide, there was a political problem. In the interview with Poivre d'Arvor, Jean-Hervé said more directly what we were spelling out in Le Monde. It is not easy for a humanitarian organisation. We drew attention to the responsibility of the President of the Republic and of the government. "What are the Balladur government and the President of the Republic – supposedly committed to human rights

- doing about this situation? "When we got back to MSF after the interview, towards 08:30 – 09:00, Jean-Hervé and I had a whisky and said, "Oh la la, we've really rocked the boat on this one!" [Jean-François Alesandrini, Director of Communication Department, MSF France (in French)].

Furthermore, the unprecedented action of calling for armed intervention in the international scene posed certain security risks on the ground. While the security of the staff in the field was already compromised in a context of genocide, some actions launched at headquarters make organizational members in the field a direct target. For instance, this happened after the French troops came in the field. French organizational members were particularly at risk.

They targeted us. They said I was the number one on their hit list, that I was mis-communicating the Rwandan truth to the rest of the world. There was a lot of pressure, very personalised intimidation, very subtle things, lots of very little clues that you are very vulnerable… They knew that they could only give me a hint that they were aware of what I was saying and then I would know that I was in danger. So they would say: "You should realize that Byumba is one hundred thousand metres above sea-level and if your breaks fail while driving down the road, you could have a very terrible accident." My car was parked outside. Anybody could tamper with the car and nobody would find out. Then they replaced the administrator in the office. The next thing I found out is that my files with this kind of report were being read, in English. So they knew what I was thinking of the RPF. So I thought: it's better to burn it. The next morning I walked out in the garden and made a pile of paper. Fourteen, fifteen people came around: "Oh, he is burning something, he has something to hide." I got questions: "Burning things and bla bla bla!". And Dr Canisius had been executed. He was critical of the way the RPF was treating the relief in general. He wanted to facilitate, to have more liberty to help organisations to set up medical aid relief program. [[…] MSF Belgium Coordinator in Rwanda, May to September 1994.]

After the deployment of French troops in Rwanda, the atmosphere in RPF territory changed dramatically. The RPF prepared their defence lines and moved large numbers of people. The attitude towards NGOs became more aggressive suspicious and the cooperation diminished day by day. Passports were checked. In the search for French nationals, and people were intimidated. I sent a French logistician back to Bujumbura

upon arrival in Ruhango and another was sent to Kampala, exchanged for a Belgian national. Both evacuations were for security reasons. [Extract from Situation Report - Rwanda n° 4, MSF Belgium, 7 July 1994]

In this case, a second moral-strategic dilemma quickly emerged. Among the Rwandan refugees, innocents and killers lived side by side. Wanting to provide aid to refugees knowing full well that many of them had just participated in genocide posed a moral dilemma for the field and the organization. It was not clear how to proceed.

How should we rethink our position and the way we intervene? We are faced with a dilemma: Rwanda has enormous needs; can we abstain, or fail to help the displaced because many of them have blood on their hands? ... between the two extremes of abstention and unqualified intervention, what procedures and safeguards are needed to avoid mistakes? ...given that this is genocide, we can't just say it's 'business as usual'. ['Genocide in Rwanda – how should we act?', François Jean, Researcher, MSF France Foundation, June 1994 (in French)

This moral-strategic dilemma became extremely important to the organization and its strategizing in Case 3, which focuses on MSF's work with Rwandan refugees in Tanzania and Zaire (see Vignette 2.3.). The link between Case 1 and Case 3 in terms of historical context and strategy is clearly established through these types of dilemmas and the resulting decisions and actions.

5.3.3.2 Vignette 2.2. (CASE 3)

This vignette shows the division on prioritization for ethical reasons at the organizational level (section vs section) and at the at the individual level (field vs headquarters).

In the previous vignette, the disagreements and debates over the strategic course of the organization ends up being resolved because the moral sense of individuals and the organizational ethical model align. However, in extreme contexts, this is not always the case. Another important disagreement over strategy faced with a moral dilemma happened in Case 3.

In this case again, from sensemaking under pressure appeared a moral-strategic dilemma. This dilemma brought several issues for the organization and its members. Operating in refugee camps run by genocidaires posed several major problems for MSF. First, aid was diverted. By increasing the number of refugees supposedly living in the refugee camps and taking over distribution within the camps, the burgomasters (those who run the camps) had complete control over the goods delivered and kept some of the aid for resale in nearby communes.

No census had been conducted. Huge quantities of food were distributed which the leaders resold. The same trucks that brought food in went back out again full. I saw them in the market of Mwanza, the neighbouring town. This wasn't resale on a small scale, but huge quantities of food by the sack-full. [Nicolas de Torrente, MSF France administrator in Tanzania, November 1993 to June 1994 then MSF France Coordinator in Rwanda, August 1994 to March 1995 (in French).]

In this way, MSF was directly involved in the rehabilitation of genocidaires. For example, the money collected from the resale of goods delivered by MSF to the refugee camps was then used to buy weapons.

Second, because of this power in the camps, there was a lot of violence and it was a dangerous environment for MSF field workers who had to take safety measures such as leaving the camp quickly at night. They often found bodies when they came back in the morning and some even witnessed killings.

We had problems with our staff who were obliged to flee during the night. During the first few months, refugees were killed and horrible exactions occurred. We found bodies in the latrines… At the end of two months, there were no longer any Tutsi left in the camp. The survivors had fled; they returned to Rwanda or they were massacred. [Extract from Wouter Kok, MSF Holland Coordinator in Tanzania, July 1994 to March 1995.]

Third, an important propaganda was happening in the camps, as one incident with an MSF expatriate demonstrated.

The MSF Spain local logistics staff was dangerous; they converted a Spanish expatriate to the Hutu cause. He had started to mix more and more with them and attended

meetings in the camp. He was the logistician in charge of security and would say that he was looking for information sources. Little by little he was brainwashed until he was completely drawn into their story, claiming, "they've been oppressed, it's historical revenge." We made him leave. He was verbally violent upon departing, threatening to kill the other expats. I don't think he was right in the head. [José-Antonio Bastos, MSF Spain Coordinator in Tanzania, July 1994 to July 1995 (in French).]

These issues have a direct impact on the organization's strategizing. Staying and continuing operations 'normally' in this particular context can be interpreted as allowing the genocidaires to remain protected and gain strength behind the shield of real Rwandan refugees. In this extreme context, strategy as purposive practical coping was stretched to its limit. The commitment to the wrong framing at the outset (see Vignette 1.2.), which led to what can be described as an 'act first, think later' strategy in the field, posed a significant moral-strategic dilemma. Once operations are underway and field workers are aware of the needs in the camps, there is no simple answer to the moral dilemma. This dilemma becomes a moral dilemma and depending on each individual's sense of morality and the organization's ethical model, some consider it acceptable to continue working under these complex conditions and others consider it unacceptable.

It has also become clear that several mayors and other leaders within these communities organised the mass murders. And in the camps these leaders are reoccupying their old positions... This is even true within the health structures set up by MSF... I could no longer face this dilemma. It forced me to make a personal, clear choice. Upon my return from Tanzania, I rejected an invitation to go to Zaïre, where the same dilemma is occurring on an even larger scale. As a final consequence, I handed in my resignation as a member of the field emergency team... But especially in such a dilemma we, as an independent organisation, must make a choice. By withdrawing from the camps in Tanzania, we would no longer open ourselves to the risk of being used by criminal power structures, thus enforcing our advocacy activities. [Extract from Arjo Berkhout, 'Our aid is keeping criminal power structures intact', Ins and Outs, September 1994.]

Should we continue to give humanitarian aid to people, especially to the so-called leaders - who had planned such atrocities- and about whom it is said that while receiving the good care of the aid agencies they are preparing themselves for a return to Rwanda to continue their murderous practices? Moreover, UNHCR is employing

people selected by these 'leaders' to patrol the camp… Choosing to whom to give or not give aid would be impossible. We are not judges who have the evidence to decide who is guilty of such a crime. MSF's charter demands us to give humanitarian aid indiscriminately. We should continue our activities in the camp, but at the same time we should continue to press publicly for these perpetrators to be brought to justice and no impunity should be given to those suspected of having committed gross violations of human rights… MSF International has written several letters to UNHCR and the Security Council and issued a press statement calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. Wouter Van Empelen desk manager for Rwanda and Hanna Nolan, department of Humanitarian Affairs, also visited UNHCR in Geneva in person to make our position known once more. [Extract from Hanna Nolan, 'Presence of alleged perpetrators of genocide in the camp: explanation of MSF Holland position,' Memo from the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, MSF Holland to all MSF Holland staff working or having worked in Benaco camp, 18 July 1994.]

The field coordinator in Tanzania (i.e., the person in charge in the field), who was also a worker in the emergency cell, chose to leave both the field and the organization. The emergency cell was created to respond to extreme situations with experts - that is, members of the organization with sufficient relevant field experience to make strategic choices and lead in the field. The fact that an experienced field strategist chose to leave not only the field but also the organization after the organization had chosen a different path from the only morally acceptable one according to his moral sense shows that the individual's moral sense is sometimes irreconcilable with the organization's ethical model.

Arjo Berkhout, the coordinator in Tanzania, resigned, saying "I am stopping working for these people because I cannot take any further responsibility for this project". [Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director.]

The organization did not dismiss the arguments of the organizational member and considered the alternative of leaving the refugee camps.

"I asked him to come to the office and organised a debate. That was even before the first report. Arjo was already thinking about the limits of humanitarian action in such a situation, about our responsibilities etc. He contributed to the internal discussion." [Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director.]

Yet, faced with this moral-strategic dilemma, following critical reflexivity, it was decided to stay and create new actions to change the context instead, similarly to the strategic course in case 1 (See Vignette 2.1.). Here, to improve the situation in the refugee camps, the organization speaks out about the issues described above and attempts unprecedented actions in the field in collaboration with other organizations. For instance, field workers strike in the field. One does not expect a strike from NGOs in refugee camps. This unprecedented action was a creative attempt to better the situation without having the leave the field.

> *Last Friday, MSF asked for a one-week reflection period in order to consider our position. MSF expatriate staff remained on standby. We are very concerned that UNHCR did not appreciate the reasons behind this difficult decision. The security situation and the presence of alleged war criminals in the Benaco camp remain of critical concern to us. The presence of alleged war criminals has contributed to the rise of tension among the refugee populations in Benaco and has created serious conditions of insecurity. […] Furthermore, persons who have committed war crimes cannot be considered refugees under the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees. In this light, MSF shall assess the security situation during the coming two days. MSF will also monitor and follow up on actions taken towards alleged instigators of war crimes committed in Rwanda. Pending the outcome of these assessments, we shall decide at the end of this week whether or not we shall reassume our duties. [Extract from Draft of MSF Holland letter to UNHCR Geneva, 21 June 1994.]*

Nonetheless, despite some improvement, this creative action did not change the context and resolve the moral-strategic dilemma for the organization. Moreover, it reduced the scope of actions of the organization.

> *After a week of arm-wrestling with UNHCR, all MSF sections rejoined the other agencies that had resumed their activities after only two days of stoppage. In the months that followed, this conditional aid strategy would, in a sense, trap MSF France because its only real means of pressure was the threat of withdrawal, pure and simple. Relations between MSF and UNHCR were tense, and this was a difficult weapon to wield because the situation was becoming increasingly complex. In fact, the situation in the camps improved partially and gradually, but without changing the fundamental context. [Extract from Nicolas de Torrente, 'MSF Activity in the Rwandan Crisis: A Critical History', July 1995, p. 40 (in French).]*

Strategic attempts to change the context only postponed the actual confrontation with this extreme context. Later on, the debate about withdrawing from the refugee camps actually took place. The organization was forced to redefine its priorities. The appropriate strategic approach was discussed at the international level.

For NGOs, particularly MSF, the instrumentalisation of aid by the leaders raises the question of manipulation…

What role for MSF?… MSF's possible departure from all the camps was the subject of many conversations. What emerged from the discussion was that no one expects to leave the camps suddenly tomorrow, and that opinions on the issue vary across sections and individuals. However, the discussion did result in consensus on the need to present MSF's possible departure as a final action.

What Should Our Strategy Be? MSF was not slow to denounce the genocide and those responsible for it. However, the international community will gradually forget (if not intentionally neglect) the genocide, and the génocidaires will manipulate the aid. We're also faced with a refugee population held hostage and the unease, clearly and justly articulated, of many in MSF. So we need a breakaway strategy. This is not just about refining our analyses or strengthening our critique. We have to find approaches and a new process. The following strategy was adopted in that spirit:

a) faced with the impunity of those responsible for genocide, we must: denounce the international community's failure to respond appropriately (desire/will to judge those guilty) – denounce the farce of the human rights delegates in Rwanda – develop a pressure campaign targeting UN member states and agencies – support the human rights organisations – push the press to investigate what is happening in the camps – alert and mobilise political leaders.

b) faced with aid diversion, we must: demand that censuses be conducted; carry out food basket monitoring; put pressure on those NGOs (Caritas) that participate in the diversion (as in Tanzania); improve targeting of our activities to vulnerable groups; reduce the currently excessive level of assistance in some camps; conduct a public information campaign.

c) faced with security problems, we must: urge UNHCR to assume its full responsibilities; urge the UN system and member states to react to this problem (security forces); pressure put on the governments of Zaïre, Tanzania, Burundi.

These actions should be taken both in the field and at headquarters." [Extract from 'Summary report on the International Council's Visit to the Rwandan Refugee Camps,' 17 October 1994 (in French).]

However, more than a month later, the approach had failed to resolve the moral-strategic dilemma, so MSF France decided it was time to leave the camps.

Context: MSF is leaving all the Rwandan camps (at the Zaïrean and Tanzanian borders). It's a question of principle, ethics and morals(!). After fattening up the leaders and participating, de facto, in the failure to punish those who perpetrated genocide, humanitarian aid cannot be complicit in a second genocide. We are leaving to pressure the international community (UN, UNHCR, governments - especially the French - and Europe) and to advocate our position.

Communications/Context: The idea that the leaders control the camps has appeared in the press and elsewhere. But there are obstacles: The current context has 'cooled-off' (unlike the emergency situation around Rwanda/Goma, when we didn't have time to take stock of what was happening). Some politicians have also intentionally confused things (Mitterrand is talking about two genocides!). There's also a recurring notion that this has to do with 'black savagery' (certain killings committed by the RPF(!) are contributing to this impression). All this means that it will be more difficult to get MSF's message across. Second obstacle: the victims ('you're abandoning people who need medical help!')

Final obstacle: giving the impression that we're not thinking straight and are blind to what's happening inside Rwanda. All this requires us to:

- Make choices (about our communications) because it's difficult to try to say everything at the same time.

- Be very clear about our departure (including internal differences within MSF).

- Make specific demands: census, expulsion of leaders, refugee security, aid to Rwanda to guarantee repatriation, with observers, international tribunal, etc.

Message: MSF is leaving all the camps in Zaïre and Tanzania for reasons of principle. Medical needs are no longer what they were, etc.

COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR 1 DECEMBER – 25 JANUARY (POPULATIONS IN DANGER DAY)

Communication actions must alternate among substantive issues (discussion of ideas), factual information (departure from Benaco, report), media actions (to be defined) and

lobbying. We must carry out our actions in France and elsewhere (Nairobi, New York, Brussels, Tokyo, Sydney and London)

In France

Our message did, in part, get out during the departure from Bukavu and in various speeches (Rony, Alain, Dominique). It's hard to get it out faster without major events in the camps or in Rwanda.

Regarding the lobbying and media plan:

Look for external support on the issue to show that MSF is not isolated. Furthermore, why not contact other French NGOs to make them aware (even convince them) of our approach? Recontact the politicians. To be defined. We can't go see them anymore just for informational purposes. We have to demand something. [Extract from 'The Massoud Strategy, or How to Leave While Getting People to Pay Attention to Your Ideas,' Strategy paper by the MSF France communications director, 29 November 1994 (in French).]

Once it appeared clear at the organizational level for one section – MSF France – that leaving was the right strategic move and priority had to be given to the organizational ethical model over the medical assistance mandate of the organization, a strategic course was formulated then implemented.

The dilemma is not so much whether to remain or to leave but how to leave in the most effective way possible, limiting the 'hostage' effect on the refugees and maximising the chances of being heard. Towards that end, we are undertaking a major consultative project with other NGOs, representatives of international organisations and their donors, as well as with governments. This departure is not an end in itself. It is an extreme position intended as much to safeguard our principles of action as to provoke a reaction. It is always possible to work to change aid conditions in the camps. MSF supports UNHCR's initiatives toward that end. Even so, however clear and virtuous the initiatives may be, we do not have to support them if the means to carry them out are lacking. It's not a matter of gaining publicity or wanting to teach a lesson. Rather, the issue is making a statement: humanitarian aid is maintaining segregation camps where purges are taking place, forced recruitment is carried out, an entire society is becoming increasingly dependent, and fear and hatred of the 'other' are nurtured. [Extract from 'Philippe Biberson, 'The Camps of Hate', Messages, MSF France Internal publication, November 1994 (in French).]

We had to leave the Zaïrean and Tanzanian camps because humanitarian aid is helping to restore those who perpetrated genocide and because the refugees' dignity and safety are not guaranteed.

What is the responsibility of the NGOs?

Non-governmental organisations like MSF do not have an international mandate. Their only obligation is to honour their founding principles: a certain notion of what it means to be human, which is certainly not the one prevailing in the Rwandan refugee camps. In the face of a situation in which women and men are manipulated by an authority capable of genocide - the worst crime against humanity - the primary responsibility of a humanitarian organisation is to refuse to support such authority in any way. At the very least, such an organisation must not participate in the evil! [Extract of 'Why We are Leaving the Rwandan Refugee Camps,' materials written for donors, MSF France, December 1994 (in French).]

Five months later, the French section of Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) denounces the génocidaires' hold on the refugee camps, and has decided to leave the camps. This choice, an isolated one for now, raises the question of the goals of humanitarian action. Can we refuse to aid a population in distress in the name of moral principles? [Extract from Dominique Martin, 'Rwanda: Aid Corrupted,' Le Figaro (France), 2 December 1994 (in French).]

Nevertheless, although they agreed with the moral dilemma present in the context of the camps, the ethical model and strategic line of MSF Belgium or MSF Holland were not the same as those of MSF France. For instance, MSF Belgium chose to continue the work but to limit it, to try to solve the issues, and to reduce salaries in the field. The culture and history of the sections (or operational centers), although grouped under the same banner, the same name and the same organization, are different.

As long as the threshold is not crossed, they remain in the field. What if working in the camps means that we are the génocidaires' accomplices? That is a dilemma. We had to respond to that deadlock. We had to respond to that dilemma … To respond to the dilemma we faced in Goma (stay and risk becoming complicit versus leave and risk abandoning our medical mandate and vulnerable populations held hostage), we had to do more. We had to be advocates, of course, but we also had to be active in the field, fight aid diversion, the leaders' grip over the camp and their propaganda, and become

involved in protecting refugees. Above all else, we had to take an activist role with respect to the international community by denouncing the political status quo and UNHCR's evasiveness.

Conditional Presence for MSF

So are we complicit? My answer is a definite 'no.' Collaborating with key NGOs, MSF has room to manoeuvre to influence the situation. We've got to follow through with all our operational resources.

However, the day that space disappears (problems of insecurity, lack of real impact), then the conditions for our presence in Goma will no longer be met and then we will have to withdraw. Our activities will be taken up by other, purely charitable organisations that are not involved in human rights. MSF will be able to redirect its resources towards Rwanda and other populations in danger. I would like to clarify further that the position of humanitarian resistance is an initiative promoted from the field. The teams have discussed it very openly and often. We have not reached unanimity but there is a solid consensus and headquarters has given its complete support. In the meantime, the Goma field teams are laying-off staff, closing programs, restructuring, and exposing themselves daily to resentment from employees and the population. They need a lot of courage, moral strength and unwavering solidarity. And they need a strong sense of humour… Having shared so much with them over three months, I offer them a heartfelt salute and my respect. [Extract from 'Goma: Humanitarian Resistance or Withdrawal?' Editorial written by the MSF Belgium coordinator in Goma, 23 January 1995 (in French).]

Furthermore, the different strategies implemented by two operational centers of the same organization, although independent and free to do so, have an impact on the effectiveness of each strategic course and on the image of the organization as a whole in the eyes of stakeholders.

Discussion:

- The problem is not with MSFers. The people in the camps are being led by their own executioners. It's a question of human dignity (Marcel).

- Has MSF B set a deadline for leaving? And didn't MSF F's departure radicalise the position of the remaining organisations? Response: No, MSF F's departure had no effect, or maybe a marginal one. It was the diagnosis that got things moving.

- Philippe agrees that leaving is not the only option but wonders about the question of MSF's identity. In the camps, some organisations could not leave. MSF was, undoubtedly, the only one that could pursue that option profitably. It's too bad we didn't agree on that common identity because a joint departure would have had a much greater impact.

- Brigitte noted the different points of view and emphasised that there are many missions where people do not reach agreement. If we need to debate MSF's identify, we should do it from top to bottom in the organisation. When program managers say, 'I'm in operations, not policy,' that has got to be part of the discussion.

- We cannot hide the fact that it is not working. There is a crisis of confidence in relation to MSF Holland. We don't feel like we're on the same team and there are significant concerns (Renaud).

- Jean-François thinks that Jacques de Mililani is using his very seductive way of speaking to try to find consensus. But he doesn't seem to be doing the same thing as the MSF Holland communications staff. That's not to say the French are better, but there's no basis for a shared discussion. Getting back to Rwanda, let's say the leaders controlling the camps are going to attack Rwanda tomorrow. What would we do? What would we say? What kind of tremendous responsibility would we have? This isn't a minor difference. It affects humanitarian ethics and it's a very significant break.

- Jean-Luc would like MSF H to attend the board of directors' discussions more regularly. Two years ago, there was a split between MSF F and MSF H and it's possible that we'll end up separating. Maybe there is a basic difference in our nature and in the way we think… Could a discussion like the one we're having here tonight take place at MSF H? It's the organisational structure that's being questioned. Response: A foundation in Holland is different to one in France. For Eric, we've always been different and that's fine, but it seems there's a gulf between us that today has led to operational contradictions. We created the problem by failing to establish a bylaws provision that would allow the International office to handle this. The meetings were all very polite and everyone went back home with his or her own account of what happened… It was like watching the Soviet empire collapse. We're not listening to each other the way we used to, we don't respect each other anymore - and it's getting worse. Without taking a nostalgic, backwards-looking approach, we've got to find a way to mediate this. Either we succeed in managing the future or the structure explodes. We in Belgium are aware of the depth of the crisis. It can't be addressed with half measures.

A proposal was made to hold a board of directors meeting with MSF France and MSF Holland to address all these questions. [Extract from Minutes of the MSF France Board meeting, 16 December 1994 (in French).]

The fact that at a board meeting the strategists stated that without better strategizing in such extreme contexts in the future, the structure i.e., the organization itself, would explode, shows the destructive potential that poor strategizing in an extreme context can have in an organization.

In addition, the MSF Holland headquarters strategy was not well received by the field, which questioned where the internalized practice of advocacy (or speaking out) should take place. This questioning is usually the result of a lack of communication between headquarters and the field. However, this raises the more general question of where strategizing should be shaped in such extreme contexts. The field can question the legitimacy of strategic actions from headquarters when they are so far removed from the rapid and extreme changes in the context that require sensemaking under pressure and constant and immediate on-site adaptation.

On several occasions great concern was expressed once more about the communication process surrounding the report "Breaking the cycle". Team members were worried about not having been aware that Amsterdam was preparing a report, about their fears for the security of the team, which had not been taken seriously by Amsterdam, and about some of the recommendations, although the content of the report was not really the issue. Miscommunication between HQ and field was identified as one of the main causes of the above concerns. Advocacy should be done in the field. The field felt overruled in the final decision to publish despite their concerns and concluded that the project manager should have the final say in such matters.(...)
- There is improvement on a number of MSF indicators. Team wants to stop talking about withdrawal. This should be clearly discussed and established in a strategic meeting at HQ level. It is the team's view that lobbying should continue, but not with such public tools as the report "Breaking the Cycle". We should focus more on the situation in Rwanda.
- Field and HQ are on different tracks regarding advocacy. This needs to be resolved internally first in MSF-H before we can tackle it in inter-section context. There is an urgent need for discussion between field and HQ or else we risk that the gap will become wider and wider. We need to identify fora in which this can be discussed. (Emergency

teams weekly meeting on advocacy, coordinators days, invitation to participate in working groups at HQ and in field, discussion in 'In and Outs'). Especially the question of whether advocacy should be a separate core activity needs to be resolved.

- Also more emphasis on informing new volunteers about advocacy HEP/LTC and more attention to this topic by project managers. But even at the interview stage HRM should make time to talk for 10 minutes about the fact that when you join MSF you join not only a humanitarian relief organization but also an organization, which speaks out about the fate of the victims it works for. We should know more about the conditions inside Rwanda in terms of safety of returnees. As long as we do advocacy on the refugee camps we need to maintain the post of legal officer. I propose that the legal officer currently based in Goma continues her work until June and that she spends one month in Rwanda to make an assessment on whether a separate post is needed there. [Extract from "Report on my visit to Zaïre (Goma) and Rwanda (Kigali) - 3-11 January 1995" by Hanna Nolan, from MSF Holland Humanitarian Affair Department - 12 January 1995.]

MSF International launched the discussion again for the departure of MSF from the camps. Despite the way in which MSF France left the field – which was clearly unfair to the other sections – the moral dilemma was still present and the fact that the health situation of the vulnerable had improved demanded MSF sections to reconsider leaving.

Please find attached the very interesting report by Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium's coordinator in Goma. As I already told him, I find the conclusion completely contradicts the analysis made.

Almost seven months have passed (more in Benaco). We have long been aware of the dilemma caused by our presence in the camps. At the international meeting in Kigali, and in the discussions, which followed (see Dominique Martin's report [summary report] and pages 12-13 of 'Breaking the cycle' by MSF Holland), we considered leaving the camps without coming to any firm decision, with the following points in mind: [...]

1.Humanitarian needs

At the Kigali meeting in November, some people felt we should stay because malnutrition was still a problem and some groups remained in a vulnerable situation. Thanks to the international community's generosity, the refugees are now well fed and

are better off than the people in Rwanda and Zaïre (the rate of malnutrition in the camps is now 2%, whereas in Kinshasa city, the rate is 9%.

2.The fight against impunity

In the spirit of the Kigali meeting, this struggle requires a practical approach: identifying the main instigators and their leaving the camps. The international community has done nothing and an international Tribunal that exists only in theory will not change the situation in the camps in a practical manner.

3.The deployment of an international police force Boutros was clear when he said, 'there will not be an international police force'. The Zairian alternative is not a possibility, as it cannot break the leaders' control in the camps. I have often heard at MSF that 'our lobbying works' and that 'it was the best we have ever done', because Boutros finally gave in (after the Kigali meeting). But results alone are what count. There will not be an international force, and therefore there is no way of breaking the so-called authorities' control over the people.

4.Census taking

This last point is not the most important one because, as it was pointed out, the situation was similar in Benaco where the census was carried out. The census is finally being made in Goma, after six months during which 'the leaders' have been able to steal or sell whatever they wanted. Distribution is carried out in a more visible manner, but this changes nothing as it is still done through the authorities. Clearly the authorities have changed tactics but not strategy. Now that the individual declarations recognising the massacres have finished, the war effort has been hidden. To international organisations, we provide a suitable front. I feel this is mainly a public relations strategy, and has an air of déjà vu (don't you think, Eric?). We should be under no illusion about this.

Obviously MSF France has not played by the rules (six weeks of observation and lobbying) before deciding to leave. This is what some call 'French arrogance'. Meanwhile, MSF Spain is also leaving Benaco. Since then, I have seen no positive developments regarding the criteria we set ourselves. I also feel that the entire organisation should seriously reconsider leaving the refugee camps. [Extract from Message from Alain Destexhe, Secretary General of MSF International, to the presidents of the MSF sections, 1 February 1995 (in French).]

When MSF Belgium chose to leave one camp, it was not to make a stand regarding the moral dilemma but because the action taken in the field to resolve the dilemma did not work

and endangered the field workers. For safety reasons, it was decided to leave this particular camp.

> *Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium has decided to end its humanitarian aid activities on behalf of Rwandan refugees in Kibumba, north of Goma, in the next 48 hours. This decision was taken following the population census, a process marked by many overt incidents. UNHCR had assigned MSF Belgium to supervise the count in the Kibumba and Kahindo camps. It quickly became apparent that certain camp leaders were organising massive fraud, particularly via force and intimidation of refugees under their control. This fraud may have exaggerated population statistics considerably and resulted in diversion of humanitarian aid to the benefit of certain militia or political leaders. MSF asked that the count be interrupted so that security could be strengthened. The request was granted. Our teams then received threats to their safety. [Extract from 'Violence, Threats and Fraud During Rwandan Refugee Census: MSF Withdraws from the Kibumba Camp,' MSF Belgium Press release, 7 February 1995 (in French).]*

However, the different interpretations of how to act faced with the same moral dilemma brough tensions within the organization and incidents began to multiply. For instance, the Secretary General of MSF International announced the decision of MSF Belgium to leave the Kibumba camp as the withdrawal of the organization from all camps in Tanzania and Zaire without consulting the sections for approval.

> *How can physicians continue to assist Rwandan refugees when by doing so they are also supporting killers? This is the moral dilemma that has forced Médecins sans Frontières, or Doctors without Borders, to decide to withdraw from all camps in Zaïre and Tanzania, starting with yesterday's retreat from the one at Kibumba, Zaïre. [...] The camps have turned into prisons. The Hutu who led the genocidal campaign against Tutsi civilians last spring are now holding hundreds hostage while they plot their counterattack against the new government in Rwanda. They have created a miniature Rwanda in the camps – refugees are organised in groups according to the regions and villages they come from. Any dissident voices are quickly silenced; our volunteers have stood by helplessly as refugees were kidnapped or even hacked to death. Why are the Hutu leaders doing this? International aid is the key to their efforts to restart the war. Food represents power, and the camp leaders, who control its distribution, have diverted considerable quantities toward war preparations. They also skim off a*

percentage of the wages earned by the thousands of refugees employed by relief agencies. Thus over the last seven months international aid has allowed the militias to reorganise, stockpile food and recruit and train new members. Not until this month did the refugee leaders realise that they needed to improve their public image; they allowed the United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees to establish a registration program to make sure that food supplies match the real needs. Some aid agencies claimed this as a major victory, but it does little good as long as the murderers remain in control. The only hope of breaking their grip is an international force to police the camps, as many aid organisations have requested. But Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the UN Secretary General, says Western countries have refused to provide troops. [...] The humanitarian crisis in the camps has been over for some time. Despite the diversion of food by the militias, Rwandan refugees are better fed in the camps than most Africans, though they are completely dependent on foreign aid. Thus agencies like ours are caught in a lose-lose situation: either continue being reluctant accomplices of genocidal warmongers or withdraw from the camps, leaving the refugee population to the mercy of their jailers. [Extract from Alain Destexhe, 'So Doctors Without Borders is leaving the Rwanda Refugee Camps', International Herald Tribune (Europe), 10 February 1995.]

Alain Destexhe had a hard time presenting the information in our terms. He said that MSF was withdrawing from the camps. He did not put it in terms of the beginning of a withdrawal process. That quickly created a huge tension with MSF Belgium, who wanted to call the New York Times to say that Alain Destexhe did not represent MSF. We had to deal with it in a slightly technically manner - as 'damage control' - which was absolutely not what we wanted to do. Indeed, we weren't even able to get a little distance to be able to take a position… Everyone was so polarised. [Joëlle Tanguy, MSF USA Executive Director (in French).]

Confusion and tension manifested themselves at all levels of the organization and, in particular, at the organizational level collaboration between sections became impossible due to divergent strategic orientations in the face of the same moral-strategic dilemma.

MSF Programs:
Total confusion and reasoning that pushes the envelope of logical thinking.
MSF Holland Zaïre/Tanzania:

- wants to continue working in the camps at all cost as long as the Rwanda situation is not conducive to repatriation

- invokes its responsibility for the camps' population

- well-developed programs for 'typical refugee camps'

EPI, family planning, mental health, slaughterhouse construction

- Activities and number of expatriates reduced for practical and operational reasons

- Very irritated by the other MSF sections' continuing uncertainty over 'withdrawal — yes or no.' Thinks that if MSF Belgium withdrew from Goma, the pressure on MSF Holland would become intolerable and Amsterdam would choose to sacrifice its Tanzania/Zaïre programs rather than risk MSF's break-up.

MSF Belgium-Zaïre:

- It's too late to withdraw for ethical reasons; would have had to happen after the cholera epidemic

- Now it's 'humanitarian resistance:' action plan goals - reduce salaries paid in Goma, participate in repatriation and testify

- Kibumba withdrawal was a denunciation of the leaders' actions. They cheated on the census and threatened the MSF Belgium staff. The Kahindo census went smoothly so there's no reason to leave

- Fed up with attitude of MSF Holland in Goma. They refuse to address ethical problems and their advocacy work is inadequate (Eleanor's reports: for internal use only)

MSF Spain in Tanzania:

- Are withdrawing in two to three months because the situation is ethically intolerable. Nothing has changed so we have to leave; the situation is unchanged from November, when we decided to stay

- Increasing programs in Kibungo and Rwanda to encourage people to repatriate. If they don't go back, it's because services have not been re-established in Rwanda…

- Comments: it appears that the field staff is completely disoriented and is paying the price of headquarters' procrastination. Under pressure from the board of directors, headquarters recently changed its position.

MSF Switzerland in Tanzania:

- the camps are different: smaller (50,000) and not as harsh as Ngara

- holds same position as MSF Holland

[Extract from Minutes of the regional MSF inter-section meeting in Kigali, 3 and 4 March 1995, written by the MSF France coordinator in Rwanda.]

MSF France asked MSF Holland and MSF Belgium why they stayed in the refugee camps if their 'humanitarian resistance' had had no significant effect. If their own criteria (defined last winter) had not been met, then why did they not withdraw? MSF Belgium said that it would not be pulling out in the near future. It is to redefine its objectives. [Extract from Minutes of the international meeting of Rwanda programme managers, Paris, 17 May 1995.]

Six months after MSF France's departure from the camps, the debate on the departure from the camps, and more generally on the responsibility and strategic course to be adopted by MSF in the face of this moral-strategic dilemma, had reoccurred. No inter-section consensus was reached and each section explained its position according to its own ethical model.

We should use what has been presented to us, to take decisions by consensus. MSF France fears that the horror of the genocide will be forgotten and the leaders will be encouraged by MSF presence to commit the same atrocities. The situation is becoming normalised and legitimised by MSF presence. They feel the camps have become miniature states, and that MSF has become a kind of Ministry of Health. MSF Holland and MSF Belgium completely disagree with each other: there is very little collusion in the field and the only ones speaking to each other are the refugees and the local staff. MSF Belgium points out that the leaders dislike MSF presence. If we left, the leaders would be pleased because MSF would be replaced by other NGOs. If we decide to leave, Eric feels we should have good reason to do so. Moreover, staying would allow us to participate actively in the various institutions' meetings; MSF France is no longer in the camps and has no say on the problem of the camps, even on an international level. With regards to leaving, MSF Holland feels that if nothing changes, we will have to take a decision. They suggest making a list of what we hope to achieve before leaving. MSF Belgium (Eric) emphasises the responsibility we have; if we left without trying any other solutions, knowing that another genocide is near, MSF could no longer speak about 'responsibility', either for themselves or for the international community.
MSF France feels they have acted responsibly and according to their own ethics.
MSF Spain would like us to take a clear position on repatriation if MSF decides to leave.
MSF Belgium believes we should press UNHCR to repatriate the refugees. For them this is the only real option. Kigali should do all it can to make the repatriation possible.
MSF Spain feels we have reached the point where we are not getting what we are asking for (tribunals, observers). 'We need to be more creative!'

MSF Holland suggests we take the 'initiative' ourselves rather than be creative in order to combat the 'system' that has developed in the camps. One suggestion would be to press for repatriation and to heighten media awareness. MSF France does not see why MSF should take initiatives. Why not place pressure on the governments helping Mobutu?

Conclusion:

The situation is at an impasse, with no consensus.

For MSF Spain: leaving would enable us to take a different course of action, e.g. lobbying for repatriation.

For MSF Holland: MSF should take the initiative, e.g. repatriation + media.

MSF Belgium remains divided between the current impasse in terms of policy, and the question of MSF's longstanding responsibility.

MSF Switzerland would like to re-examine the situation in the Tanzanian camps before deciding.

All sections will take their decisions after internal discussion. [Extract of Minutes of the international meeting of Directors of Operations and the Rwanda programme manager in Brussels, 22 June 1995 (in French).]

The difficulty of reaching consensus on the strategic direction of MSF as a 'single' organization reveals the cultural differences in ethical models between each section, the limitations of the organization's work and of humanitarian aid in general in such extreme contexts.

[…] this report reflects the moral dilemma faced by MSF and many other aid agencies working in camps in which killers walk freely and where preparations are made for a military intervention into Rwanda aimed at further massacres of the Tutsi population. The humanitarian catastrophe that took place in the Rwandan region tested MSF's capacity to its very limits. Feelings of outrage over the countless murders and continued impunity overshadowed the humanitarian relief efforts of MSF. This report is another outcry of MSF's relief workers to the international community and the public of their feelings. MSF believes that humanitarian aid has to be accompanied by political measures and justice. Otherwise, relief workers find themselves confronted with an unacceptable situation. [Extract from MSF Holland Report, 'Deadlock in the Rwandan crisis', July 1995.]

It was realized later that this lack of unity was a strategic failure.

We took a decision in June or August. I can't remember exactly when. Anyway for me, it was already too late. We should have taken a decision earlier to be more effective and to give it more weight. We all should have left the camps together. I think it was a historic moment when the movement lost its unity and I think we are suffering as a result. The measures taken did not convince us things were better. But the reasons given for leaving – the massive registration fraud – I'll be honest, were not valid reasons. Anyone who has worked in the camps knows very well in all refugee camps there is at least 5-10 % double-registration. In those camps it was less than that. Obviously fraud was a problem, and of course some food was diverted. I don't know of any camps where people don't have to pay for a ration. I'm not saying that I agree with this practice, but it wasn't a good reason to leave. We should have emphasised more than we did, that all those camps were in fact bases, and that the refugees were hostages. We didn't emphasise this enough. I wasn't very happy about that. We left but the problem was, it was too late. [Dr. […], MSF Belgium Programme manager then Director of Operations (in French).]

5.3.3.3 Vignette 2.3. (CASE 2)

This vignette shows how the organization creates unprecedented ways of operating in the face of moral dilemmas.

In this vignette, as a result of sensemaking under pressure, a moral dilemma arises in the sense that working in this context requires going beyond the organization's mandate but doing nothing would not be in adequation with the organizational ethical model or the moral sense of the members of the organization. MSF observed human rights violations, lack of humanitarian protection that should go hand in and with the medical assistance in such extreme context. However, doing something about these issues means going beyond the organization's charter. In other words, the missions that need to be accomplished in order to start solving the moral dilemmas of Case 2 go beyond not only the organization's practices, but also its boundaries. To avoid both unacceptable strategic approaches, the organization tried to put pressure on the organizations whose mandate it is to work on the issues identified.

We request that you urgently take all possible political initiative in view of allowing these displaced to return to their region of origin as quickly as possible so that

appropriate protection and humanitarian aid can be provided. We also request your intervention so that the United Nations as a whole retains a determining leadership role, both in the political response (so as to avoid one country acting alone) and humanitarian response (by mobilising the United Nations specialised agencies). [Exctract of Letter from Médecins Sans Frontières (International office) to Boutros Boutros - Ghali, UN General Secretary, 12 juillet 1994 (in French)]

However, it soon became clear that the organization can ask and lobby, but absolutely cannot force other organizations such as the UN to act in a certain way and to deploy the necessary resources in the field.

We've already put pressure on the UN to increase their observers, gather information and provide statements. Unfortunately, we have limited power over the UN and member states. Decisions are made but not implemented. [Extract of Minutes of the MSF France Board meeting, 28 October 1994 (in French)]

The fact that other organizations are not fulfilling their mandate satisfactorily affects the possibilities of the organization in the field. There is a moral dilemma in that acting in place of other organizations to protect refugees is not an acceptable strategic course of action for MSF, but doing nothing and continuing medical activities without humanitarian protection is equally unacceptable.

It is inconceivable that humanitarian organisations should fill the void left by the troops' withdrawal. They are neither trained for nor suited to that goal. The refugees' significant unmet humanitarian needs should not allow us to forget the international community's political responsibilities towards those who instigated the genocide, nor exonerate the international community of those responsibilities. The instigators hold sway even today, operating in complete impunity within the safe humanitarian zone and in the refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania. ["Rwanda: Death Rate Still Unacceptable," MSF France Press Release, 3 August 1994 (in French)]

MSF headquarters tried something different by sending a specialist in human rights abuses in the field. This way, the organization was indirectly responding to the needs in the field that were not part of its mandate. It is indeed not MSF's role to monitor human rights' abuses. However, it impacts morally those in the field and those in the headquarters in addition to reducing the scope of activities possible in the situation.

Because of its medical activities, MSF will not be involved directly in monitoring compliance with human rights but has decided to send a 'facilitator' to Rwanda. We are expecting names and suggestions today. MSF will continue to encourage initiatives and is ready to support actions financially, logistically and otherwise. [Extract of Minutes of the International Council teleconference on Rwanda, 10 August 1994 (in French)]

However, this new action was not successful because it was unilateral and there was an obvious lack of communication with the field with the centralization of information at headquarters.

Faced with rumours, MSF tried to place someone in the teams to try to clarify what was happening with abuses, but that didn't work. This person was designated as a 'specialist' and the information went straight to headquarters without going via the team in the capital. Maybe we should try again but do things differently? Still, it's a strange country where you don't know what the person you are dealing with has done in the past… [Extract from Minutes of the MSF France Board meeting, 28 October 1994 (in French).]

Moreover, the kind of complexities encountered on the ground with human rights violations are often part of a larger, more complex problem. Here, they are also the result of the failure of the judiciary. MSF made a clear assessment of the Rwandan judiciary system following the genocide thanks to the organization's unique presence in the field. Six months after the genocide began, the Rwandan judicial system was clearly dead.

Today, six judges and 10 lawyers remain in Rwanda. The justice ministry is completely destroyed. The minister's office is on the third floor of a devastated building. There is no door and no window. He managed to grab two chairs and some paper. The Palais de Justice has been turned into a restaurant. The archives were burned to cook meals. [...] The gradual reconstruction of a legal system puts the problem of arrests and imprisonment in stark relief. Today, the army is the only public law enforcement agency. There is no police force and it will take time to establish a civilian force. It makes sense, and would seem reasonable, to recommend that the army's role be limited and that a civilian police be established. But the army can only be limited when soldiers receive pay, which is not yet the case. [...] There is only one 'civilian prison' in the country -

the one in Kigali. The World Food Programme is responsible for maintaining prisoners'
minimum nutrition levels (including the imprisoned minister of justice and the national
prosecutor). There is no medical clinic for those 15,000 prisoners. Everywhere else,
prisoners are held in military camps. Their names are not recorded on lists. In Rwanda
today, that makes it impossible to distinguish between those who have disappeared and
those who are incarcerated. Fear of the army is so great that families, including MSF
workers, rarely seek information from the military about people who have been arrested
or disappeared. The system is so disorganised that these prisoners are not a priority for
anyone. [Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, Report on Rwanda mission, September 1994 (in
French)]

MSF saw in the field that the country's judiciary system was completely destroyed. In the absence of a solution from other stakeholders in this extreme context and after realizing that the practice of speaking out to bring about change in others had reached its limits, MSF decided to create beyond its boundaries. Once again, the decision-making process was morally based. MSF chose to prioritize solving the moral issue over its regular activities and internalized practices and to create a new NGO to fulfil the mandate to start rebuilding the judiciary system as soon as possible. This is clearly beyond the mandate of MSF. However, the extreme gravity of the situation (i.e., a non-existent national judiciary) affects MSF's regular activities as Rwandans were imprisoned without fair judicial treatment and prisoners were dying like flies. This is why in this case, the organization created an unprecedented action to respond to this dilemma by creating an entirely new NGO that would have for mission to start solving the moral issue – here, the giant and much needed task of rebuilding the judiciary system of an entire country.

In late July, MSF International decided to undertake a lobbying campaign to increase
the presence of human rights observers among the Rwandans. The effort was targeted
at the international community (UN and member states) and sought to augment the
number of UN observers. Pressure was also directed at private non-profit organisations
like Amnesty International, Avocats Sans Frontières, the International Federation of
Human Rights, and Africa Watch. [Extract of 'MSF and Human Rights in Rwanda,' Le
Zarwabuta No. 1, (internal newsletter on the Rwandan crisis), MSF France, 25 August
1994 (in French)]

The new strategic course – the creation of a new organization – was initiated by one section, MSF Belgium. Subsequently, two sections cooperated with other NGOs in this unprecedented strategic action because their ethical models aligned with this issue and no single organization could fulfil this mandate. More generally, the situation in the country was catastrophic and actors operating in emergency contexts recognized that they were lost in this disrupted context. Creation became the only strategic option.

> *Human Rights organisations exist to denounce violations committed by governments, but when there is no government, when there is only chaos- they're at a loss what to do. There were no (Human Rights) organisations present, but when Réginald Moreels made his appeal in the media they all woke up and said «we totally agree, but we're not used to working in these types of situation». MSF offered to take a certain number of representatives of these organisations to the field and Réginald ask me to accompany them. We went to Rwanda for 15 days to see what they could do for the country… We ended up outlining a number of possible pragmatic actions that no Human Rights organisation as such could implement. A minimum of things that we considered necessary, realistic and relatively positive, and that did not have any negative effects. Thus MSF and these organisations decided to create together the Réseau des Citoyens (The Citizen's Network) which was operational immediately: it thus received funding from the French and Belgian sections. Six months later, the bilateral cooperation was to be set up. [Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor (in French)]*

5.3.3.4 Vignette 2.4. (CASES 1, 2, 4)

This vignette shows how the organization prioritizes ethical issues beyond its organizational boundaries by fulfilling the mandates of other actors both at the individual level and at the organizational level.

When other actors do not fulfil their mandate, MSF may also decide to fulfil the unfulfilled mandate itself. In the different extreme cases, this happened both at the organizational level and at the individual level. These actions happened when trying to save human lives for example by evacuating refugees (which is not part of MSF's mandate) as an organizational strategic choice (Case 4) or an individual one (Cases 1 and 2). This boundary-crossing creation occurred both at the individual level by transgressing the boundaries of the individual's organizational role and at the organizational level by going beyond the boundaries

of the organization and can only be explained by organizational ethical models and individuals' moral sense.

At the individual level, I call this *individual misbehaving* by organizational members stepping out of their organizational role and/or risking their lives.

The day after I arrived, we had a big meeting with the staff. The Tutsi staff asked to leave the country as they were fearful for their lives. I still didn't really understand the context, of course, as I had just arrived. They were really scared for their lives and they wanted to leave. I saw in their eyes that they were really desperate. I said to them "OK, tomorrow, I am going to evacuate you." Then I had a big fight with my logistician because he didn't want to be part of that. The next day, I lined up three big Land Rovers – perhaps naively because I thought that I would manage to evacuate the local staff. I had the three cars and there were six of them because they had their husbands and their wives and all their children and all the luggage they could carry. We stuffed the three cars. On the border in the town of Butare — we didn't even leave Butare — we were stopped. One of the cars was taken away from us. All of the people in that car were scared to stay in Butare. So, I said, "Look, let's get in the other cars, leave some luggage behind and get in." You never saw so many people in two MSF cars — they were almost on top of each other. So we passed a lot of roadblocks — scary stuff. I had already radioed Bujumbura. They had sent cars to the border to pick up the passengers… So we arrived at the border and there were men with knives and machetes around the cars. You could not see who was in the cars because the steam from their mouths had put steam on the windows — but obviously, there were a lot of people inside. They refused to let the Rwandans cross because they had no papers, etc. I talked and talked and talked to the border guy and offered him money but he wouldn't let them go. Earlier, in Butare, two priests who wanted to leave had joined our convoy in their own car. The priests became very handy at the border. I went to them and said, 'it's your turn, please help me.' The priests went to the guy and talked about Jesus and what Jesus did, and asked whether he believed in Jesus and so on — he talked for 15 minutes. And the guy said, 'ok, let them go.' So the priests saved their lives. [Wouter Van Empelen, Emergency Cell, MSF Holland, in Rwanda in April 1994.] CASE 1

After touring the hospital, the Australian soldiers came to see us and said "There are three newborns alone in the paediatrics unit." "You don't want to go back and get them?" "No, it's too dangerous. There are snipers everywhere." "We'll go."

I asked Christian to come with me because I was afraid and didn't want to go alone. We left. The Australians were yelling at us, "You jerks! You stupid idiots!" But they had to escort us because there were RPA troops in the hospital. We went over there. Eight babies, between two weeks and two months, lay naked on a bed, shrieking with hunger. The blue helmets didn't want to put their guns down so Christian and I each had to carry four babies. I went to get my radio and I hid it between the four infants in my arms. We brought them back and the ICRC evacuated them…The RPA had "cleaned out" the hospital. There was only one patient still alive. We found dead patients with their IVs still in place. We had to put the bodies in the grave with the IVs. We had to move so quickly there wasn't time to remove them. It was obvious that the soldiers had executed the patients in the hospital. [Dr. Didier Laureillard, MSF France physician, Gikongoro, Rwanda, from December 1994 to May 1995 (in French).] CASE 2

At the organizational level, MSF sometimes chose to take on the mission of other organizations such as the UNHCR by evacuating refugees.

At the same time, we had located the other people who hadn't been killed and we had to get them out because we knew that they were going to be killed. So we worked with ICRC to try to get an evacuation of these people. But we couldn't get anyone to do it. The ICRC wouldn't evacuate them; UNHCR wouldn't evacuate them—no one would touch them. We said that we were going to evacuate them and so we did. Wouter gave me $10,000 and we got a truck, came back to the village, got the people into the truck, and took them to Rwanda where they went to a camp on the border. They were mainly women and children. Many of the men had fled to take up arms and fight. [Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaïre) from February to September 1996.] CASE 4

In other cases, the organization extended its own medical mandate to new areas. For example, MSF chose to create new practices in response to the reality of Rwandan prisons. Previously, it was not within MSF's mandate to provide medical assistance in prisons.

The prison problem has been a preoccupation for MSF for several months. MSFF and MSFB have undertaken several actions [...] The needs are enormous but it is imperative to make a political decision: Should MSF as an organisation become more involved in this work? We find ourselves confronted with a situation that includes concentration camps, death camps. ICRC is also completely confused about this problematic situation. Philippe thinks that if MSF, which is not an international organisation and has no mandate, becomes involved in the prisons there will be no means to apply pressure in relation to the detention conditions, except by temoignage. Eric [Goemaere, Executive Director of MSF Belgium] reminds us of the demand made to MSFB by the government to build a detention centre for children under the age of 14 at Gitarama. Proposition refused. While in Brussels, ICRC asked MSF to withdraw from the prisons but wants us to intervene in the 'cachots', where they feel they cannot cope. However, it is one thing for an MSF doctor to work in the prison in Kigali, but working in the 'cachots', veritable torture centres, is a totally different matter. Developing a health service there will change nothing and our only means of fighting the system will be by speaking out. As soon as we do, we must expect to be expelled. We have no legal means at our disposal. Eric pointed out that it is ICRC and not the Rwandan government that is asking us to intervene in the 'cachots'. We must remain extremely vigilant in order to avoid getting tainted. We are faced with a government that resembles a military dictatorship that recognises no international laws. [Extract from Minutes from the MSF International Council meeting in Geneva, 4 May 1995 (in French).] CASE 2

The implication of MSF extending its mandate to Rwandan prisons led to the denouncing of the tragic fate of the prisoners. This created political issues with the Rwandan authorities. The Rwandan Minister for Rehabilitation and Social Integration clearly asked MSF to remain in its place and not extend its to the political arena. Although MSF is an independent organization, it usually collaborates with local authorities and governments to set up its operations.

"We cannot, however, tolerate anyone using this situation to interfere in matters that are the responsibility of the government. More specifically, we want MSF France to stick strictly to its humanitarian and medical vocation and to abstain from all political considerations in its dia-gnoses, as in its public and unofficial declarations." [Extract from the Minister for Rehabilitation and Social Integration to the MSF France coordinator, 17 May 1995 (in French).] CASE 2

The organization's response was to defend this strategic choice to the Minister and explained how it was not in contradiction with MSF's mission and moral duty.

"It is an inherent part of our vocation as doctors that while treating the ill we also name the diseases from which they suffer. Our testi-mony is factual and presents human suffering as the result of more of less temporary crisis situations and indicates the persons or populations responsible for the crises. We systematically avoid all sordid or fatalistic considerations, as well as all forms of paternalism with regard to the populations we help.

In exceptional circumstances, MSF denounces or adopts a stance with regard to certain situations.

We thus denounced the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda in May 94 and demanded that those responsible be brought to justice. Again in relation to the genocide, we withdrew our teams from the camps for Rwandan refugees in Zaire and Tanzania in protest against the same instigators of genocide using international solidarity in order to streng-then their hold on the populations in question. These positions had no directly political character. They aimed at preventing aid from contributing to an acceptance of the fate reserved for the victims, or from making it worse. We are aware of the fact that our testimony can be used by others to further their own ends, in the same way as our presence and activity can be misrepresented and used in a partisan fashion. We constantly endeavour to limit such undesirable effects as much as possible.

To this end, we strive to develop a relationship that is constructive and respectful of the total sovereignty of the government that receives us. That was the purpose of [the head of mission] recent letter to you concerning the patients we receive from Gitarama prison.

I wish to add that [the head of mission] is a very experienced coordinator and that he acts in perfect liaison with, and enjoys the full confidence of, our headquarters. He has total latitude concerning the manner in which he represents MSF and we have asked him to finalise, as quickly as possible, an explicit agreement with your Ministry in order to define the framework of our activity in Rwanda. [Extract from etter from the President of MSF France to the Rwandan Minister for Rehabilitation and Social Integration, 23 May 1995 (in French).] CASE 2

One month later, the situation was still horrible and all MSF sections spoke out together in a press release to denounce the appalling conditions of the prisoners in the Gitarama prison. This led to journalists visiting Rwandan prisons to verify the accusation of MSF and later the Rwandan government officially declared that it would put in place measures to better the sanitary conditions of the prisoners. However, MSF did not see in the field the application of such measures and the context for the prisoners did not improve. The case of the Rwandan prisons and 'cachots' (where conditions were even worse than in the prisons) is not an isolated one in terms of MSF going beyond its institutionalized practices to denounce and advocate for change in the extreme context. Nonetheless, it did not resonate well with authorities and eventually MSF-France and MSF-Switzerland (with other humanitarian organizations) were expelled from Rwanda by the government on 6 December 1995.

> *"A year after the drama, it is important to note that some of the NGOs operating in Rwanda have intervened suc-cessfully while others have not been up to standard either because of a lack of adequate means and capacities, not having clear programs and experience, or neglect of exis-ting government regulations." [Extract from Letter from the Minister for Rehabilitation and Social Integration to the Head of Missions of Non-Governmental Organisations operating in Rwanda, Kigali, 6 December 1995.]*

5.3.3.5 Vignette 2.5. (CASES 2 & 4)

This vignette shows how a crisis of trust between sections broke due to conflicting ethical decision-making at the same moral-strategic dilemma.

Tensions and strategic differences between sections and between the field and headquarters over a moral dilemma came to a head more than a year later in Case 4. The strategic decisions made during this case led to two unprecedented crises of trust, one between sections and one between headquarters and the field. Changing practices as result of organizational learning (as described in Vignette 3.2. (CASE 4)) was necessary but insufficient faced with the moral dilemmas that arose during Case 4. For instance, the repatriation of Rwandan refugees posed a moral-strategic dilemma.

> *The issue of our participation in the repatriation of Rwandan refugees is probably one of the most complex the organisation has faced in recent years. We are confronted with*

a new dilemma with direct parallels to the great episodes of hostage taking in humanitarian history… [...] In practice, what operational position can we adopt?

A. Repatriation 1. Aid the repatriation of those who indicate a desire for it and prolong the procedure for a minimum of 3 months.

2. Adapt the pace of this repatriation to medical conditions to avoid transporting those close to death: in and out decisions [should be] entirely the responsibility of an MSF expat team. [Extract from 'What is our Position on Repatriation?' [Extract from Eric Goemaere, General Director, MSF Belgium, written 18 June 1997 and published in Contact n°48 (MSF Belgium internal publication), June-July 1997 (in French).]

In fact, from their sensemaking under pressure, some organizational members in the field told headquarters that operations were simply impossible in this extreme context.

Barely a few days after the shock of discovering the hidden military agenda, we were reminded today, once again, that humanitarian agencies, in general, and UNHCR, in particular, are impotent. We are being encouraged not to believe that UNHCR is complicit in the tragedy now unfolding. We are ashamed to have to face up to our own powerlessness. Neither the number or tenor of the condemnations can make up for this third failure. Each time their number is reduced and so is the feasibility of repatriation. With UNHCR powerless, we have only the to ask soldiers for authorisation and protection (the population remains hostile and unpredictable) to someday gain access to the refugees; nothing more cynical than after today's demonstration. The train is blocked and MSF has no independent air transport. So complete non-access: non-access to the refugees and non-access to information about the refugees.

Conclusion: operations are impossible.

To avoid sinking into despair, we are planning future response scenarios regarding the likely spots where the phantom refugees might be [...]

We realise that staying makes us responsible for nonrepatriation - and without even a guarantee of being able to save individuals. We know that if we leave now we will face the unbearable prospect of not being here just when we would have access to the refugees again. Either we try to carry out advocacy while staying on site or we make a massive retreat from the Great Lakes region and issue a political condemnation.

... The aeroplane/no aeroplane issue started up again today (no authorisation). Someone from the Rwandan delegation rejected the agreement to give us a place on board, saying the flight is political and will continue on to Kigali. Dominique will say

that we should plant ourselves on the tarmac to force the question. The team doesn't agree any more. We'll tell UNHCR that if we're not included, we're closing up shop. If this has now become a game to get to be included, you'll need to send other people to play. In this environment, we see no possibility for operations or advocacy.

We're now doing what we have to do to close the mission and we propose waiting for two pieces of information to conclude:

- Including MSF in the assessment flight - Your feedback with a clear and feasible position for follow-up

For now, we're not trying to criticise anyone, it's just an observation that we've come to the end of the line.

Greetings from the biggest shit I've ever been in

Vincent [Extract from Sitrep, Vincent Janssen, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani, to MSF Belgium, France and Holland programme managers, 25 April 1995 (in French).]

This assessment echoes the questioning the limits of humanitarian aid, which is recurrent in all four cases, both at the individual level and at the organizational level.

"I asked him to come to the office and organised a debate. That was even before the first report. Arjo was already thinking about the limits of humanitarian action in such a situation, about our responsibilities etc. He contributed to the internal discussion."
[Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director.] CASE 3

The critical humanitarian conflict arises again: the moral and medical obligation to assist, regardless of political affiliations and past crimes, versus the use of NGOs as pawns on a political chess board. It is hard to turn our back on suffering, so always search for middle ground - where we continue our work and use advocacy to put pressure on the international community to act. However, in this region, the additional problems of disintegrating security for expats and freedom of access will make a compromise difficult. MSF should recognise the worth of its own advocacy and speak out about what it sees, even if this means we have to leave. If we continue to work in a country where we are forbidden to mourn the murder of the three expats, and we voice no protest, need we bother with advocacy at all? [Extract from 'Contribution to the Advocacy Debate,' Message from Amanda Harvey and Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Goma to the HQ, HAD and MSF Holland Kigali, 31 January 1997.] CASE 4

In extreme contexts, the work of organizations, in this case humanitarian aid, can reach its limits. It is particularly important to know when this threshold is reached and how to strategize at that point. In this case, we can see that it is not an isolated issue. The question was already raised in the previous cases, meaning chronologically in the three years before this assessment.

> *"From that moment, one question would haunt us: What good was it to treat and care for people who might be killed the next day? Should we continue working under such conditions?" [Extract from Geneviève Legrand (MSF France nurse on the Kibeho team) 'Testimony on the Kibeho Killing,' April 1995 (in French).] CASE 2*

> *"When I asked him about Dr Canissius, he said "you should be careful because you are not a human rights organisation. You did not come here for human rights." I said "no but it's stupid to treat people and not to take care of the fact that they are going to be executed after the treatment, if you don't mind dear doctor"." [MSF Belgium coordinator for Byumba and Bugesera (Rwanda), from May to September 1994.] CASE 2*

However, what the previous quotes from different cases also indicate is that the exact moment when the threshold is reached may be different for individual members of the organization and for the organization. Furthermore, when the threshold is reached, individuals and MSF sections may react differently to this assessment. The crisis of trust that broke out between the field and headquarters was born out of a specific reaction to the moral-strategic dilemma, the assessment of the limitation of humanitarian aid, and the desire to act quickly and forcefully in this regard. However, at the beginning, it seemed that the decision to prioritize advocacy over medical assistance was shared at the international level at headquarters.

> *I bumped into Jacques (de Milliano, President MSF Holland) and Doris (Schopper, President MSF Switzerland) on their way out of the International Council meeting. They asked how I was and I said, "I'm fine, I don't have any work and can catch up on my shopping." They started to laugh and said, "Why don't you have any work?" I replied, "MSF is an institution which tries to communicate as little as possible about the Great Lakes crisis, at a time when unbelievable things are happening there. So, as Director of Communications, half the time I have nothing to do." They reassured me, "Don't worry, we just voted a resolution which will really give you room to work in." And, they had*

indeed voted a resolution, which placed emphasis on advocacy. The International Council declared, "green light, priority for advocacy over assistance, which is meaningless in this situation." I therefore have a clear position from MSF's political/associative echelons, the International Council and the Board, as Director of Communications, I assume my responsibilities and will communicate along these lines. I am not working outside the bounds of internal discipline. [Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France programme manager then Communication Director (in French).]

Yet, over time, advocacy took on different meanings for different sections of MSF and the priorities of each section were no longer aligned. Faced with the long process of following organizational procedures – debates, report writing, consensus reaching – MSF France headquarters chose to 'misbehave', to act alone without momentarily caring about collaboration with the field or other sections. This action not only contradicted the organization's routines, but also its rules. For example, MSF France was not even present in the field, but used the sensemaking of other MSF sections present in the field, without their consent.

Témoignage - here's a brief recap of recent developments: The MSF France Board meeting in April unilaterally challenged, i.e. with no international consultation, the témoignage security veto that applies to all sections. The Board announced that from now on the security veto would be replaced by a 24-hour security warning to ensure the safety (in other words the withdrawal) of the teams. The IC [International Council] sitting of 1 May refused to ratify this unilateral abrogation and reaffirmed that the security veto rule still applied. Moreover, the IC asked the DGs to examine whether a change to the existing rule was appropriate. In terms of témoignage, the implicit message from the Paris Board seems quite counter-productive. The incidents that followed did not help matters at all. The emergence of the Shabunda report and "MSF accuses" splashed all over the front page of Libération (20 May 97) was like a bomb exploding at the centre of MSF. [Extract from Minutes of the MSF Belgium Board meeting, 13 June 1997, (in French).]

This led to a lack of communication from headquarters on its advocacy strategy that directly endangered the field workers. We can ask here whether the expertise of headquarters strategists is to blame for this strategic failure. Indeed, experts can lose their sensitivity to the context and the people directly involved. Decision-making is based on distanced thinking and not on sensing the context and its embodiment. The following quotes show the strong emotional

reactions of field workers to this strategic choice made by headquarters. While the rationale for the strategic choice to respond to this extreme context is debatable, the resulting loss of trust is indicative of a lack of responsible management.

Hello Paris, Absolutely delighted to see that the operational centres are capable of understanding and getting on with each other, in short, of denouncing the situation of the Hutu refugees in Zaire, shit, I mean the Democratic Congo. I note, however, that you seem to have forgotten the existence of the Belgian and French teams in Kinshasa, which amount to 40 people at the very least. This is both regrettable and dangerous. Regrettable, since at the very moment I'm supposed to re-establish contact with the new authorities, I'm totally unaware that you have decided to remind us of their presence in a more indirect way. You might think I'm a bit thick but frankly, I didn't envisage introducing myself to the new government armed with such a discourse. Anyway, I'm prepared to have a change of heart, as long as I'm kept informed of the communication policy you decide for us.

Apart from that, I'm the first to follow you on the facts of the dossier for, I may remind you, not so long ago I was one of those who directly witnessed what was happening to the refugees. You know, Tingi Tingi! You could have talked to me about it, my name's not […], General Director MSF B- I think I would have understood…. twigged… [...] Imagine the liberation of Paris in 1944. The Parisians are out on the streets, armed with their clippers, and MSF denounces the bombing of Dresden. Then a small team sets off through the streets in a gas-powered Citroen duly festooned with the regulation stickers and flags, because they've been told that these accessories will contribute to their security.

That's more or less the situation you've placed us in, only here the clippers are more effectively replaced by a burning tyre around your neck. Luckily, the press is there to tell us what's going on but as for you, you won't be winning the Prix Albert Londres this year.

But finally, if some of you think that communication with the field doesn't matter, I'll give you a tip so you can really fulfil your potential. Young and Rubicam are recruiting creative staff who report their projects directly to the commercial director, last door at the end of the corridor, on your right… [Letter from Frédérique Marodon, MSF France in Kinshasa, to the directors of MSF France, 20 May 1997 (in French).]

We have been equally dismayed, distressed, disappointed and angered by the whole episode. We try to understand why MSF France adamantly insists on being reckless and nonchalant about the lives of so many volunteers in the region. We also try to understand how on earth it is again possible that apparent differences in approach of advocacy can lead once again to another intersectional crisis ... [Extract from 'Silence Does Not Mean Consent,' Message from the MSF Belgium team in Rwanda to the Directors and programme manager of MSF Belgium, MSF Holland, MSF France, 29 May 1997 (in French).]

Who are they trying to kid? At the last Board meeting, the communication veto was withdrawn but a 24-hour security window was maintained so the teams could be warned. It seems that in the euphoria of your entente between operational centres, the field workers have become pawns - they can't understand the operational centres' high strategy so why bother telling them? Yet at the same time, they are told to get on with making contacts so the work can continue.
I can only hope that during coordinators' week you won't propose, for the 26th year, a debate on team security because these days, if we want to evaluate the risk, all we have to do is listen to RFI.
Although I'm in complete agreement on the facts in the dossier and I think we would have been capable of supporting it, I'm totally disgusted by our casual attitude. [Extract from Letter from Pascal Vignier, MSF France coordinator in Kinshasa, to the General Director, Communications Director, and programme manager of MSF France, 20 May 1997 (in French).]

Field strategists completely lost trust in headquarters' strategists to represent them and to speak for them. In fact, the internalized practice of *speaking out* is usually a form of *speaking for* the field. This is why field workers demanded silence. They wanted to speak for themselves, in whatever form and at whatever time they saw fit.

I think that Jean Hervé Bradol's interview is not appropriate at this time, and should not take place. Although we can assume that a lot of the things he is going to say might have been said already, it will, at least in Goma, work as oil on the fire.
Secondly we cannot have confidence that he is taking into account the precarious situation some of our teams are in at the moment. MSF Paris has other priorities (right or wrong, not the discussion now) than to preserve the mission and give priority to the

security of our teams. [Extract from "Re-interview," E-mails between Wilna Van Artzen, MSF Holland programme manager and Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager, 4 June 1997.]

This crisis not only caused rifts in the field and at headquarters, but it also changed the strategy of the field, which decided to cut off communication and collaboration with MSF France headquarters. This is obviously an extremely rare occurrence, probably even a first in an organization that normally shapes its strategy based on the interconnection between the field and headquarters. The extreme nature of this strategic orientation is evidence of a rupture that only threatened the identity of the organization and the reason to be part of it.

I am addressing this letter especially to those 3 people who wrote the letter of explanation. After doing the 'damage control', which was the result of the article in the Libération, again MSF Paris succeeded in being in the newspapers. I have to congratulate you. I think that it is the first time that the press coverage in Paris is so high without being present on the field. If this [is the situation] the insecurity in the field is secondary to the interest of Paris.

The co-ordination team in Kisangani has lost confidence in Paris. We hope that it will not be on RFI this morning. We know also that Mr Bradol (well known for his declarations in the past) will be attending a discussion on TF1 on the 3/06. Knowing the reputation of Mr Bradol we are obliged to take some preventive measures in order to limit the damage.

From today no information from Kisangani will be given to Paris.

2. AlI the lobbying that was undertaken (with the agreement of Marie Pierre Allie) to introduce Paris and prepare the field to set up a long-term programme will be stopped.

3. Although I still support the last report that was published and the importance of it, I will no longer defend Paris when I will [SIC] called by the Governor to give an explanation on the press articles.

4. We will reduce as much as possible expats coming from MSF Paris as we don't want to be responsible for their security.

I regret to take such measures but for this [SIC] time being it is the only solution. Thanks for your comprehension and collaboration. William Claus and co. "Marche du Siècle": Bradol is still due to appear on the programme. This means a break with MSF-F. Dominique can no longer guarantee the security of the expats in Rwanda. [Extract from Message from William Claus, Coordinator MSF Belgium in Kisangani to MSF Belgium,

MSF France, and MSF Holland President, Executive Director and Director of Operations and all Teams present in the Great Lakes region, 29 May 2003.]

I am writing to you about the incident that we have just experienced in former Zaire following the Médecins Sans Frontières statements about the Rwandan refugees that appeared in the press. I consider that the way you have handled this reveals a lack of seriousness and an overwhelming professional incompetence.

Let no one start moralising by saying that the cause of the massacres is so grave that it justifies what has happened, because <u>I am not even questioning the contents of the report or the duty of bearing witness on this issue. I repeat - my concern is your carelessness and incompetence over the way this témoignage [testimony] was handled</u> …

-Kinshasa: Both the MSF-B and MSF-F teams learned through RFI that MSF was denouncing [the AFDL]. To make things worse, the MSF-B Kinshasa team was not even told that such a report was being prepared.

-Mbandaka: No information.

-Kisangani: Information on the report but no warning about its

distribution. The AFDL official tells the Coordinator what MSF has been saying.

-Goma: Information on the report, but no agreement on releasing it at that time.

-Furthermore, MSF-B's Zaire Desk for Kinshasa, with which we were in contact throughout the weekend, was not informed…

The day Kabila arrived in Kinshasa, after we spent a weekend indoors to avoid being bumped off by the FAZ, when the situation in Kinshasa was extremely volatile and totally insecure: who could have chosen a better moment? And don't tell me that you could not have foreseen the fall of Kinshasa and that Kin[shasa] would already be under AFDL control (as somebody told me over the phone), because in that case you are all the more stupid for not even doing a basic analysis of the way things might develop...

<u>As for me, I've had it. I'm sending you notice that I don't trust you. I feel scorned these days - my personal security scorned, my views scorned, my work in the field scorned, my very existence scorned</u>. [Extract from Letter from Mit Philips, MSF Belgium coordinator in Kinshasa, to MSF Directors, Presidents, Board, Secretary General MSF International, 31 May 1997.]

Those for whom the threshold of what is acceptable as a member of the organization had been crossed even chose to resign from the organization.

I had a discussion with the field. I felt that we should not only release the report but confront the authorities on the ground with it - we should give it to them and say: "How is this possible?" Not accuse but ask: "How is this possible?" And I had a discussion with the person in charge in Goma who said, "Are you crazy? We could never do that here." I thought that we should. But they refused to do it. Of course the people were angry. After the release of the report - the team in Goma had agreed, but then when it was released, they were very angry with me as well - extremely angry with me, and quite a few people resigned. They said they resigned not only from MSF in Goma but also from MSF in total. That changed later but I got several letters from people saying that I had not dealt with it in the correct way. There was the person in charge in Kinshasa that resigned too. And they all sent letters all over the MSF network. It was a total mess. After that-in June - I wanted a holiday. I had the feeling that I didn't know what was going to happen to me. I felt that I was the guilty person. I wasn't sure. [Wilna Van Artzen, MSF Holland Emergency Desk Officer.]

I had just been appointed director of human resources here and I was so disgusted to see people from MSF Belgium, people like Dominique Boutriau, in tears. To some of them, it represented a break with MSF France, with témoignage, with trust. Those people felt that their deepest beliefs had been attacked. It was my duty as head of Human Resources to engineer a kind of catharsis so that people could say what they felt and not repress it. I asked the Heads of Mission for their views and did a fresh analysis. I included the decisions taken at the Executive Committee and the teleconferences in the dossier. Bernard Pécoul acknowledged that at some point in the decisiontaking process, he had made a mistake, etc… that data had been obscured. People will say that of course that's the Belgian version. OK, but I'm talking about international documents. I think there was a kind of loss of control there, which did a lot of harm. I am very curious to see how you are going to present this because you can only rewrite the story against one section or the other. [Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium, Human Resources Director (in French).]

The crisis of trust between the field and headquarters also revealed differences between the sections. The assessment of the need to advocate in this case and in Case 1, when the genocide took place, was similar for MSF France headquarters, which followed its organizational ethical model and individual sense of morality in such extreme, disrupted contexts. Extremely serious events were happening and they felt it was their responsibility to

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make this known to the world. However, for other sections, the two different extreme contexts require two different strategic responses. MSF France headquarters defended the strategic position of speaking out in such extreme context, even when in disagreement with the field.

For several months now, everyone - be it in government offices, the United Nations, or the press - has been aware that an implacable process is underway to liquidate the largest possible number of refugees still present in Zaire, or about 250,000 people. In late March 1997, one of our teams in Kivu drafted a report on the fact that our work - the roadside first aid posts to help the refugees coming out of the forest - is being used by the ADFL, backed up by Rwandan military, to attract the refugees and then massacre them.

At the end of April, we began to release this information unofficially to governments, the United Nations and a few journalists. Meanwhile, in Kisangani, refugee massacres were beginning. The Rwandan-speaking troops took over from the Katangans, mechanical diggers were sent to the camps to dig mass graves, and of course, access to the camps remained closed to the aid organisations.

What was the reaction from Médecins Sans Frontières? First veto from Brussels - prohibiting any release of information, even unofficial, about the fact that our work is being used to make refugee massacres more efficient. Second veto from Amsterdam - prohibiting discussion of the massacres in progress in the Biaro and Kasese camps south of Kisangani.

So what's left of our so-called policy of advocacy? The right to release information confidentially to officials and journalists already perfectly aware of the facts, and already publicly proclaimed by other aid organisations, usually reluctant to speak out? The right to describe the situation of the survivors, without explaining what really happened to them? The right to count the number of corpses for which we supplied body bags?

A glaring example is this account, transmitted by the MSF field desk, of a discussion between the aid organisations and the Vice-Governor of Kisangani. For information, two weeks previously, these authorities were massacring the refugees. We are now collecting eyewitness accounts of the massacre of our patients by the troops following the orders of these same political leaders. The killings continue south of Biaro, which is still off-limits to us.

The Vice-Governor, accompanied by Kamanza (ADFL/ UNHCR liaison officer) and the Mayor of Kisangani, also deplored the poor image given to the Alliance in the outside world, feeling this image to be unfair because it failed to mention the good things done by the Alliance, such as authorising the transit site, providing escorts, ferrying the refugees over to the right bank, and so on. MSF was mentioned as a good example on three occasions after my particularly frank but friendly conversation with the Vice-Governor. They are probably playing a sort of game in denigrating UNHCR while applauding others, aiming to drive a wedge between us, so we shouldn't be too happy to hear about these feathers in the MSF cap. There is certainly more than 'a sort of game' in the dedication employed by the butchers to silence the victims. But to realise this, we have to open our eyes rather than congratulating ourselves over 'frank but friendly' conversations with the monsters who have just exterminated our patients. Butare, 1994, for information The MSF team stands by powerless as the Rwandan militia kills 200 patients in Butare hospital. It was decided to close the mission and accuse the Rwandan authorities of the time. Another team was in Kigali at the mercy of the militia. This team decided not to oppose the approach adopted by the Butare team and stayed in Kigali. I was a doctor in the Kigali team and Rony Zachariah was a doctor in the Butare team. More than ever, I can only thank Rony for having opened his big mouth and enabling me to continue to be able to look at myself in the mirror. [Extract from 'I Keep Quiet, You Keep Quiet, They Die,' Doctor Jean-Hervé Bradol, Director Communications MSF France, Messages (MSF France in-house magazine) April-May 1997 (in French).]

In the field, some members of other sections also shared the belief that there was a need for more freedom and risk-taking in strategizing in these contexts where there is little time for procedure and certainty.

The teams wanted proof of the killings before communicating anything. And that was unacceptable. It's true that there wasn't much proof at that time because there was no access… But anyway, there were stories. We didn't have much direct testimony at that time, but I believe they had a lorry driver who had said something when he came back from the camps, that he'd heard machine gun fire and he'd had to bury people etc… What more did they need? And it all dragged on. There was a discussion in the field about gaining time, evacuating people, etc… All these procedures for the testimony are stupid! I don't agree with them. In my view, you can't create procedures for it. You have

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to match the strategy to the situation. You have to sensitise the authorities at the outset - if they are capable of being sensitised. But Kabila was not. All the same, there were quite a few people who did not agree with this testimony. But the decision had been taken so it had to be applied… There were provocations. etc. I think they should have been more cautious. We did not get direct threats; they were more indirect: passing lorries with passengers chanting anti-foreigner slogans, etc… [Dr.[…], MSF Belgium Operational Director (in French).]

With the benefit of hindsight, MSF USA's analysis pinpoints the collaboration and communication issues that led to strategic failure in this extreme context.

It went beyond quarrels between sections. With MSF Holland it became quarrels between the operations centre and the field, and personal quarrels with Jean-Hervé… I sometimes felt that MSF was descending into farce. But I forgave us these lapses because what lay at the bottom of crises, like the Rwandan crisis, was the expression of a malaise. It showed that we were living through this malaise, that we were not completely disconnected from the events. Here in New York, we felt bad about not being able to get this information out; it was barely mentioned in the newspapers. That's the form our malaise took. In Europe, the malaise took the usual form of controversy but basically it was a way of realising that we were on shaky ground. What was the disagreement? The French had not managed to get into the field whereas the Belgians had, but they didn't want to talk about it. It's not a matter of agreement or disagreement. The sections were not working together; they were not in the same places. As the French were not in the field, it was easy for them to talk. It was more difficult for the Belgians and that was only to be expected. Since 1994, MSF Belgium has demonstrated a certain spontaneity - take the denunciation of genocide at Butare. On the other hand, that section has such a paranoid way of functioning when it comes to poorly timed statements from Paris, that it sometimes withholds information. I don't know if it's a voluntary practice or if it's quite simply that they don't have the reflex to go and get this information whereas with MSF France, it's a kind of instinct. [Joëlle Tanguy, MSF USA Executive Director (in French).]

The cultural embeddedness of strategizing is evident here in the way things are done, in the organizational ethical models of each section, and in the potential for misunderstanding or conflict with other sections.

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From MSFF to MSFB - 11/6/97 16:09

Hello; Today more than 8,000 Rwandan refugees are in Congo along the Zaire river and the Ubangi River, stuck there, between Loukulela and Njundu. Two MSF Teams (6 people in Loukolela and Njundu) are present with these people in these camps, delivering assistance to them. There is also a MSF team, coming down from Bangui, on the river, to deliver food, infusions, and fuel to the 2 camps. We know, from the refugees themselves, from Pierre Mounier who came back last week from Mbandaka, that massacres are still going on, (even USAID officials speak about it), that refugees are pursued by the AFDL soldiers. We fear that these soldiers attempt to cross the river to finish their work on the other side. There is an MSF team on DR Congo side, in Mbandaka, but we do not have any information about what is happening there. Circulation of information has been stopped some weeks ago and still is because in MSF we spend more time discussing internal problems than refugees ones (at least since a few weeks). In the best interests of the refugees, (if anybody cares), and for the security of our teams (which seems to be a main concern for anyone, so, prove it!), I am asking this black out imposed on what is happening in the Great Lakes is stopped and that all information can circulate freely between the different sections on the field and at the head quarter level. Greetings, MP.

From MSFB to MSFF - 12/6/97 18:30

Hello Marie-Pierre;

As you know, there have been several breaches of rules over the last 6 weeks, concerning security rules and advocacy. These have broken the confidence we have in MSF Paris.

I would like to be clear, MSFB is in favour of the "témoignage"... and I would just like to remind you [about] our press briefing of the 25th of April...before the start of the unacceptable attitude of Paris. Therefore I do not understand at all the meaning of your board meeting of the night of 25th April... and the decisions that have been taken there. For us, a MSFF board decision that témoignage is a priority on operations and that a warning of 24 hours on MSF teams (from other sections!!!) is sufficient for MSF (France !!!) to make témoignage is not a sign of an international attitude.

This means that we are asking [for] some positive signs from Paris to review this board decision and to restore the confidence. Up to now, the Directors meetings of last days have not been successful (as far as I understand). Therefore, it is not possible for us to

feed you with detailed info from the field in the Great Lakes region and believe it or not, I regret it deeply.

You might know that this does not mean for us a blockade on Paris… as I am collaborating with Françoise Saulnier on the testimony reports, trying to find an acceptable solution for all of us. The door is still open from our side, waiting for a sign from yours.

Kind regards Dominique. [Extracts from 'Re: Mbandaka,' E-mail exchange between MSF France programme manager and MSF Belgium programme manager, 11 and 12 June 1997.]

The opposite viewpoints that led to not only a crisis of trust between the field and headquarters and a crisis of trust between sections, but an internal organizational crisis revealed at the organizational level the need for organizational learning to strategize in such extreme context. This is also the result of the extreme demands on the organization over the course of several years and the malaise vis-à-vis the powerlessness of the organizational members and the organization in such extreme contexts. An international meeting was held to discuss such malaise and the prioritizing in the field.

This meeting had a limited objective: "identification, inventory, no decision taking". The aim was to resume dialogue, examine contextual changes, and review our situation and activities in Central Africa. The meeting achieved its goals and we took a step forward. Now that the diagnosis has been made, we have the responsibility to act. I hope we continue this dialogue and above all expand it so we can emerge from our impasse…

a) The enormous malaise surrounding "témoignage": We are all agreed on the fact that témoignage is an intrinsic part of our activity, but that we don't inevitably interpret it in the same way in terms of form or content. It is therefore urgent that we debate what we mean by "MSF's duty and action of témoignage" at international level.

b) The dilemma over the urgency-development debate: Amsterdam, Barcelona, and Paris focus on the desperate plight of some of the region's populations. Development programmes are therefore secondary and increasingly limited given the evolution of the context. Brussels does not think that a regional approach is necessary and pursues the national strategies established in '96, namely:

- Rwanda: "We will stay in Rwanda at all costs! In Rwanda as elsewhere, the problem stems from operational criteria; these are not the same from one section to another. Discussing this or trying anything is absurd and a waste of time as long as it has not

been previously clarified" (William) [Claus, coordinateur MSF B]. There is an effective consensus on the inevitable necessity of agreeing on operational criteria. An internal debate on Rwanda is nonetheless URGENT, not to "force out the Belgians" - a presence in this mess is vital - but to decide what the movement as a whole can and should do for endangered populations in Rwanda, given the context and our principles.

- DRC: Our strategy in the former Zaire involves three levels of priority. These are complex programmes, which took years to mount under Mobutu's regime. Given that Kabila's regime is, for the moment, more or less the same, the strategy does not need to be reviewed:

1. Support to the health zones

2. AIDS and Trypanosomiasis

3. Emergencies of all kinds

The Rwandan refugees are therefore in 3. (Vincent) [Janssen, Kisangani Coordinator]. Some participants feel that this strategy poses an enormous fundamental problem and should be re-examined as soon as possible. There is no opposition in principle to the long-term programmes in the region, but they have to take into account the context and constraints, which are currently not sufficiently clear - always these infamous operational criteria. [Extract from 'Draft Memo Following the International Meeting on Central Africa in Brussels', 30 July 1997. Stephan Oberreit, Foundation, MSF France, 1 August 1997 (in French).]

The two most important activities of MSF are medical assistance and advocacy (or speaking out, *témoignage* in French). The four extreme cases studied, and in particular Case 4 which comes last chronologically, reveal the need to redefine the activity of advocacy with its related internalized practices. This critical learning from the extreme is elaborated in Vignette 3.4. (CASE 4).

5.3.4 Learning in and from the extreme

This section includes four vignettes that emphasize how learning at the individual level and organizational learning are integral to extreme context strategizing. These vignettes show learning in the form of acquiring knowledge, sharing knowledge (in particular between field and headquarters) and questioning knowledge and organizational practices. In addition, because of the chronological order of some of the case studies, the following vignettes show how

learning in and from the extreme context led to changes in organizational practices which then became one of the key elements of strategizing in the next extreme context.

5.3.4.1 Vignette 3.1. (CASE 1)

This vignette shows the value of learning in the extreme starting from the sensemaking of the extreme context.

When the new sense made of the extreme context (i.e., genocide) became accepted within the organization, members of the organization, especially the strategists at headquarters, were very critical of MSF's ignorance of the political aspect and the way in which the organization, despite its presence and observations on the ground, did not make contextual analysis an important part of its work. This started at the individual level with strategists criticizing the organization's practices and rules applied in an extreme context for which they were not appropriate. The following quote is a striking example of the critique of this initial failure of sensemaking and indicates a recognized need for double-loop learning.

I think that the analysis of the conflict in Rwanda was poor and not very relevant. Even though we'd been working there for several years, there was no thinking in the group here, and even less internationally, that integrated the work of others to better understand the conflict. As a consequence, MSF did very little to sound the alarm about how dangerous the situation was… We didn't have much of a political understanding of the conflict. That's how I saw it when I started working on the Rwanda Desk and when I went there in June/July 1993. The two Heads of Mission in the field were pretty much doing a good job. I was especially impressed by the Dutch team, which was assisting internally displaced people in the north of the country. From a medical point of view, they had aspects of their program that were very well run and they saved many lives. But at the same time, I felt ill at ease with them because there was little attention paid to the nature and dynamics of the conflict. It was largely a material response to the consequences of the conflict. I don't think we properly took into account the conflict's gravity or severity. […] The real criticism we can make of MSF is that we had a real presence on the ground that gave us the means to have gathered information and data to expose the whole plan and we did not do it. Neither MSF France nor the other sections called a meeting to organise this. [Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF France (in French).]

This kind of questioning of the organization's sensemaking in this disrupted context shows that despite the fact that the organization is one of the best known in the world for responding to emergencies, it was ill-equipped to respond to disruption. Furthermore, it is first-order sensemaking (in the field, where extreme events occur) that led to second-order sensemaking (at headquarters), giving rise to opportunities for organizational learning.

5.3.4.2 Vignette 3.2. (CASE 4)

This vignette shows how, from an extreme context, the organization learns to change practices in the extreme context.

Vignette 1.4. (CASE 4) shows how sensemaking under pressure is critical in extreme contexts for shaping and reshaping strategy. In Case 4, we can see how the sensemaking reshaped the strategy for working with Rwandan refugees.

"- First clear description by local population of the pressure the military are putting on those who are helping the refugees. Population who help refugees will be eliminated by military.

- Told us that there have been incidents of military killing refugees but were unwilling to specify any incidents. Many of those who were speaking to us were reluctant to give us clear information as they were afraid to speak to us. It was clear however, that they were trying to indicate to us what was occurring. [...]

- Refugee teen from Burundi was beaten up after speaking to us. We found this out on return trip from Shabunda. [...] As we drove from village to village, it was clear that the villagers and refugees alike were terrified of the military. In practically every village we stopped in we heard stories or insinuations about what the military was doing to the refugees. The stories ranged from incidents to precise descriptions with locations and numbers of refugees getting killed. In addition, the deadline for helping and sensitisation efforts of the military terrified the local population. On our way to Shabunda we often heard that the military had preceded us in order to tell villagers that we were coming. Also, a little more disturbing, we heard from both the local population and refugees alike that the military followed us. When we pass through, refugees hear that we are in the area, feel safe, and emerge from the forest. The military who are following us then eliminate the refugees who have emerged from the forest." [Extract

from James Fraser, 'Exploratory Mission Report - Kigalube - Catchungu - Shabunda,' beginning of April 1997.]

MSF reversed its medical assistance practices in terms of access to refugees. Instead of going to the refugees, luring them out of hiding and putting them in danger by showing their location with the organization's presence, MSF would ask them to come to the organization for medical assistance on the roads.

> *In the Bukavu area, information on ethnic cleansing did not only become stronger and stronger, it might even have a relation with the work of the humanitarian organisations. UNHCR-ICRC-MSF are working closely together to assist larger groups of refugees who are on the move. When larger groups are found the authorities are aware of this as they monitor our movements very closely. Several times when we wanted to assist a group the area was sealed off for a military operation in order to make the area safe enough for us to go in. When returning there after permission of the authorities, no refugees were found any more. The dilemma, expressed in the last sitrep about our fear that our presence is not improving the chances of the refugees to survive is now even stronger. Are we becoming a risk for the refugees ?*
>
> *It is decided to change our intervention approach towards these groups of refugees. We will encourage people to come to the main roads and spread the news that they will get assistance on the road. [Extract from Sitrep Kivu , from MSF Kigali, Ton Berg, (temporarily in Bukavu) to MSF Amsterdam, MSF Goma, MSF Bukavu, MSF Kigali and Kivu support team, forwarded to other sections, 11 January 1997.]*

5.3.4.3   Vignette 3.3. (CASES 3, 4)

This vignette shows the direct impact of learning from past extreme cases on decision-making and action.

Creating new actions and making mistakes in extreme contexts create learning opportunities that influence positively or negatively the strategizing process later. For example, two and a half years later, in the fourth case study, the organization again calls for military intervention. This time, there is no lengthy debate about whether this action is acceptable to the organization because it is no longer unprecedented. MSF is also clarifying the acceptable way in which such an intervention should take place in order to avoid the drifts and failures of the

French intervention during the genocide in Case 1. Furthermore, the organization has recognized the past failure of the strategic approach implemented in refugee camps run by genocidaires in Case 3 and has implemented a different strategy to avoid reenacting the same context so as not to face the same moral dilemma and repeat this strategic failure.

> *Today the international emergency relief agency Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders called for an immediate international/UN military intervention to set up safe zones in Kivu, Zaire.*
>
> *Since the last of the international aid workers were evacuated 48 hours ago from Goma, 1.2 million Rwandan and Burundian refugees and countless Zairians have been left without assistance and most importantly protection.*
>
> *Dr. Jacques De Milliano, Vice President of MSF International said, "How many pictures of massacres and dying babies will it take before the Heads of State and UN react? The insecurity and chaos in Zaire is so bad that there is nothing doctors and bandages or any other humanitarian assistance can do. I fear that precious time and lives are being lost to diplomacy and international hesitation. If no urgent political and military action is taken the international community will face a repetition of the 1994 catastrophe when a delayed humanitarian action replaced effective protection of the population."*
>
> *The UN safe zones must: ensure protection for refugees and Zairians; ensure access for relief agencies; disarm all warring parties and criminal elements within the zone; and bring an end to impunity by isolating and bringing to justice those responsible for the Rwandan 1994 genocide. By calling for international intervention Médecins S Sans Frontières does not call for a repeat of Operation Turquoise which was politically biased and inadequate.*
>
> *Médecins Sans Frontières also warns, as it did for the past two years, against recreating semi-permanent camps, whose refugees were intimidated and manipulated by the perpetrators of the genocide. The camps cost 1 million $ US per day to run and were used as military and political bases. [Extract from 'Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders Calls for an International Military Intervention to Set Up Safe Zones within Zaire to Prevent Further Human Catastrophe,' Press release MSF Gisenyi (New-York), 4 November, 1996.]*

The extreme contexts of the past expand the range of possibilities for developing strategies in new extreme contexts. Things that seemed out of the question, such as calling for

armed intervention, are no longer discussed ethically, but only in terms of effectiveness or risk. This does not mean that unprecedented action in the past extreme case has become a new practice that has been routinized, but it has become part of the strategic toolbox in extreme contexts. It has been done before and the organization has learned from how it was done and can now use this strategic option if the context demands such an extreme from the organization.

Organizations can also apply lessons from the past in the wrong way. Learning can lead the organization to predict a certain scenario. This prediction supported the organization's argument for armed intervention after the Rwandan government prohibited such a force from entering their country if it were to be deployed. However, predictions are risky and, despite the similarities between extreme contexts, it is difficult to see significant differences in the type of extreme context. Applying such learning without factual evidence in this extreme context put the organization in a very difficult position with stakeholders in terms of credibility and image. In this case, MSF reported a 'shocking' estimate of the number of people who had died in the last three weeks because international organizations could not get access to them.

> *For three days, MSF teams based in Gisenyi and Cyangugu, Rwanda have tried to cross the border to launch aid operations on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Rwandans and Zairians who lack assistance. Each time, MSF representatives have been turned back. To date, the only visits allowed into the Goma region have been guided trips.*
> *Since the last teams were forced to evacuate Goma on 2 November, aid organisations have not been able to reach the populations in danger. This means that:*
> *- the 200,000 Rwandan and Burundian refugees in the Uvira region have been deprived of aid for three weeks;*
> *- the 300,000 refugees in Bukavu and the displaced Zairians have not received assistance for two weeks;*
> *- the 700,000 people who were living in the Goma camps and the inhabitants of neighboring villages have been left on their own for a week.*
> *We know from experience that in similar situations, 10 out of every 10,000 displaced people deprived of aid die every day. We can thus estimate that more than 13,600 people have died since the crisis began 21 days ago (not including deaths from killings), confirming the urgent need to create an international force to set up safe zones. [Extract from 'Are 13,600 Deaths Insignificant?' MSF France Press Release, 8 November 1996 (in French).]*

We were trying to get the message out again. Journalists were calling, saying, "We can't get to the other side, we'd like to know what's going on, what" We were answering that we didn't know, that we didn't have access. Then we said to ourselves, we can extrapolate from our experience with this kind of population in this kind of situation. Working with the medical department, we researched situations most similar to this one and identified the corresponding mortality rates. We chose situations in which a population of hundreds of thousands had had access to aid in a camp for some period of time and were then cut off for three weeks to a month. We applied the Goma mortality rates, projecting them over a week and a month. You can't fault the method in and of itself. We were very careful to say that these were projections. But as soon as the AFP got hold of them, our carefully chosen words became the following: "Here are the mortality rates predicted by MSF…" All our caveats disappeared … In addition, we couldn't foresee that people were leaving with food and water and in good health. [Anne Guibert, MSF France Press Officer (in French).]

If people lack food and water, the situation deteriorates very quickly. That's what the past has shown. The Kurds were very healthy before their migration but in the space of a few days in the mountains, without supplies, they found themselves in an extremely precarious situation. All large population movements very quickly lead to the decline of the health of the people involved. [Dr. Bernard Pécoul, MSF France Executive Director (in French)]

Our analysis was this: if the media can enter and humanitarian organisations cannot enter in the context where camps are completely dependent on food and water from the outside, we have to speak in terms of the worst case. That's my experience. I said that also after several times because we were criticised. I remember in such a type of situation, when we were optimistic in the past ten years, we always were wrong. [Extract from Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président.]

This created what was called internally the 'Figures crisis'.

"the NGOs made ridiculous claims. By predicting a humanitarian catastrophe that would result in a million deaths before Christmas – one that proved to be a figment of

the imagination – they dangerously overstated the case." [Extract from 'Humanitarian Aid Movement in Disarray,' Le Monde (France), 21 December 1996 (in French).]

When people left the camps, plump and well fed, and returned to Rwanda, that was really a slap in the face for the humanitarian agencies and especially those that had spoken out vigorously. I think that was the most interesting year because we had to defend ourselves, which had never happened to us. We had always been these great people, these good-looking doctors (another myth)! We did a huge amount of work with the press and television networks and we held public discussions on the obligation to make pessimistic projections and why it was necessary to make them. We found ourselves in a very useful position because that allowed us to explain the complexities of that kind of analysis, etc. I think we came out of it fine but it was very uncomfortable. [Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director (in French).]

On the one hand, the above quote shows that this failure also offered a unique opportunity to learn, as the organization could recognize and discuss the complex strategizing required in such extreme contexts. Without this freedom to make mistakes, the organization was seen as nothing more than a stereotype. However, it takes hindsight and time to come to this conclusion.

On the other hand, at the time of the events, the crisis was difficult to maneuver. The harsh press criticism of MSF damaged the organization's image and credibility, which is essential when applying the organization's practice of speaking out to bring about change. The change in the media's attitude towards MSF hampered its work and could severely undermine public perception of the organization, not only in the extreme context, but also with the potential to damage the organization's future. As a result, it created a certain fear and risk-averse attitude toward advocacy in the months that followed.

There was nothing for us to do but keep quiet. ... We were like little children being scolded for making arithmetic errors. It was hard but we held on. We said the same things every day. Some French reporters quoted us but you could still see that they didn't believe us. [Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director, MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November-December 1996 (in French).]

For your info, I am sending you an extract of a BBC TV script (by Alex de Waal yet again, about aid agencies and the Kivu crisis) to which we are going to reply. Alex is a

bit of a one-man band, but his criticism has definitely had an (probably long-lasting) impact in media land, particularly in the UK. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT WE DO NOT DROP OUR GUARD. I have read on CCmail [MSF Intranet] that Nicolas Louis has been quoted as saying that hundreds of thousands of people are about to flood into Kisangani (or was it another town?). Once again, we are venturing figures that may turn out to be totally exaggerated. You may not be in the firing line in your country, but we are here, and the UK media is very influential in Europe and the US. We just cannot take a parochial view of this problem. I am urging you to brief your teams in the field to ensure that they do not describe rumour and estimates as fact. I know that all the mass graves of eastern Zaire are not open yet, and that access is still not possible, but the attitude of the media HAS CHANGED, and we cannot go on as if nothing had happened. There are going to be lots of 1996 retrospectives in the media over the next few weeks, and the issue of the responsibility and accountability of aid agencies will be raised again. Please let us know what you can do. [Extract from 'Negative Publicity,' Message from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director to all Directors of Communications, copy to Press Officers in delegate offices, 9 December 1996.]

"That whole numbers thing had a very powerful impact in Holland. There was an internal document written about the statistics. What was missing during that whole period was a sense of perspective and distance. The things that were said were taken out of context. In the end, the context was restored somewhat but at the time, it was a major crisis. I had the impression that afterwards, there was a certain fear of speaking out. And, there was also team security to consider." [Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président.]

I suggested three or four times that we leave and close the mission. I remember talking to Lex (Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director) in Kigali around Christmas. I presented my arguments. My information on the massacres around Chimanga, statements from the people who'd escaped, the fact that we'd been used as bait… I have a very clear recollection of their questions and their thoughts. "Did you hear the killers? Are you sure this was a massacre? You had stories from villagers saying they arrived two days later and killed people but you don't have any eyewitness statements." After the problem with the figures, they were very, very cautious. Things were completely paralyzed! [Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency intersections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).]

The 'Figures crisis' had an important impact on reducing the range of strategic options of the organization in this extreme context and contributed to the divergent opinions on the right strategic path in this case (see Vignette 2.5. (CASES 2 & 4).

5.3.4.4   Vignette 3.4. (CASE 4)

This vignette shows how lessons learned from strategic failures in the extreme shape decision-making and lead to a redefinition of the organization's identity.

Past extreme cases have highlighted several strategic missteps in the organization's responses to moral-strategic dilemmas. In such contexts, ignoring these mistakes is not an option, making it more likely for the organization to learn from them and implement changes to avoid repeating the mistakes when the new extreme context reveals another moral-strategic dilemma. This is not a simple learning loop (simple detection and correction of error), as it usually requires changing the organization's practices or routines to operate appropriately when faced with a moral-strategic dilemma. The critical importance of learning from the extreme in strategizing is emphasized in this vignette.

As described in Vignette 2.5. (CASES 2 & 4) the different interpretations of the right strategic approach to address the moral-strategic dilemmas led to an unprecedented crisis of trust and identity within the organization.

Furthermore, Cases 3 and 4 have shown a tear within the different sections of the organization and between the field and the headquarters. It was a crisis of trust, of meaning behind commitment and action and identity. At the time, it was the worst crisis of confidence in the organization's history, which is clearly palpable in many extracts from the secondary data, such as the following extract from a board meeting in Case 4 three years after the start of the genocide in Rwanda.

> *"Serious and intolerable dysfunction within MSF*
>
> *• Jean-Hervé (Bradol) – very angry – asked that these events be put in context. This isn't a recent dysfunction. For two years, a part of MSF has been determined to hide this kind of information and not take a position. He calls for the board of directors to vote tonight to stop all international exchange until we know the results of the inquiry into what has just happened, with a statement regarding who's accountable and conclusions.*

• Jean-Hervé says he can draft a guideline on how information is suppressed! If you are convinced that refugees are being exterminated by every means possible, how can you propose a 'silent advocacy' strategy in response? This is part of MSF's collective responsibility and is beyond the pale of what we are willing to understand, even while trying to be constructive.

This position led to the killing of several thousand people. He's tried several times to alert the board of directors to a serious problem. Operations blocked the communication. There was an official veto on Sunday and on Friday, Brussels (Eric Goemaere) vetoed the use of the Shabunda report in the form he had.

There are two operational policies that have been out of sync for a long time and a repetition of this kind of event in the Great Lakes area. We have to be able to learn lessons. Let's determine who's responsible and deal with it on the spot so we don't miss the boat yet again.

• Philippe (Biberson) thinks that in the face of this kind of operational pathology, it's almost like having to control a perversion. Doesn't this intent to hide/elude/conceal indeed hide other debates? Today, MSF has a team of communication professionals who know how to define a message and deal with timing. How can this team be paralyzed?

• It seems that fundamentally different policies lead to fundamentally different attitudes. We should lay out these policies and debate the ideas (Odile [Cochetel]).

• For Serge [Stefanaggi], the problem is the mindset that says we should 'save the international movement at any price.' We may be headed towards an international confrontation and have to start over from zero. [...] On Monday morning, Vincent Janssens (MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani) had said that if the teams couldn't work normally, MSF would withdraw and issue a condemnation. That night, he said that MSF would stay and reduce the teams. Who led him to change his mind so radically? Marlène felt very isolated. People were talking about not abandoning the refugees, but we haven't had access to them for four days. A coordinator even said that "We were talking about genocideurs here and we couldn't even manage to condemn their killings!"

• Bernard says that Vincent had been under pressure not to speak and that this new direction followed several phone calls. We know that a team in the field is easily influenced.

• Jean-Hervé thinks there's a policy problem. We have to rely on what the people coming back from the field say. We make mistakes and certainly we'll make more, but it's the intention that counts. Today in some areas, MSF's only policy is to keep things running.

• There are mindsets that oppose speaking out. That can't be tolerated any longer. There has to be a break. We can't ignore this kind of thing. Silence has killed tens of thousands of people (Frédéric [Laffont])

• Brigitte Vasset and Bernard Pecoul refuse to agree that the veto has caused deaths.

Determining responsibility

• *Are there individuals who hushed up this matter because of influence? If that's the case, they must resign or be removed from MSF. We cannot allow such people to hold positions of responsibility and there have to be sanctions. The system has been disrupted and we have to be able to make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen again. This raises issues of accountability and competence (Frédéric [Laffont])*

• *Does hiding information constitute malpractice that should be punished? This raises the question of professional responsibility. If there was bad faith or incompetence, you have to be able to impose sanctions (Françoise Saulnier).*

• *We have a professional responsibility and if we make mistakes, we have to be held accountable. There are incompetent people practicing medicine (Maurice [Nègre])*

• *A doctor's professional responsibility is to not abandon his patients. That doesn't mean anything in this context (Odile [Cochetel])*

• *Let's be careful when we use the term 'malpractice.' The idea of responsibility exists, but it's something else to stigmatize an individual. Who's going to define the misconduct? Going down that road is difficult and complicated. We are responsible-- but as an organisation-for failing to condemn what was happening in Rwanda (Jean-Luc [Nahel]).*

•*Professional responsibility is more important than committing malpractice (Brigitte Vasset.)*

• *Let's try not to mix up objective and irrational arguments. If only one person out of 32 raises the issue of speaking out, that means the others are afraid. I can't understand the others' fear. Today there's a force at MSF putting pressure on people. That leads to a loss of free will. That's what's scares me. How can people stay silent when we don't have any financial interests at stake (Philippe Biberson)?*

The idea of undertaking an inquiry to determine responsibility doesn't seem to me to be a solution. Who would have the right to investigate whom? Let's not make fools of ourselves. On the other hand, let's not hesitate to express our shock and then challenge the process, not people (Philippe Biberson). - The people who voted for the veto didn't do so because they disagreed with the assessment, but out of concern for the teams on site (Bernard Pecoul).

[...] Violate procedures if necessary and recover the will to fight.

• *Procedures have always been what's blocked us, so to find a solution we have to ignore them permanently. When several sections are involved and one says we should speak out, let's not accept a 'security veto,' but rather an 'advance security warning.' We inform the others that in 24 hours, we're going to speak out. We can't give in to the terrorism that says speaking out is no longer possible because there are teams in the field. (Françoise Saulnier).*

• *We have to stop putting advocacy against our presence in the field. Today, when we don't agree, we lack the will to fight. We've got to get it back to be able to win. No one wants to argue anymore and we just chatter during the teleconferences. The person who thinks s/ he's right should take his/her arguments all the way. We are suffering from a certain fatigue and we've got to get our energy back (Bernard Pecoul).*

• It's true that you've got to win over a discouraging number of people when you're convinced of something. You don't even know who you need to talk to in when you're dealing with this cumbersome machine (Martine [Lochin]).

• We don't have a solution, but we've got to struggle (Brigitte Vasset).

• [...] Today, the forest is full of refugees and we don't know who's in charge, operationally, for Kivu. Let's have an in-depth conversation about the region in terms of operations and policy. We can't respond to Kivu if we don't address Rwanda. Kigali is behind the extermination policy and we have to talk about it among ourselves. Let's say loud and clear that the refugees can't go back to Rwanda (Françoise Saulnier).

• Shouldn't it be said that these people must be granted refuge, but somewhere else besides Rwanda? Everyone is giving up, but what we need is to propose something else. We need an initiative that breaks out of our current isolation and negotiates a space where these people will be taken in. Let's pressure the Dutch, the British, and the Americans to find a solution. Let's work with Oxfam, MSF-US, etc.

MSF has to move out of its traditional way of operating and move into a lobbying mode that will allow us to find a solution. If we lead an anti-Kigali campaign and get to the point of pointing fingers, that's different from what we usually do (Bernard Pecoul).

[...] The Board of Directors must take a position

This isn't a matter of criticising the field, but of seeing what's not working at the operational and decision-making levels. It's important that the board take a radical position and that that can help people resist pressure (Christiane).

[...] The motion passed by the Board of Directors: - The Board of Directors of the French section of Médecins Sans Frontières expresses its outrage regarding the veto that prevented us from speaking out on the physical elimination of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire. -It confirms the primary purpose of MSF action, which is focused on defending populations in danger. This purpose must guide MSF's action, giving absolute priority to principles of international consistency and internal functioning. - On the latter point, the Board announces that security vetoes of advocacy actions will no longer be accepted, but only advance security warnings with a deadline to ensure team safety.

[Extract from Minutes of the MSF France board Meeting, 25 April 1997 (in French).] CASE 4

The chronology of Case 4 does not overlap with the other three cases studied, as it focuses on the years 1996 and 1997. This shows that the lessons learned from the extreme cases experienced in 1994-1995 led the different sections to adopt different positions in terms of strategy. Their interpretation of what the organization was and what they should do as members of that organization was different. They therefore reacted differently to the many difficulties encountered in the field, such as the lack of access for refugees who were being manipulated by the authorities and were dying like flies and wanted to respond in opposite ways (e.g.,

speaking out and condemning versus remaining silent). The organization was out of sync in terms of strategy, and, at the organizational level, headquarters strategists were getting in each other's way by trying to impose their way of doing things, some resenting that others were not following the organization's procedures and others declaring that it was time to break procedures. People's feelings were very strong.

However, an attempt was made to put one section in charge.

On Wednesday, November 6, a meeting was held in Amsterdam regarding MSF International's position on the Kivu crisis.
Board members agreed on the following points:
The only way to avoid a bloodbath is to create safe zones so that displaced persons and refugees can obtain access to humanitarian aid while under protection. [...]
Regarding activity in the field, four or five sections are interested in responding to this tragedy. Because there are four or five intervention locations, coordination and communication are critical. The Board decided that MSF Holland would be the back-up section (coordinating section in the ET framework). MSF Holland will assign tasks to the other sections. All evaluation missions are currently under MSF Holland coordination. The Executive Directors and Operations Directors are in contact weekly to ensure regular communication and resolve any disputes. A discrepancy remains at the planning level. MSF Belgium is calling for operations tasks to be divided up because the context is too broad. [Extract from Minutes of the 8 November 1996 meeting of the MSF Belgium Board of Directors (in French).]

Despite this attempt, the organization failed to develop an international strategic response. As a result, the need for unity in the organization's strategizing as a single entity became evident. The ethical models and cultures of each section made it extremely difficult to determine how to unify the organization on a single strategic path or at least coordinate and support each section in its strategic direction.

The purpose of the international board meeting was to clarify differences in the priorities of the different sections and of headquarters versus the field. The strategic directions taken during this extreme case (see Vignette 2.4. (CASES 1, 2, 4)) show that the priorities are clearly different. This gap creates a need for a new internal organizational policy for the internalized practice of advocacy, which is clearly part of the mental models of the organization's members,

but which is expressed differently in the strategizing because of personal moral sense and culturally-embedded ethical models.

> *The differences between sections were discussed. Although fundamental differences were not stressed, the discussion brought to light differences over the philosophy of témoignage. MSF-F is inclined to give it greater priority because of its publicity value. Moreover, intervention criteria in contexts of crisis do not appear to stem from the same logic.*
>
> *MSF-B tends to focus on delivering aid directly to the victims and maintaining a presence in order to exploit any change in the situation. On the other hand, MSF-F will be particularly careful to avoid an inadmissible situation. Moreover, MSF-B places great emphasis on long-term preventive measures. That is why, unlike other sections, we were active and had a strong presence in the Congo ten years before the crisis.*
>
> *The unilateral decision to remove the "security veto" taken at the French Board Meeting of April 97 was discussed. The administrators insist on the fact that external communication is a separate issue. That decision was taken in order to allow MSF to continue its work of denunciation. The Board was aware of deliberately jeopardising the rules of the international movement, so that the movement could fall back on other, more appropriate rules.*
>
> *However, Marleen stresses that field workers are aware that they are risking their lives. She therefore finds MSFF's decision incomprehensible, because it erodes both their trust and security. She can't see anything positive emerging from such a decision. Françoise Saive, returning from the field, also stresses that such a decision reveals a lack of trust in the field. The field is willing to engage in témoignage, but cannot be forced to do so to the detriment of its security.*
>
> *In conclusion, Jean-Marie Kindermans stresses the importance of dialogue between the sections - daily, nonhierarchical discussions - and of restoring trust between Boards, field-posts and Operations Centres. Inter-section thinking on témoignage and the need to professionalise it should continue.*
>
> *The meeting took note of immediate projects in this domain: workshops in Brussels in October and a vote at December's IC for a new international "Code of Conduct" for témoignage. [Extract from "Médecins Sans Frontières, Summary of the Board Meeting," 12 and 13 September 1997 (in French).]*

Multiple perspectives on a specific moral-strategic dilemma can help create new ways to respond to such difficulties in extreme contexts but when these perspectives lead to miscommunication, and opposite strategic paths, the organization is at an impasse and we observe strong emotional reactions in organizational members who can lose their identification with their organizational roles and therefore their place in the organization, as evidenced by the resignations of several organizational members in the various cases.

Témoignage - here's a brief recap of recent developments: The MSF France Board meeting in April unilaterally challenged, i.e.

with no international consultation, the témoignage security veto that applies to all sections. The Board announced that from now on the security veto would be replaced by a 24-hour security warning to ensure the safety (in other words the withdrawal) of the teams. The IC [International Council] sitting of 1 May refused to ratify this unilateral abrogation and reaffirmed that the security veto rule still applied. Moreover, the IC asked the DGs to examine whether a change to the existing rule was appropriate. In terms of témoignage, the implicit message from the Paris Board seems quite counter-productive. The incidents that followed did not help matters at all. The emergence of the Shabunda report and "MSF accuses" splashed all over the front page of Libération (20 May 97) was like a bomb exploding at the centre of MSF.

The Board's evaluation of repercussions in the field benefited from the return of Mit Philips (Kinshasa). The teams first heard the news on local radio stations; the message "MSF accuses" was repeated every fifteen minutes by RFI in Kinshasa, which was under attack from the Alliance at the time. For Mit Philips, this "clash" is inexcusable. The situation is all the more unacceptable because it has jeopardised the safety of the teams and destroyed all trust between local staff and the operations centre. The staff thought that giving the field prior notification in the event of témoignage was an established rule. The field makes a heartfelt plea for the professionalisation of témoignage and its harmonisation with the policy of the international movement, because it is obvious that different sections apply different strategies when it comes to communication.

On this topic, Daniel De Schrijver thinks it is important to stress that the "clash" with Paris is not a "mere" professional failing but stems from a far more serious and fundamental problem - a blatant intentionality. Agnès Delahaie also draws attention to the impact of increasing insecurity is having on recruitment. Fewer candidates are

coming forward; some delay their departure in order to "see what happens", others resign. Field workers are neither professional mercenaries nor pawns who can be moved around according to circumstance and left to deal with the fallout from the disastrous communication strategies devised by operations centres.

Anouk Delafortie expresses concern about the "international memory", and particularly the absence of note taking or recording of what is discussed at international teleconferences. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that the same problems keep cropping up…

Eric's comments on various incidents: since the start of the crisis, MSF has done its best in terms of assistance but has not been efficient in terms of protection. Now, the recent témoignage might not have been done in a very professional manner but it turned out to be very efficient.

In any case, it helped to save about 50,000 refugees and led to the US finally acknowledging the reality of the massacres. Several international authorities also took more notice after that report.

However, what did it cost? MSF admits it made a huge communications blunder over Kinshasa (Kigali was informed that the Shabunda report was coming out). It thinks témoignage is more important than the international movement, even if that implies increased insecurity and the withdrawal of teams. The IC's power of arbitration must be strengthened; the IC will have to adopt a firm and unambiguous position in September.

Philippe B. suggests setting up a workshop in September, conducted on the case study model - the Great Lakes crisis in this instance - to examine the issue of témoignage and the ways it is approached. The workshop would include members from the IC, Boards, Operations Departments and the operations centres of different sections. Its aim would be to produce a study. Although MSF sections have the same philosophy, there is little room for public testimony in operational terms.

Now vital questions should not be ignored. Does témoignage endanger the missions? Does it help the political process? Does it endanger populations? Its integration into complex crises like the Great Lakes presents obvious difficulties, but if we are to come to grips with the problematic it might be better to deconstruct the case rather than produce theoretical statements or expositions, to work on the material so that we all learn the same lessons from it and forge a "common culture". The MSF group possesses all the elements necessary for such a debate. We are one of the few organisations to

have taken the discussion forward (re-examination, in-depth analysis) and to have practiced témoignage. There is enough material for us to move forward together so that everyone emerges from this crisis with a more mature outlook.

We must revitalise this debate internally and between sections. Odile thinks it sounds a bit like a high mass and wonders if so many participants might not dilute the process. Odysseas thinks that we should be wary of the attraction of conflict. We all agree on the main principles and if such serious conflicts exist, it is because political and cultural approaches vary greatly from one section to another. It therefore seems pointless to talk of principles but essential to examine the nature of these different approaches (perhaps with the help of people from outside MSF).

Bernard agrees that the differences are essentially political and cultural. All that can be modified by a periodic exchange of views and not by declarations. Let's get away from caricature. Let's compare different approaches, analyses and methods and learn from each other.

When a problem arises, we should see what reactions and lessons we can learn from it. What methods do we use for témoignage and which of them have produced the best results? (Alain) If we are to create an MSF culture, there should be broad participation by MSF field workers (François). Input from those who were directly affected by the problem is essential (Jeroen).

There are many ways of approaching the matter and we should drop the pretences and the clichés. Témoignage poses a permanent problem, a fact that can't be disguised. We can't exempt ourselves from accepting the commitment and the risks (Françoise)… [...] MSF is still collecting testimony on the refugees' odyssey. A document has been prepared and we want to use it to put pressure on major political players. We have still not agreed on how to use it. There is resistance from the Dutch section; they say that as these massacres are now common knowledge, it is not worth doing anymore... What are the consequences when humanitarian organisations speak out? Marie-Pierre does not think the report's publication led to major security problems. Médecins du Monde in Goma does not see much confirmation either way, when all existing factors are taken into account. There were attacks before and after the report's publication and tension in the area is very high. On Kisangani - no particular consequences. [Extract from Minutes of the MSF Belgium Board meeting, 13 June 1997, (in French).]

This failure also revealed the limited strategic authority of MSF's International Council (IC). In fact, the rules established by the IC have sometimes simply been ignored, and the need to strengthen the power of the IC is recognized here when section headquarters strategists, such as executive directors, disagree. The movement was built around the independence and freedom of each section (or operational center) – beginning with the French section – to manage its field operations as it saw fit. However, the pitting of one section against another or the field against headquarters, which led to such a loss of trust, was a first.

We see clearly that the organization emphasizes learning from the strategic failures and crises experienced due to internal divisions. One of the main learning areas has been the questioning and redefinition of advocacy and related internalized practices. Indeed, advocacy is one of the core principles of the organization and, if one looks at the history of the organization, it is the main reason for its creation. Indeed, the founders of MSF wanted to be able to speak out about what they were seeing and experiencing in the field, and not turn medical assistance into 'band-aids on war wounds' without drawing attention to the causes of medical need.

MSF has experienced some stormy weather in terms of témoignage in recent months, including a series of denunciations and accusations over the tragic plight of Hutu refugees in the former Zaire. We cannot ignore the flood of frustration, bitterness and accusation, nor everybody's incessant questioning: what MSF témoignage? What is it for? Who is it addressed to? What methods do we use? What is its relevance? What causes us to do it and what stops us from doing it? And what about security??

MSF practices three forms of témoignage:

- Information explaining the delivery of aid in a critical situation (MSF is dealing with malnutrition).

- Denunciation (malnutrition is due to the displacement of populations).

- Accusation (these displacements are caused by the authorities in charge).

It is this last form that often causes problems (and which will be chiefly dealt with below), particularly when it is public and jeopardises action in the field (limitation of the humanitarian space) and the security of the teams. I am suggesting several reference points, taken from our original position and International Council texts, so that we can initiate a discussion that should result in a better definition of témoignage, as well as better coordination between HQ and the field in this respect. The subject concerns us all, whether through our responsibilities or our sensibilities, whether we work in the

field, the capital or the operations centre, whether we are medical staff, sanitation specialists or work in human resources.

The main idea behind this document is the protection of témoignage, which remains one of our most relevant and original modes of action, as long as we do not abuse it or divert it from its original objectives.

It is a broad domain and the present document is certainly not exhaustive. It has two purposes. The first is to create a breathing space after our media exposure over the last few months and the fallout from the "Libération episode". The second is to initiate an in-depth examination which should result in a (re)definition of témoignage at an International Council debate in September. We should also note that Thierry Coppens, Head of Research at MSF-B, is organising a seminar and workshops on MSF's témoignage policy for mid-October '97.

This instalment is the result of a decision taken at the May management committee. It has been put together hurriedly, as always, with the help of Brigitte Gaignage and Sabine Vanhuysse (document research), Monia (typing) and Edouard Vercruysse (editing). The texts are in French and English; a translation is planned. Give your critical faculties free rein and let's have your informed comments. Send it all to Thierry Coppens before the end of August '97. [Extract from 'MSF Témoignage in Crisis?' Internal document, Coordination Alex Parisel, June 1997 (in French).]

This organizational discussion of the meaning of advocacy in 1997 was clearly a milestone. Two years later, in 1999, it was primarily for its advocacy work that the organization received the Nobel Peace Prize.

More generally, the organization took stock of the extreme contexts it faced in the four cases studied here. The moral-strategic dilemmas the organization faced and the range of potential actions and limitations of the organization were discussed openly in a platform different from the regular meetings. MSF organized a symposium.

What lessons can be drawn from this series of failures? Must we resign ourselves to impotent medical power? Is withdrawing the only way to show opposition? Or should we stay to care for the most deprived, in spite of everything? How far should warlords be allowed to go in diverting aid to their own coffers? And above all, what position should we take faced with a political power also in disarray, but one still capable of manipulation? How can we elude its traps and avoid becoming the tool of its hidden

strategies? How can we end the confusion of roles between humanitarian aid providers and politicians, when the former are used – to excess - to disguise the inaction of the latter?

These are some of the questions raised during a recent symposium organised by Médecins Sans Frontières in Paris on the topic of humanitarian responsibility in honour of the group's 25th birthday.

Over the years, as the humanitarian movement has become more professional and media-savvy, its role has changed. The initial goal of easing individual suffering has given way to a new ambition: controlling collective destinies. The humanitarian aid movement has been assigned the responsibility of protecting populations in danger, a collective security task previously assumed by national governments.

[...] Jean-Christophe Rufin and Alain Destexhe also note that in the recent Kivu crisis, humanitarian aid "was manipulated" in the service of "a French policy aimed at aiding former Rwandan genocidaires and supporting the Mobutu regime. [Extract from 'Humanitarian Aid Movement in Disarray,' Le Monde (France), 21 December 1996 (in French).]

As we stand before the US government once again, telling you what we've seen, we cannot deny our frustration that our past efforts in this regard have been made without response. In fact, humanitarian agencies are often asked to put ourselves on the line - not only in the field, but at home - to tell governments about massacres, health catastrophes, and the general state of threatened populations. Respectfully, we ask you for an official and systematic way to address conflict together so that our hard-won information does not fall on deaf ears. As long as politicians do not take the first line of responsibility for establishing the truth, both at-risk populations and humanitarian actors remain endangered. Lack of impunity has a price, whether paid in political terms or human life. But the pursuit of truth is not the sole province of humanitarian agencies. Given the choice, we would prefer to be in the field saving lives and providing medical care to people rather than compiling reports and speaking about them, even before such an esteemed audience. We look forward to your leadership in the region, which we are sure will save lives in the future. [Extract from 'Statement of Doctors Without Borders For the Hearing at the House of Representatives House Committee on International Relations,' delivered by Marcel Van Soest, Epidemiologist, November 5, 1997.]

Another learning point concerns the limits of what the organization can do and accept in an extreme context. This threshold refers to the ethical models of organizations and the moral sense of individuals. This is indeed a moral issue. Learning has also brought the realization that humanitarian aid cannot supplement a political solution to a political issue. The desire to do the right thing or to save human lives should not blind the organization to the power plays that are taking place in the field. The following quote shows a certain naivety. Ironically, the naivety of the organization was highlighted at the very beginning of the first case study, when the organization failed to understand the context appropriately and immediately recognize the genocide in progress.

> *We compromised our impartiality too much. We were always there where people wanted us to be for a very specific motive: to control populations, confine populations. We were always walking into some kind of trap. We have a kind of cult of access - we are humanitarians, therefore we must have access. Now in the Great Lakes region, everything came down to manipulation and displacement of populations, to regrouping, purification, screening, separation of populations, etc. We did what they told us to do. I think we always found it too difficult to say no. I believe that MSF Belgium's persistence in wanting to stay in Rwanda, to accompany the repatriated, etc., was too obvious and the Rwandan government found that very easy to manipulate. They knew that MSF was too interested in staying for operational reasons, institutional, and sentimental reasons. They knew that we would not leave, that they could make us swallow all the lies, that they could keep us waiting as long as they liked, denying us access for much of the time, then letting us in when they felt like it - we were ready to swallow anything. [Dr. Philippe Biberson, MSF France President (in French).]*

Those in power in the field have used MSF's strong commitment to staying in the field based on a moral choice to their advantage. And when MSF's advocacy strategy came close to becoming a problem, they found ways to avoid it. For example, when it became likely that a military intervention was going to be launched following MSF's appeal, which drew international and press attention, Kabila, a rebel leader, declared a three-week cease-fire and controlled the message on the international stage.

> *Media coverage of MSF's call for international military intervention and safe zones then eclipsed by Banyamulenge's call for 3 weeks unilateral cease-fire. [Extract from 'MSF International Sitrep Rwanda 007,' 5-6 November 1996.]*

First interview was BBC, to be sure that the BBC was the first to put it on the air and that our wording was the right one. In a press conference people can change things. When the press conference is finished, on the minute, the BBC put it on the air. 20 minutes later the BBC got a call. From Kabila! He said that he was going to organise a humanitarian corridor... and the BBC journalist, who was quite new, come to us and said: "You are putting pressure internationally now" - "Ils éclipsent le message" (they blocked our message with their own). That's the news: "Rebels agree to a ceasefire, no international intervention needed anymore". So you see how Kagame is behind the scene. Because how can Kabila respond so fast directly to the BBC with a satellite phone? Amazing ! [Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président.]

Although MSF reiterated the need for an armed intervention, it did not take place.

The vignettes that have been detailed here are the stories synthesized from the data which, taken together, provide a more detailed understanding of extreme context strategizing. They bring to life the experiences of the extreme context in the field and at headquarters and make visible the organizational practices that are at the heart of strategizing.

5.4 Dynamic model of extreme context strategizing

In my findings presented with thirteen illustrative vignettes, I have highlighted four constitutive sub-processes that together shape the strategizing process in an extreme context and represent the sensemaking, decision-making, doing and learning that happen in an extreme context. Each of these processes are made in the confrontation between the individual and the organizational levels. In this interplay, I have identified 1) *sensemaking under pressure*, 2) *ethical decision-making*, 3) *prioritizing practices* and *creating new pathways* and 4) *learning in and from the extreme context*.
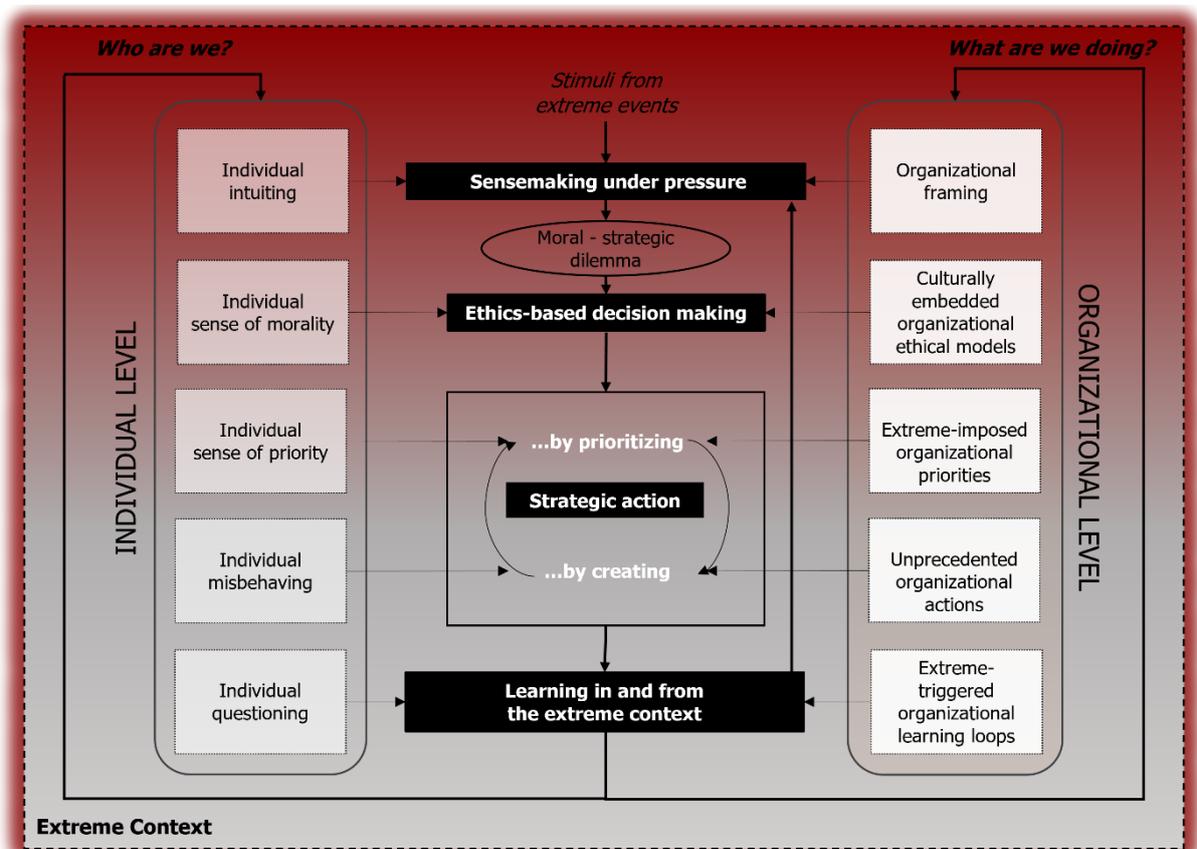
FIGURE 23: Multi-level model of strategizing in extreme context
Source: own figure

The model presented above is the result from abductive reasoning, as described in 4.3.1.2. It represents the strategizing process in extreme contexts in the sense of what has been labelled 'emergency contexts' or 'disrupted contexts' (see Hällgren et al., 2018). It does not represent strategizing in 'risky contexts' where organizations are exposed to potential extreme events that have not occurred (see Hällgren et al., 2018).

Extreme context strategizing is a dynamic and iterative process that is shaped at the individual level and organizational level by a constellation of practices that respond to the unique challenges and risks inherent in the extreme context. Although the model may seem very sequential, it is important to bear in mind that extreme context strategizing is shaped in the network of the four organizational processes and their practices highlighted in this model. One of these processes often triggers another, which is what the arrows represent in the model. However, the processes that make up strategy in an extreme context inform each other and sometimes they overlap.

5.4.1 Sensemaking under pressure

When an extreme event occurs and the organization is suddenly immersed in an extreme context (as defined above), the first process to be shaped is *sensemaking under pressure*. In disrupted contexts, such as the one showcased in Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1), the organization often has to deal with a cosmology episode. A cosmology episode brings chaos and sensemaking brings back order. The members of the organization, as human beings, cannot resist chaos for long and a form of new order must be made quickly. However, in restoring order quickly by giving meaning to the situation, mistakes may be made. In both Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1) and Vignette 1.2. (CASE 2), we see failed sensemaking and sensegiving in a disrupted context before sense-remaking happens. In Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1), the correct meaning comes from a field worker who shares this new sense with headquarters and this new meaning then becomes socially accepted. However, in Vignette 1.2. (CASE 2), it is through a strategist at headquarters that the correct meaning is brought and shared. This means that sensemaking under pressure is not a one-way street from the field to headquarters but a dialogue between the two. We see how the dialogue between first-order sensemaking (in the field where extreme events occur) and second-order sensemaking (at headquarters) shapes *sensemaking under pressure.* Since sensemaking precedes action, this dialogue is particularly critical in the process of strategizing in extreme contexts.

MSF field workers at the time were not used to questioning the context or being encouraged to interpret the cues they received in the field. They were not trained to do this, and there were no internalized practices in place to do so. It was clearly not part of the organization's norms. This raises an important question when looking back at the creation of the organization since, (as described in detail in 2.2), the MSF movement was created not only to heal wounds but also to bear witness to the context and advocate for change. This requires an accurate assessment of the context. It also shows the lack of organizational learning, as already highlighted by the criticism made at MSF's French headquarters during a board meeting, ironically two weeks before the genocide in Rwanda began:

> *"There's a kind of 'travel agency' mentality. They go to one place and if they don't like it, they move on … they give no thought to the political aspects: the right to asylum, why people are fleeing, the nature of the enormous conflict between Hutu and Tutsi." [Extract from Minutes of the Board Meeting of MSF France, 25 March 1994 (in French).]*

This highlights the importance to demystify the 'savior' appearance of the organization and shows the immense gap between preparedness of the organization for emergency contexts and total confusion in disrupted contexts. Somehow, the past of the organization and arguably the primary reason for its creation got forgotten and the critical organizational activity of scanning and understanding the environment to not only put bandages on war wounds but make a real change was forfeited.

As described in detail in the vignette, in the field, and then at the headquarters, MSF workers did not realize the meaning and scale of the extreme events that were taking place. However, sense-remaking always followed a failure in sensemaking. In that process, the data have showed that sensing and intuiting and integral parts of sensemaking. For instance, Vignette 1.3. (CASE 3) demonstrates the power of intuition in the sensemaking process. Further, sensing and feeling strong emotions appear throughout the narratives of the field workers immersed in the extreme context. As a matter of fact, sensemaking under pressure revealed moral-strategic dilemmas in all four extreme contexts studied. This recurrence of moral-strategic dilemma and its importance explains why it is part of the model for extreme context strategizing.

5.4.2 Ethical decision-making in response to moral dilemmas

5.4.2.1 *Ethical decision-making*

Ethical decision making was identified as second process shaped in extreme context strategizing. Vignette 2.1. (CASE 1), Vignette 2.2. (CASE 3), Vignette 2.3. (CASE 2) and Vignette 2.4. (CASES 1, 2, 4) show that for each case studied, *sensemaking under pressure* reveals a moral-strategic dilemma. In other words, this study has shown that sensemaking activities lead to the identification of an ethical issue. It is one result of making sense and enacting the context that the organization will be able to understand the ethical issue at hand which initially becomes a paralyzer for strategic action. This was observed in the confusion and numerous debates that failed to reach a consensus on a strategic direction, because the organization's members were unable to find one that was both adapted to the extreme context and respectful of all the organization's core principles. This stalled action in many instances. In fact, a dialogue was taking place between the individual's sense of morality and what is named here 'culturally embedded organizational ethical models'. The former is the moral expression of the agent who is confronted with the moral-strategic dilemma. The latter is the way of framing moral issues in the organization which is subject to the specific culture of each section

(or operational center) and to the cultural differences in the field and at headquarters. Ethical decision-making is not a mere rational process because the data has shown that sensing, intuiting and creating play key roles.

The three paths for strategic action described here are therefore the direct result of an ethical decision-making scheme. When it was realized that, because of the encountered moral-strategic dilemma, it was impossible to continue operations in the field (i.e., in the extreme context) by following the organization's routinized processes, strategic action consisted in one of three alternatives in ethical decision-making.

The first is called '*dilemma-driven doing by creating*' because this strategic path involves thinking and acting outside the box, literally creating new ways of doing things beyond the organization's boundaries. The second is called '*dilemma-driven doing by prioritizing*' because responding to a dilemma usually means setting a priority and, therefore, making a sacrifice. The third was generally considered as a last resort by the organization examined in this study, due to its extremely active and morally motivated culture. This alternative is renunciation and is still part of *dilemma-driven doing by prioritizing*. In this case, the organization does not simply make a sacrifice, it does not compromise its identity. Instead, the organization foregoes activities in the extreme context, waiting for a change of context to resume its activities. Priority is given here to the identity of the organization as a whole; if the organization deems that it is too limited in context to operate according to all its principles, it makes a statement and attempts to force a change of context by leaving the field. The organization generally evolves from one strategic option to another, creating an iteration between setting priorities and creating.

5.4.2.2   Creating new pathways

Several factors fueled a creative process driving strategic action in new directions for the organization. This creative process went beyond an act of improvisation since it led to new ways to respond in the extreme context and practices that became part of the organization's toolbox for responding to other extreme contexts.

The first factor identified in the studied extreme cases is strong moral emotions. At the individual level, a member of the organization will act in a creative way to follow its sense of morality. This was visible when individual members of the organization 'misbehaved' in the

sense that they did not act according to organizational procedures, did not request permission or discussed the strategic action before implementing it, as showcased in the following example.

> *"The day after I arrived, we had a big meeting with the staff. The Tutsi staff asked to leave the country as they were fearful for their lives. I still didn't really understand the context, of course, as I had just arrived. They were really scared for their lives and they wanted to leave. I saw in their eyes that they were really desperate. I said to them "OK, tomorrow, I am going to evacuate you." Then I had a big fight with my logistician because he didn't want to be part of that. The next day, I lined up three big Land Rovers – perhaps naively because I thought that I would manage to evacuate the local staff. I had the three cars and there were six of them because they had their husbands and their wives and all their children and all the luggage they could carry. We stuffed the three cars. On the border in the town of Butare — we didn't even leave Butare — we were stopped. One of the cars was taken away from us. All of the people in that car were scared to stay in Butare. So, I said, "Look, let's get in the other cars, leave some luggage behind and get in." You never saw so many people in two MSF cars — they were almost on top of each other. So we passed a lot of roadblocks — scary stuff. I had already radioed Bujumbura. They had sent cars to the border to pick up the passengers… So we arrived at the border and there were men with knives and machetes around the cars. You could not see who was in the cars because the steam from their mouths had put steam on the windows — but obviously, there were a lot of people inside. They refused to let the Rwandans cross because they had no papers, etc. I talked and talked and talked to the border guy and offered him money but he wouldn't let them go. Earlier, in Butare, two priests who wanted to leave had joined our convoy in their own car. The priests became very handy at the border. I went to them and said, 'it's your turn, please help me.' The priests went to the guy and talked about Jesus and what Jesus did, and asked whether he believed in Jesus and so on — he talked for 15 minutes. And the guy said, 'ok, let them go.' So the priests saved their lives." [Wouter Van Empelen, Emergency Cell, MSF Holland, in Rwanda in April 1994.] CASE 1*

The above example relies on the felt sensation that something is just wrong because the member of the organization, as he recognized himself, did not understand the context at the time of making this creative decision.

At the organizational level, 'misbehaving' occurred when moral emotions and ethical models embedded in the culture of a section clashed with the decision-making of others. Some MSF sections (or operational centers) have vetoed others or strongly criticized their decision-making. We note that there was a long period of debate where each section explained its understanding of what the organization should do in the extreme context and this was marked by persuasion. Each section wanted to persuade the other that it had the right solution to the dilemma facing the organization. However, at a certain point, persuasion was abandoned and we witnessed an imposition instead. Headquarters imposed a certain strategic direction on the field, or one section imposed certain rules or decisions on others. It is clear that in an organization that relies heavily on collective decision-making, this change has created a great deal of tension and ultimately a crisis of trust that has shaken the organization to its very core.

The second factor revealed by the data is the will to transform the context into another type of extreme context that is easier to manage – for example, by changing from a disrupted context to an emergency context – or into a context that can no longer be described as extreme. MSF's call for armed intervention was a first not only for the organization, but for all humanitarian organizations worldwide. Calling for the use of force is certainly not expected from a neutral organization that medically treats the different sides of a conflict without discrimination.

"We said: "Even if it means supping with the devil, MSF is calling for armed intervention." [Dr. Philippe Biberson, President, MSF France from May 1994 (in French).] CASE 1

Indeed, Vignette 2.1. (CASE 1) shows that the extreme context leads the organization to be creative by strategizing beyond the organizations' principles defined in its Charter which is what links all MSF entities worldwide. In other words, the Charter is the *raison d'être* of the organization. The organization was in uncharted territory and faced communication issues, internal debate over which actions to take or even not to take. Several MSF members stated that the organization was lost in terms of strategizing. The organization ultimately struggled with the question: *What is the right thing to do?* The decision-making at the time started from a place of empathy, feeling for what others were going through, the victims and the field workers. It was not clear what the short-term and long-term effects of the creative path will be on the organization but the moral sense of the members of the organization as well as the *raison* behind the *raison d'être* of the organization which created the organization – the unique combination

of an assistance mandate and an advocacy mandate, being able to speak out for a bettering of the situation – became the leitmotiv for unprecedent actions. The extreme context of genocide and the moral-strategic dilemma that accompanies it prompted the organization to develop a creative strategic approach. Despite a lack of consensus, there was clear common objective, which was to change the context and, ultimately, put an end to the genocide. The organization was disrupted by the extreme context, and creative solutions were used to return the disrupted context to one of emergency, to which the organization is accustomed.

The third dilemma-driven reason for creative strategic action in extreme contexts is the failure in the external system the organization depends on to operate. Indeed, the studied organization, MSF, operates withing a specific network in emergency contexts. However, disrupted contexts not only disrupted MSF, but other organizations which are part of the system for humanitarian work. Many practices of the organization which shape the strategic course of the organization depend on this system. For instance, collaboration with authorities, other NGOs or recognized international actors such as UNHCR which all have specific responsibilities and practices complementing each other. For instance, UNHCR's practices are aligned with its mission to protect refugees, in some contexts being primordial for MSF to provide the medical assistance to this population. When other stakeholders fail to fulfil their mandate, whether governments, local authorities, NGOs or UN agencies, MSF has usually first relied on its institutionalized practices by speaking out, denouncing and demanding that they fulfil their mandate. However, when this was ineffective or impossible, the organization created new ways to change the extreme context as discussed above or fulfilled the unfulfilled mandate themselves. For instance, Vignette 2.4. (CASES 1, 2, 4) has shown that when members of this network of practices fail in their own mandate in the extreme context, MSF responded creatively in taking on roles that were not its own or even created another organization that could do so when it was simply impossible to do for MSF.

To summarize, once the moral dilemma had been experienced, three factors led to the use of creativity in strategizing. Firstly, the strong moral emotions felt by members of the organization, who sometimes expressed feelings of helplessness, frustration and even anger in the face of human suffering and death, gave rise to new modes of operation and sometimes reprehensible individual behavior. These behaviors occurred in the field, regardless of authorization or collaboration with headquarters, due, for example, to the time pressure of trying to save lives. It also occurred between sections, deceiving others, withdrawing from collaboration or blocking their strategic action. Secondly, the organization, anxious for a change

of context, made creative strategic attempts because it desperately wanted to operate in a more manageable and less disruptive environment. Thirdly, the failure of the wider system in which the organization depends on collaboration with other organizations that are part of the landscape of practices. In this landscape, when other stakeholders did not fulfil their mandates and essentially do their part for strategic success, the organization was led to take unprecedented steps to accomplish tasks that were not its own. That is because, boundaries and are crossed in the external extreme context that does not only concern the organization under study here but it is much larger that.

Underlying the creation of new ways, sometimes well beyond the organization's boundaries, was the establishment of priorities, even if these were not formulated in the organization's archives. A choice was made to emphasize one of the organization's core principles or activities over others. This stems from priority setting with the creation of new practices enabling the imposition of what the section or individual deemed to be the priority, which explains the relationship between '*prioritizing practices'* and '*creating new pathways'* in the proposed model for extreme context strategizing (**FIGURE** *23***Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**).

In extreme context strategizing, it is not clear what might tip the balance towards success or failure. Often, the organization realizes that relying solely on its practices will probably lead to failure and chooses to create new means to simply have a chance of succeeding. To define the type of potential success, the organization had to set priorities in the face of a moral-strategic dilemma.

5.4.2.3 Prioritizing practices

Faced with a moral-strategic dilemma, priority may be given to changing the extreme context. This goes in line with creating unprecedent actions for changing the context, as discussed in the previous paragraph. Even if this contradicts one of its fundamental principles, priority is given to changing the situation, stepping up the action in the extreme to finally step out of it.

> *"MSF B is prepared to continue its operations in the Great Lakes region because a major crisis is underway there. The populations are in a precarious situation, it is a post-genocide situation and the conflict continues. Our duty of assistance and advocacy*

is to be close to this kind of population, even if assistance and advocacy don't always work hand in glove … In difficult circumstances, aggravated by the security situation, it is up to us to find a way to carry out our mission. I think the other MSF sections share this view" [Extract from Message from MSF Belgium to Kigali to MSF Belgium, Spain and Holland officials, 28 January 1997 (in French).] CASE 4

In each case studied, it happened that the organization's main mandates or activities clashed at certain points in the extreme context. For example, the organization's medical assistance mandate and advocacy mandate, with their own practices, could not go hand in hand in the extreme context, as is normally the case for the organization. Another example is the principle of the organization's independence. In addition, the issue of worker safety in the field adds a new layer of complexity in a context where extreme events do not occur just once at the launch of the extreme context, as may be the case for many disasters qualified as extreme contexts but occur several times with new disruptions due to unpredictable incidents in the field.

When this confrontation occurs, organizations have to decide what takes priority. According to the SAP perspective, practices are the main drivers of strategy, but when practices come into conflict with each other, prioritization becomes inevitable. Giving priority to one mandate over the other has enabled the organization to remain in the extreme context, and to operate in a scaled-down way in relation to its original mandate. Nevertheless, it also happens that prioritizing one mission leads to the creation of an action that can broaden the organization's mission by taking it on new ventures. This creative action can lead to the definition of new priorities, whether in the case of success or failure.

Although prioritizing was usually successful for the organization to keep operating in the extreme context, the strategy of being in the field at all costs has shown its limits time and again in these extreme contexts. For example, this happened with the change in collaboration with the ICRC when MSF gave up its independence, its name and its voice to be in the field. Clearly, there is a need to create new ways of doing things in disrupted contexts, as relying on internalized practices and routines is simply not sustainable. However, it is essential to define thresholds at both the individual and organizational levels. In fact, these thresholds are not primarily related to safety and security, contrary to what one might expect, but they concern moral issues and confront organizational ethical models and the moral sense of individuals.

As explained before, dilemma-driven ethical decision making happens in the iteration between setting priorities and creating. Further, at several times during such iteration, the organization and/or its members come to finally accept its limits, as emphasized in the following quote.

"We left with our tails between our legs but, in any case, we would inevitably have understood that there was no way of working in this country while respecting our criteria of independence, impartiality, etc. We could not have continued working like that." [Nicolas de Torrente, MSF France coordinator in Rwanda, from August 1994 to March 1995 (in French).] CASE 2

Nonetheless, this notion of letting go was one of the most challenging things that was observed in the strategizing and it caused much division. At the organizational level, renouncing as described was either not a question or usually a last resort. At the individual level however, it happened more often. In Vignette 2.2. (CASE 3), the field coordinator who first strongly pointed out the limits of the organization's work in this extreme context and the potential negative consequences for the organization and its members who may be participating in the moral issue, left the field and resigned from the organization. In addition, Vignette 3.4. (CASE 4) shows how the sense of morality and priority of several field workers led them to resign (or exit) after a crisis of trust within the organization. It also happened that field workers were ready to renounce their work in the field.

"[...] So complete non-access: non-access to the refugees and non-access to information about the refugees.

Conclusion: operations are impossible. [...]

We realise that staying makes us responsible for nonrepatriation - and without even a guarantee of being able to save individuals. We know that if we leave now we will face the unbearable prospect of not being here just when we would have access to the refugees again. Either we try to carry out advocacy while staying on site or we make a massive retreat from the Great Lakes region and issue a political condemnation. [...] We'll tell UNHCR that if we're not included, we're closing up shop. If this has now become a game to get to be included, you'll need to send other people to play. In this environment, we see no possibility for operations or advocacy.

We're now doing what we have to do to close the mission and we propose waiting for two pieces of information to conclude:

- Including MSF in the assessment flight

- Your feedback with a clear and feasible position for follow-up

For now, we're not trying to criticise anyone, it's just an observation that we've come to the end of the line.

Greetings from the biggest shit I've ever been in

Vincent" [Extract from Sitrep, Vincent Janssen, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani, to MSF Belgium, France and Holland programme managers, 25 April 1995 (in French).] CASE 4

Such acceptance and renunciation at the organizational level does not stem from the organization's culture and is the result of organizational learning. This is why the final process described as fundamental in shaping extreme context strategizing is *learning in and from the extreme*.

5.4.3 Learning in and from the extreme context

The analysis of OL – here in the role of learning in extreme context strategizing – was very much linked to all three temporal modalities i.e., the past, present and future.

On the one hand, extreme contexts have brought to light the past, and in particular the identity and history of the organization since its inception. Understanding what the organization does and what it stands for begins with its past. This had an impact on the organization's strategizing in the studied extreme contexts. Analysis of the four cases clearly showed that the way of thinking and maneuvering in an extreme context was strongly influenced by the history of each section: although part of a common movement, each operational center had a different past, with distinct creation dates and previous missions.

In addition, lessons learned from past extremes were sometimes visible in the archival data. Some previous extreme contexts experienced by the organization were cited in an effort to understand the extreme context in question, in a comparative analysis of the potential

consequences of certain actions or as an argument for a certain strategic path. For example, MSF used the extreme context of the million people killed by the Khmer Rouge to draw a comparison with the genocide in Rwanda in Case 1. The lessons learned from this past extreme context were also used to demand lessons from other actors, such as the international community, in order to achieve timely political action to change the extreme context at the time (in Case 1). Furthermore, in all four case studies, some of the unprecedented actions undertaken in one case were discussed and even replicated in another case that followed chronologically such as a call for military intervention.

However, extreme cases such as those presented in this study clearly reveal that learning in the extreme does happen, but not always as a good thing for the organization or its members. Sometimes, people learn from the experience of the extreme context the wrong thing or, as a result of learning, they become over-cautious, over-protective or simply afraid of repeating a mistake. Learning naturally influences the way people make decisions; especially what they see as comparable situations in the future. Vignette 3.3. (CASES 3, 4) shows the struggle of MSF to confidently engage with speaking out (or advocacy), one of its two primary practices after suffering an important strategic failure – i.e., the fiasco of the 'Figures crisis'.

On the other hand, the future of the organization was also present in the interpretation and decision-making.

> *"The result of the re-evaluation during the meeting of all MSF- F teams: more Press Releases, renewed contact with government to explain who we are, to try to discover what they really expect from us, the necessity of demonstrating our independence in all choices (programs) we make now or in the future." [Extract from Minutes of the meeting between heads of mission and HQ representatives from MSF Belgium, France, Holland, Switzerland and Spain, Kigali, 1 May 1995 (in French).] CASE 2*

A critical part of preparing for the future is in being in the present, in sensing and in responding to the adversity in the present context. Having learned the hard way how essential it was for MSF to retain its independence (see Vignette 2.1. (CASE 1)), there was a strong desire not only to worry about the current extreme context, but also about the future of the organization, as this called into question MSF's principle of independence. In fact, being controlled by the authorities in terms of access and missions was subsequently a major problem in Cases 3 and 4. Some MSF strategists also sounded the alarm about the possible future of the

international community's use of humanitarian aid as a crisis response in an extreme context, when it actually requires a political solution that organizations like MSF cannot provide. So, taking into account the future of the organization and the extreme context is an integral part of extreme context strategizing.

> *"The international humanitarian effort, which is saving thousands of lives, is also rapidly sowing the seeds of a future conflict in which, as with the Khmer Rouge, the army of the former government will use its political control of hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced people to legitimise its power. The international community, continuing to treat the crisis as an exclusively humanitarian issue, seems blind to the vicious circle that is forming… An urgent response is required. There are only two possible scenarios that can be envisaged over the next few weeks: either the refugees return, or they dig in among the remnant of the former government's army. The last act remains to be written." [Extract from Alain Destexhe, 'Hurry to Prevent a Cambodian Epilogue in Rwanda,' International Herald Tribune (Europe), 11 August 1994.] CASE 3*

Although it can be argued that in the face of extreme events, tending to the present and pressing issues and risks for the organization takes priority in comparison to a non-extreme context, predictions of the future context and of the organization in the future also happen in extreme contexts. From this learning flow two questionings, at the individual level '*who are we?*' and at the organizational level '*what should we do?*', which not only reframe the organization for the next extreme context, but also for ordinary contexts.

> *"What role for MSF? […]*
>
> *What Should Our Strategy Be?"*
>
> *[Extract from 'Summary report on the International Council's Visit to the Rwandan Refugee Camps,' 17 October 1994 (in French).] CASE 3*

Accepting the limits of the organization and its members in their organizational roles is not only a lesson in humility, it is also extremely difficult in an extreme context that seems to demand a lot of action. These extreme contexts also show that exiting can be a way of responding to the extreme context, particularly in the case of disrupted contexts. Finding the right way out of an extreme context when it is impossible to change it, or when operating in it is deemed incompatible with the organization's values as a result of organizational learning, is not synonymous with inaction. It is important to recognize, however, that some extreme

contexts require a systemic response that includes the political will to transform the context to make it more manageable for the organizations operating in it. In this case, there was no joint strategic action to achieve this, as the extreme was linked to the collapse of the political system.

To conclude this subchapter, I argue that extremes not only offer a magnifying glass on the organization's norms and practices by making them more visible internally and externally, but also reveal the weaknesses present in the organization in terms of clearly defining the organization, its purpose, and its boundaries, even for an international emergency response organization such as MSF. The underlying question that has posed the most difficulty in terms of strategy in extreme contexts filled with moral-strategic dilemmas is: *What is our role?* The same question arises at the individual level and organizational level. This question – more difficult to answer than it may seem – in an extreme context is the basis of the learning through extremes that occurs in the strategic trajectory of the organization. When this question is answered differently within the same organization, it is essential to allow time for redefinition.

5.5   Final thoughts on Findings

In this chapter, I have presented my findings resulting from the analysis of four case studies of extreme context strategizing. I have begun this chapter with the data structure, which gives a static image of extreme context strategizing based on the thematic analysis of the archival data. Then, this picture came to life with illustrative vignettes in the form of stories synthesized from the data that provide both insights and detailed accounts of the findings. Finally, I presented the dynamic model of extreme context strategizing. I described the model, focusing on the sub-processes that shape it over time: sensemaking under pressure, EDM and dilemma-driven doing, and learning in and from the extreme.

6   Discussion

In the discussion chapter, I synthesize the findings by presenting the process of strategizing in extreme context through three axes. The first axis is the process of extreme context strategizing. The second axis is extreme context strategizing in practice. The third axis is knowledge-based extreme context strategizing. It is by discussing the findings of this research

in contrast to the extant literature in these three axes that I demonstrate the contribution and significance of this research

My model of extreme context strategizing provides an understanding on the intricacies of what constitutes a strategy over time when an organization finds itself in an extreme context. One could consider (in the grand scheme of organizational life) that it is a zoom on a 'strategizing episode' (an episode of extreme context strategizing) of the SAPP model (**FIGURE 4**) developed by Burgelman et al. (2018). This is because both the processual view of strategy and the SAP perspective are integrated into the model proposed here. Further, the model highlights the critical role of learning in extreme context strategizing.

6.1 The Process of Extreme Context Strategizing

This study's perspective is processual because it was framed in process theory and the findings revealed a process. In this subchapter, I explain how this study showcases the processual nature of extreme context strategizing in the way it is continuously shaped and reshaped by organizational processes that inform and trigger each other. This study argues that it is the four processes – sensemaking, EDM, doing by prioritizing and creating, and learning – that together shape the becoming of the organization, the internal change through strategizing to respond to the extreme context which is unexpected, novel and uncertain. It is also discussed how the three temporalities of past, present and future are expressed in extreme context strategizing.

Extreme context strategizing is neither deliberate nor emergent as it is a combination of the two. Mintzberg et al. (1998: 372) explain that strategy formation "has to include analyzing before and programming after as well as negotiating during; and all of this must be in response to what can be a demanding environment". The idea that there is a before, during and after that are expressed in extreme context strategizing is shared and transparent in this study. The logic of situation as discussed by Chia and Holt (2023) is clearly visible in the process of extreme context strategizing which demands adaptation to the (particularly problematic) environment. This adaptation is only possible through alignment of action with the environment (Chia & Holt, 2023), however this encompasses several critical processes. With this study, strategy formation is continuously explained through the expression of sensemaking under pressure, ethical decision making, prioritizing practices, creating new pathways and learning in and from the extreme context.

Dwyer and Hardy (2016) explain that extreme events offer opportunities for sensemaking and learning. This study shows that this is more of a necessity than an opportunity. Yet, the process of strategizing during and after the occurrence of extreme events is not discussed at all in the study of Dwyer and Hardy (2016) . This research shows that when order and sense are lost, sensemaking and learning are necessary components of strategizing. While Weick and Sutcliffe (2015) have shown that 'comprehending', through timely perception and interpretation of contextual cues, is particularly critical for extreme events that originate internally, within the organization at risk, we need more than comprehending when the extreme events start externally and are much bigger than the organization undergoing where the organization operates (such as shown in the case of genocide in Case 1). In other words, in extreme events that are unstoppable by the organization which must operate during and through them, where strategizing becomes extreme context strategizing, to comprehend the issue is critical to start figuring out how to strategically respond.

Debating what comes first in organizational life between sensemaking and learning is like arguing the chicken-and-egg riddle. Nonetheless, when an extreme event happens, perception in the present, which is vital for sensemaking, happens before learning. This goes in line with the idea from Gibson and Gibson (1955) that we perceive to learn by "using the senses rather than the intellect (it is more semiotic than semantic)" (Chia & Holt, 2023: 12).

"To overcome, one must first learn to succumb" (Chia & Holt, 2023: 13)

This idea that sensing and sensemaking come before learning when an extreme event occurs is translated into my model of extreme context strategizing. This does not contradict that we need to "learn to make sense and make sense to learn", as stated by Colville et al. (2016: 3). This is because sensemaking also rests on learning from the past, on the mental models, representations and frames that are formed from past experiences in the cognitions of the organizational members.

There is no debate on the power of extreme events to trigger sensemaking. Maitlis and Christianson (2014) recognize that most scholars agree on what triggers sensemaking, however sensemaking is both continuous and episodic (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2016). It happens as continuous organizational activity and as episode when triggered by a disruptive event. However, when a disruption happens, the two happen simultaneously; the processual nature of sensemaking and the urgency in the present of re-enacting a new order are both expressed in

the lived experiences of the members of the organization (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2016). The process of *sensemaking under pressure* in the extreme context strategizing model represents this juxtaposition.

Similarly, "learning is 'found in the juxtaposing of order and disorder, frames of past learning and cues of present action' (Colville et al., 2014: 216), as well as in the tension between reducing and exploring equivocality, or simplifying and complicating understanding" (Guiette & Vandenbempt, 2016: 87). This is why extreme contexts provide the proper terrain for both *sensemaking under pressure* and *learning in and from the extreme*. For instance, Dwyer and Hardy (2016) focus on the public investigations of three extreme events that were not man-made. They discuss sensemaking and learning through public inquiry, not only to make sense as research usually suggests, but also to learn, leading to new organizational practices as an outcome of inquiry. In other words, public inquiries are there to make sense of the past to learn for the future (Dwyer & Hardy, 2016).

Unlike a public inquiry, which tends to clarify the cause and responsibility for the extreme event at the source of the extreme context and provide recommendations, the reports used as data sources for this study were focused on the organization's dilemmas that shaped the strategic responses to the extreme and organizational members' experiences in the extreme, not the cause of the extreme events. In addition, the archival reports used as primary data here provided no recommendations. In fact, the archival reports that serve as primary data of this study were created by the organization that experienced the extreme context in order to: firstly, make sense of the past –understand what happened and the organization's strategy for finding a new balance and order, and reconcile members of the organization with what happened– and secondly, learn –used to introduce new recruits to the challenges of extreme contexts and organizational practices–, as indicated at the start of each case's secondary archival report. It is left to the reader to reflect and learn from the stories that are told in the report. In this aspect, the data used for this study is quite different from the public inquiry reports often used by extreme context researchers and offers a unique internal perspective to analyze the process of extreme context strategizing.

Colville et al. (2014) explain the critical interrelationship between sensemaking and organizational learning in organizational becoming. However, they leave aside the role of the future in organizational becoming, and more specifically in strategizing, which is arguably the vital force in organizational becoming. This study links sensemaking and organizational

learning to the three temporal modalities of past, present and future. It reiterates the critical interrelation between sensemaking and organizational learning in the role of the organizational frames in the individual mental models of the members of the organization that derive from past experiences in the organization and the perception of present contextual cues. Yet, the future is also involved in sensemaking, with the projection of the organization's future and action towards a certain image of the hoped-for future context. This is even more palpable in extreme contexts where the organization is working towards contextual change which may require organizational change.

Nonetheless, Bosma et al. (2016) understood the role of the three temporalities in sensemaking following the loss of meaning in a cosmology episode. They argue that for an organization "to restore sensemaking activities (both retrospective and prospective), a new past, a new present, and a new future that are all radically different to the ones previously established have to be linguistically constructed" (Bosma et al., 2016: 16). The present study provides empirical evidence, as requested by Bosma et al. (2016) of this construction of a new past, present and future, as well as of all the debates, disagreements, tensions and difficulties that accompany this new creation of meaning for the organization. In that creation of meaning, "learning and sensemaking are two mutually constitutive and interdependent elements" (Bosma et al., 2016: 15). Extreme events are novel events that threaten the organization and its members. Novel events disturb the processes of sensemaking and organizing and stimulate new meaning:

> *"The emergence of the new [...] challenges current established ways of knowing and opens a creative space for radical learning to take place" (Bosma et al., 2016: 14)*

Novelty is therefore the spark of an extreme context. Further, novelty is also present in sensemaking in both the creation of meaning and as this study has showed with empirical evidence in the response to the extreme. Extreme context strategizing involves the creation of new ways to organize and restore order which Bosma et al. (2016) name *'radical learning'*. These new ways through learning may become new practices that are then internalized and become part of the mental models of the members of the organization that are later confronted with the novelty of the next extreme events. This *radical learning* has been revealed as strategic response to extreme events that bring with them novelty in the sense of disruption of the established order and moral dilemma that shows the limits of the old ways of organizing.

The findings of this study align with the idea developed by Thomas et al. (2001) of the importance of investing time and effort at different levels of the organization in sensemaking and learning of specific events (in this study defined as extreme events) at the organizational level. The link between sensemaking and organizational learning is further discussed in the strategizing process not specifically for future opportunities but as a necessity to respond adequately to such events in the present and, in so doing, redesign the future of possibilities for the organization. In fact, in extreme context strategizing, both the past and the future of the organization are projected and enacted.

Through the studying of extreme contexts that chronologically follow one another, extreme context strategizing is revealed here over time. Indeed, temporality and process are at the heart of this study, which considers them essential to the understanding of strategizing in an extreme context. According to Colville (1994: 223), Weick's intention with his book *The Social Psychology of Organizing* is "learning to appreciate process over outcome". Although most extreme context studies focus on a single case of the extreme, this study brings to light the interplay between key processes that together continuously shape strategizing because it investigates four cases of the extreme over several years that the organization experienced and through the responses and the strategizing from one case to the other. This way, the dynamic shaping of strategizing in the interplay between sensemaking and learning through creative action and prioritization appears more clearly.

Guiette and Vandenbempt (2016) take stock of research that considers sensemaking processes aimed at restoring order as a means of reducing equivocality and complexity. In this line of thinking, the idea of 'simplexity' was first described by Colville (1994) by combining the ideas developed by Weick to 'complicate yourself' (or complex thought) and act simply (or simple action); and later developed by Colville, Brown, and Pye (2012). This study responds to Guiette and Vandenbempt (2016), who instead encourage researchers to study how learning can embrace the complexity.

> *"It is the unwillingness to meet equivocality in an equivocal manner that produces failure, non-adaptation... It is the unwillingness to disrupt order, ironically, that makes it impossible for the organization to create order. If people cherish the unequivocal but are unwilling to participate in the equivocal, then survival becomes more problematic."* (Weick, 1979: cited in Colville et al., 2014: 230)

Another contribution is linking organizational learning and sensemaking is offered by Calvard (2016) in contexts that are not extreme but under conditions of dynamic complexity. However, these conditions apply to big data environments ant the focus is on technology which is a very different focus that the one of this research. This study provides an understanding of the interplay between sensemaking and learning in extreme environments that are not related to organizations' big data analytics efforts, but rather concern the strategizing in particularly complex, dynamic and threatening environments. Interestingly, Calvard (2016: 77) points out that "a central concern has been that sensemaking and learning exist in something of a paradoxical relationship concerning the uncertainty and variety of perception–action links (Weick and Westley, 1999)". Similarly, the paradoxical relationship exists between learning and organizing.

> *"to learn is to disorganize and increase variety. To organize is to forget and reduce variety" (Weick & Westley, 1999: 190: cited in Calvard, 2016: 66)*

As explained by Hubert Reeves[7] – renowned astrophysicist who recently passed away after a life dedicated not only to the advancement of science but also to its popularization – if everything depended on random chance, there would be no organization, and if everything was determined, there would be no freedom or variety, which is the source of creativity. Just as in nature, there is a juxtaposition of the two in organizational life, the organizing that is visible in internalized practices and routine processes is just as present as the unpredictable and unexpected events that, while disrupting the organization, bring it variety and give its members the freedom to learn and create. Extreme contexts are the scene of both, which is why sensemaking and learning are so important to organizations and have been discussed together in the different contributions just discussed. However, how they, with other critical organizational processes shape strategizing have not received much attention. This study makes an important contribution in presenting a comprehensive model of the process of extreme context strategizing.

To conclude this subchapter, the analysis of the case studies goes beyond organizational change and reveals that extreme context strategizing is essentially an iterative and dynamic process of redefinition: redefining who members of the organization are, what the organization stands for and how it translates into action. Since "process is the becoming of experience"

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[7] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpNCDfxPuxY

(Whitehead, 1929: 194), the process of extreme context strategizing is revealed in practice in the experiences of the extreme context – or using Husserl's terminology in the 'life world' of organizational members –, whether directly in the field or indirectly at headquarters.

6.2   Extreme Context Strategizing in Practice

In this subchapter, I discuss how this study is anchored in a practice perspective. The logic of practices is visible in the understanding of extreme context strategizing offered by this study. The three main components in a view of extreme context strategizing in practice – practices, practitioners and praxis– are examined through the critical concepts of habitus, agency and structure that were introduced when examining the turn to practice in the social sciences.

Embracing Vaara and Whittington (2012: 287)'s view on practices as "accepted ways of doing things, embodied and materially mediated, that are shared between actors and routinized over time", this empirical study has shown the critical role of practices in leading decision-making and action. Chia and MacKay (2007: 232) state that "it is agents and processes that are subordinate to, and constituted from practices and practice-complexes". This study showcases that the extreme context strategizing process is subordinate to both practices and practitioners. The dialogue between the two continuously shape the strategizing of the organization and, in doing so, redefines praxis, the "actual activity" (Whittington, 2006: 615) of the organization.

As discussed in the literature review, the practice turn in SM has revealed the importance of the concepts of habitus, agency and structure. These three notions are evident here. Habitus manifests itself in the internalized practices and mental models of organizational members, enabling sensemaking in both perception and action. The expression of the human agent is visible at the individual level and plays an important role in decision-making and strategic action in extreme contexts. This is the case of the agent who acts according to his moral compass, misbehaves and questions practices. At the same time, the social structure is embedded at the organizational level and has enabled or constrained action. However, extreme contexts have shaken the structure and can sometimes be powerful enough to threaten it with collapse, necessitating the creation of something new. This study reveals that it is when the two (agency and structure) clash that learning becomes more critical than ever, and strategic learning develops through questioning and redefinition at both individual and organizational levels.

First, the expression of habitus in extreme context strategizing is emphasized. That is because the concept of habitus introduced by Bourdieu encompasses the predispositions by which an individual conceives, perceives and acts. For Bourdieu (1977: 72), habitus are "systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures". These predispositions are codes of behavior internalized by organizational members that drive action. Moreover, habitus is ingrained in people's cognition and moral values and brings a sense of comfort and familiarity with certain situations and discomfort and equivocality in others.

Extreme contexts by their very nature open up the field to uncertainty and equivocality, and therefore require a meaning that cannot simply be based on habitus. Following Foucault's critique of structuralism, it is clear from this study that meaning is created within a specific context which is social and historical. This is not only the case in the macro-environment (which is social and historical) where the extreme context is anchored but also internally because the past of the organization and the social context within the organization create internal predispositions that have transpired in the strategizing in the extreme context.

Further, meaning is found in sensemaking. Although sensemaking is ongoing, there are moments individuals find order when they "bracket the phenomenon to simplify equivocality and uncertainty and focus on a plausible account of an issue that can induce action" (Sonenshein, 2007: 1035). However, failure in sensemaking can act instead of an action enabler, as an action paralyzer. This study shows that when members of the organization realized their mistake in sensing, perceiving and ultimately understanding the extreme context based on habitus, the organization was first paralyzed. Then, the capability to respond was based on achieving a balance between agency and structure rather than simply relying on predispositions.

Second, the role of agency is visible in strategizing in an extreme context in all the four cases studied. This role has been revealed in this study in a contrast between the individual and his/her organizational role in EDM. Although "the traditional approach to ethical decision making focuses on the individual who must decide what to do in a concrete situation, many ethical problems in business concern not the individual as such, but rather the individual participating in an organization and acting within his or her organizational role (Boatright, 1997)" (Geva, 2000: 778). When the organizational role clashes with one's values, an individual can choose to give up this organizational role. This happened with the field coordinator who left the field and resigned his position at MSF, when the strategists at headquarters failed to

make strategic choices acceptable to him, as shown in Vignette 2.2. (CASE 3). In voicing his moral position, the agent exited the organization. In doing so, he showed "integrity [that] can be redescribed as a social virtue whereby an individual dissents from a behavior the individual considers unethical by means of voice or exit. Exit and voice are methods by which individuals resist unethical organizational behavior" (Nielsen, 1993: 120-121). The options of voice, exit and loyalty are a legacy from Hirschman (1972) who introduced them in the face of dissatisfaction in firms in particular when deterioration happens. In this example, the individual prioritized his moral emotions over his organizational role and chose both and exit due to moral dissatisfaction. Moral emotions are "linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent" (Haidt, 2003: 853). Furthermore, as Hibbert (2023: 1) state, "individuals' moral emotions can have positive effects for organizations, by motivating appraisal of the context in which inappropriate conduct takes place to support adaptation and encouraging action". Nonetheless, other agents of the organization chose voice and loyalty and spoke out while committing themselves to their role within the organization, even when their moral sense was violated.

Additionally, another logic of strategic action appears in this study in relation to agency. That is the logic of potential, based on the concept of will to power developed by Nietzsche, as described by Chia and Holt (2023). For Nietzsche, human beings should above all avoid being powerless and this goes back to an idea developed in Ancient Greece.

> *"Power which has greatly suffered both in deed and in thought is better than powerlessness which only meets with kind treatment—such was the Greek way of thinking. In other words, the feeling of power was prized more highly by them than any mere utility or fair renown." (Nietzsche, The Dawn: 360)*

The analysis provided here shows that a strong drive to decision-making and action in the different cases studies was the feeling of powerlessness experienced by members of the organization as agents of strategic action (see Vignette 2.5. (CASES 2 & 4)). This feeling led these agents to go above and beyond. They expressed through their voice and action the need to transform the moral dilemmas they were confronted with, the extreme context, the organization and eventually themselves. This transformation happened through an iteration between prioritization and creation. Extreme contexts, especially when characterized as disrupted, challenge the common, institutionalized practices that are socially accepted and drive

strategic action under 'normal' conditions through habitus. Recourse to certain known practices and procedures goes hand in hand with the creation of new ones.

The cases of extreme contexts studied here have crystallized irreconcilable views on strategic action for the organization. Sensemaking stories have revealed sub-cultures' differences of meanings that existed prior to the extreme context but were unnoticed. The assumption that within an organization, meaning is simply translated at the different levels of the organization is simply wrong. Although mental models and organizational culture are strong influencing factors in understanding, there are not the same within the organization when it comes to different sections or the field and the headquarters despite the critical sensegiving between them the organization's strategizing relies on. Further, within the different operational centres of the organization with their own cultures and ethical models infused by habitus, this study shows that agents either act towards preservation when they commit to internalized practices or transformation of the structure through creative action.

Creativity has an undeniable place in these extra-ordinary contexts. Here, rather that drawing from the literature, I compare with another publicly known case to offer some light into this study's contribution in understanding the critical place of practitioners as agents through creation in extreme context strategizing. This case was followed live around the world in 2018. On June 23, 2018, twelve boys from a soccer team and their assistant coach found themselves trapped in the Tham Luang cave in Thailand after unpredictable heavy rains partially flooded the cave and blocked their exit. What became known as the Tham Luang cave rescue was the result of an unprecedented strategic choice in practice. After analyzing all the possible strategic options for a rescue, such as drilling a hole that had been done successfully in the past (e.g., the 2010 rescue of miners in Chile), leaving the boys for months until the end of the rainy season or teaching them to dive, it became clear that no known option was viable, especially after the death of a former Navy Seal and experienced diver during the operations. In addition, contextual changes in the extreme context, such as the rising water level in the cave and the reduced oxygen in the chamber where the boys were trapped, meant that they were working against the clock. The pressure of time in this extreme context required a creative solution.

This involved using both known methods such as pumping as much water out of the cave as possible to reduce the water levels inside the cave and creating a new response by placing the boys under anesthetic and tying them up and dragging them by divers along the

dangerous and long way out of the cave. Although extremely risky and never carried out before, this creative strategic action was the only way, with a small chance of success, to save all those trapped. Against all the odds, the operation turned into an incredible success before the eyes of the world, as all thirteen people were brought safely back to the light outside the cave. The international collaboration of experts with a rare combination of skills, such as Australian doctor Richard Harris (both anesthesiologist and experienced cave diver) and Craig Challen (veterinarian with experience in anesthesia and dive partner), combined with the motivation derived from the moral emotions of divers literally risking their lives, made this extraordinary strategic action not only possible, but successful in practice. Nevertheless, in an interview, Dr. Harris explained the struggle he had with his moral emotions when he immersed an unconscious child in water, with the very real risk of taking him to his death. However, it was ultimately his moral emotions that led him, and so many others involved in this rescue, similarly to MSF field workers and headquarters strategists as detailed in the findings (see **5.4.2)** to turn creative strategic thinking into action, and sometimes, this creative action into strategic success.

It has been shown that meaning is not achieved individually, like Goffman explained, because the sense given by one individual was not always directly accepted within the organization as shown in Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1), Vignette 1.2. (CASE 2), Vignette 1.3. (CASE 3) and Vignette 1.4. (CASE 4). Until meaning was achieved collectively through social interactions in dialogue, decision-making, action and learning did not follow. Furthermore, meaning was developed in a multiplicity of voices. The question of integrating different voices in organizational decision-making has been discussed in the concept of polyphony found in organizational narratives. Polyphony is here understood "as a plurality of voices […] manifesting itself in organizational discourses and language games" (Vaara & Rantakari, 2024: 320). This study shows that different agents' voices are expressed at the same time in extreme contexts and shared within the organization through sensemaking stories. Vaara and Rantakari (2024) explain that it is through counternararatives to the primary existent top-down narrative that a form of 'genuine' polyphony emerges. Here, agency is expressed in each individual voice that speaks not only from the organizational role of a headquarters strategist in a top-down manner but at all levels of the organization as shown in several vignettes. For Vaara and Rantakari (2024), this polyphony requires organizing. In that sense, there is a need for structure in participatory decision-making. This is all the more important as this study has shown that polyphony can lead to cacophony. This is what happened with the crisis of trust that followed the dissenting voices that were not arbitrated.

Third, the understanding of the role of structure in extreme context strategizing is contrasted with the literature. There is one important factor that has been observed in the various cases studied, and which has not yet been discussed, and which is part of the faulty sensemaking under pressure repeatedly observed in extreme contexts. This is the social structure which is institutionally embedded in the frames and representations of the organization.

Structure is a particularly important concept since structure can either enable or constrain activity (Whittington, 2010). Organizational frames are not about framing options or outcomes, but about framing the situation, which involves drawing on the organization's internalized mental models and ways of perceiving and interpreting contextual cues. Mental models developed within the organization greatly influence sensemaking. The sensemaking model of ethical decision making (**FIGURE 9**) and the sensemaking-intuition model (**FIGURE 10**) focus on the factors that come into play when individuals must respond to ethical issues. The former is limited to the individual level, while the latter also takes collective factors into account. The sensemaking-intuition model (**FIGURE 10**) integrates 'representation' – the individual's mental model of how others within the organization interpret the situation – in the construction of the ethical issue by the individual. However, in both, the role of organizational frames is not considered as such. This study provides several examples of how organizational framing shapes sensemaking under pressure as much as individual intuition and perception. As described above, Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1) and Vignette 1.2. (CASE 2) show that organizational members rely on the organizational frame to give them an interpretation of certain types of injury, or of the reasons and actions to be taken when they see people fleeing their country, determining strategic action.

This study is therefore different in that exploring the strategizing process involves examining both the individual and the organizational level and in doing so emphasizes the roles of habitus, agent and structure, making a contribution to the understanding of extreme context strategizing in practice. Extreme contexts show the great impact of the macro level of the environment on the micro level of practices. By strategizing, we then observe to a certain degree the impact of the micro level of practices on the macro level of the environment. Indeed, because they are "necessarily rooted within a particular temporal and strategic context, as they must be, organizational change efforts nevertheless explicitly seek to transcend one context to create another" (Jelinek, 2003: 324).

Habitus, agency and structure are all expressed in extreme context strategizing. It is by exploring extreme cases such as the four cases presented in this study, that we can clearly observe that organizational values (imbued in what I call an ethical model) and personal moral beliefs are intertwined, like in the fictional case of the CEO of an Icelandic fishing company described by Kvalnes (2019). Kvalnes (2019) presents the case of a CEO in a difficult situation with three strategic options, 1) to continue doing business as usual despite the difficult economic situation, 2) to downsize by closing one plant and laying off staff and suffering directly as an individual from the fallout for employees and oneself as people would react strongly against the decision, 3) to sell the company and let someone else close probably all five plants for financial gain and take the blame. In addition to the individual's sense of morality weighing heavily on decision-making, the organization's ethical model, its history and its culture centered on community and family values are integral to the issue. The aim of this case study is to make business students aware of the importance of the individual's moral reasoning in organizational decision-making. This example raises the question of responsibility at two levels: the individual and the organizational. What this example does not propose is a fourth strategic option, which can only result from creative strategic thinking.

At the individual level, moral reasoning, and at the organizational level, corporate social responsibility, are revealed in practice through agency and structure. It can be argued that for non-profit organizations such as the one studied here, social responsibility takes on even greater significance. However, we can discuss the critical part of moral reasoning in for-profit organizations, in contrast to Friedman who considered profit generation as 'the' social responsibility of a company (Kvalnes, 2019). When an organization focuses solely on economic success without regard for morality and the impact on others, it becomes a dangerous recipe and usually ends up doing harm. One of the most striking examples of such a corporate disaster is Purdue Pharma's economic growth during the mass marketing and distribution of the drug OxyContin, which led to an explosion in opioid prescriptions, causing the opioid crisis that killed hundreds of thousands of people. The company's huge commercial success was made possible by the striking failure of regulatory systems (Chow, 2019). The lack of structure is evident in this case. The organization's strategizing process was clearly immune to any form of individual moral reasoning or organizational ethical framing. The magnitude and direct relationship between immoral corporate decision-making and adverse public consequences is particularly evidenced in this example, but there are countless others across a very broad spectrum. This study of extreme context strategizing demonstrates the critical place of both

agent and structure in EDM. I propose that this contribution is applicable for the strategizing of both for-profit and not-for-profit organizations in extreme contexts.

> *"Corporate social responsibility and responsiveness are areas where business leaders and employees have to engage in moral reasoning, in order to clarify to themselves and others where their priorities should lie."(Kvalnes, 2019: 66)*

The above quotation goes in line with ethical decision-making leading to prioritizing in the proposed model of extreme context strategizing (**FIGURE *23*Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**).

In EDM, are expressed both the will of the individual and the organization's rules, models and culture. We see in this study the interaction between agency and structure in ethical behavior. Yuthas et al. (2004) show how Gidden's structuration theory applies to ethical behavior, which is both an individual and a social phenomenon. They go further by introducing the element missing from agency and structure in ethical behavior: learning (Yuthas et al., 2004). Taking the accounting profession as an example, they argue that only continuous learning (as opposed to one-off change) has the potential to transform and build an ethical framework over time that fosters ethical thinking and action. Furthermore, Nielsen emphasizes that double-loop learning ignores the embedded social tradition system and proposes to overcome this limitation with triple-loop action-learning. It is argued that in triple-loop learning, "the embedded social tradition system is both criticized and treated as a partner in mutual action-learning" (Nielsen, 1993: 121). In other words, triple-loop learning relies on the social tradition system; at the same time triple-loop learning allows the questioning and improvement of ethical organization cultures with the correction of the social tradition's negative biases.

Nonetheless, none of these studies look closely at the relationship between ethics and organizational learning in strategizing. This study makes a unique contribution in bringing the critical organizational processes of sensemaking, EDM and OL together in a model of extreme context strategizing based on empirical data. Furthermore, an important finding to this research is that practices not only cumulate in the shaping of strategizing, but they can directly oppose each other, confusing strategic action. From this contradiction, agency has appeared in prioritization and the creation of new ways that emerge for action. Interestingly, sometimes these new ways become new organizational practices because they have been internalized and

become visible in the strategizing of the next extreme context. This shows a form of organizational learning (OL). OL is further discussed in the following chapter, in revealing the central place of knowledge in extreme context strategizing.

6.3 Knowledge-based Extreme Context Strategizing

In this subchapter, I mainly focus on the '*learning in and from the extreme*' element in the model proposed in this study to emphasize that extreme context strategizing is knowledge-based. That is, because "learning is the social construction of knowledge" (McCormick & Paechter, 1999: xi). I first explain how the process of extreme context strategizing is knowledge-driven in the necessity to learn *in* the extreme. I then explain how learning *from* the extreme reshapes organizational practices through redefinition at the individual level and at the organizational level.

6.3.1 Learning in the extreme

Strategizing in an extreme context is a knowledge-intensive process: from the state of knowledge (which becomes obsolete) when the extreme context is formed to the new knowledge that is created through sensemaking, ethical decision-making, prioritization and learning. "Mental models, by nature, represent a particularly complex form of knowledge" (Bagdasarov et al., 2016: 134); they are representations of knowledge about the past that cannot be translated as they are into the present or future. Therefore, mental models are not sufficient to correctly interpret the disruption in the present and enable appropriate action.

Extreme context strategizing, like all types of strategizing, is highly dependent on knowledge. The central place of knowledge in strategizing has been discussed in the literature review. However, in extreme context strategizing, this dependence to knowledge is problematic. It creates particular challenges because the extreme context brings a certain form of unknown and a high level of uncertainty. Knowing the context is not a given, as the extreme context disrupts the order in the macro-environment in which the organization operates and, in doing so, the organization's micro practices. Lack of contextual knowledge, particularly in the case of a disrupted context, exacerbates the complexity of the strategizing process, as it depends on knowing the environment as explained in the logic of situation. Thus, the first efforts in an extreme context must be aimed at knowing the context, answering the question '*What's going on here?*'. Further, answering this question leads to *learning in the extreme*, which involves

EDM and questioning the organizational limits in prioritizing and creating new ways of responding to the extreme context.

The question *'What's going on here?'* is answered through sensemaking. Yet, this is particularly difficult in an extreme context as Weick made clear by revealing the paradoxical nature of sensemaking in asking "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (Anderson, 2006: 1675). As this study has shown, sometimes, this requirement to know the context in order to be able to give an appropriate strategic response is done intuitively, in the form of knowledge that can be described as "knowing for sure without knowing for certain" (Dörfler & Eden, 2014: 265). However, scholars have shown that "intuition becomes more and more dominant with the increase of expertise (e.g. Dörfler et al., 2009; Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986; Simon, 1996), and Kahneman and Klein (2009) suggest that only experts' intuition is reliable" (Dörfler & Eden, 2019: 538). This is particularly true in a situation that was both equivocal and uncertain, and qualified as a disrupted context for the organization. The intuitive understanding of organizational members who were immersed in this context and who were also novices to extreme contexts failed (see Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1)).

As a result of this misinterpretation of the context, their decision-making was not adapted to the situation. They carried on simply relying on organizational routines and internalized practices which could not align with the disruption in the environment and therefore led to strategic failure. Further, in such equivocal and uncertain situations or with novices, the sensemaking-intuition model emphasizes the power of intuitive judgement for responding to ethical issues (Sonenshein, 2007). This research goes some way towards understanding that expertise and competences are particularly relevant for developing reliable intuition when the organization cannot simply rely on its routines and practices to strategize in the extreme context.

When the organization is committed to a specific meaning, it becomes extremely difficult to perceive that a mistake has been made and to learn from (as shown in Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1)). However, single-loop organizational learning or Learning I according to Bateson's levels of knowledge (see **FIGURE 5**), is needed to reshape strategy according to the new sense made after the error has been corrected. However, Vignette 3.1. (CASE 1) reveals that extreme context strategizing involves other types of learning loops. Double-loop learning or Learning II also happened since error correction has involved a change in the "organisation's underlying norms, policies, and objectives" (Argyris & Schön, 1978: 3). Again, in Vignette 3.4. (CASE 4), it is discussed how learning from the extreme happened through a combination of single-loop

learning and double-loop learning because it was necessary to question and change the organization's practices to respond creatively to the moral dilemma.

In fact, these examples highlight the power of double-loop learning as generative process which is "learning that enhances our capacity to create" (Senge, 2006: 14) because simply adapting to the context by relying solely on single-loop learning was insufficient. The extreme context of genocide in Case 1 and the use of the organization to lure and kill refugees in Case 4 manifestly showed that the organization was ill-equipped to respond to disrupted contexts. This study advances the understanding of strategizing in disrupted contexts which require the organization to be both passive i.e., to observe and perceive the context, and active i.e., to prioritize and create in the context. Learning in the extreme means understanding that the organization needs both a sensory-based reaction, which can be immediate because it occurs under the impulse of contextual changes, and a response that occurs after sensemaking under pressure and must be adapted to the particular context.

Making changes within the organization is a form of learning in the extreme, not only for future strategizing in other extreme contexts, but above all for the search for strategic action likely to lead to contextual change since the organization cannot allow the disruption to last too long. That is because the extreme contexts studied here have revealed moral dilemmas that made strategizing particularly difficult. This study showed how commitment to the EDM led to double-loop learning. The moral sense of members at all levels of the organization influenced the EDM process and the resulting actions. It is not just leaders who guide ethical behavior as discussed by Gottlieb and Sanzgiri (1996), but each individual member who, faced with a moral dilemma, maneuvers the situation according to his or her own moral compass.

At the same time, on a collective level, the organization's culture of open dialogue was clearly observed, enabling debate and, failing consensus, questioning of the organization's past, present and future. In their review of the literature on sensemaking, Maitlis and Christianson (2014) discuss a body of literature that explains how "sensemaking enables the accomplishment of other key organizational processes, such organizational change, learning, and creativity and innovation" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014: 57). More specifically, Maitlis and Christianson (2014: 92) state that sensemaking "is the key mechanism through which the creative process progresses". In fact, creation is an integral part of sensemaking, since the members of the organization socially and continuously create meaning that is shared in a "web of meaning" (Bosma et al., 2016: 22).

This study also contributes to the literature on organizational limits. As Oliver et al. (2017: 729) point out, there is a "paradox of almost totally safe systems" that explains why even HROs can experience disruptions that can turn into disasters. This is why, even if it surprises many (including within the organization itself), organizations like MSF, known for responding to emergencies and complex contexts, can experience disruptions and be brought to their limits. While boundary violation has been studied as the trigger of an extreme event, as described in Oliver et al. (2017)'s analysis of the Air France 447 crash, in this study, the extreme context is external to the organization. That is because the cause of extreme events has nothing to do with the work or boundaries of the organization. In the cases studied here, extreme events are not caused by the crossing of a boundary within the organization. On the contrary, the boundary-crossing occurs in response to the extreme context. Smith, Callagher, Hibbert, Krull, and Hosking (2024) describe how business students can learn to span organizational and disciplinary boundaries, implying that this learning is important as future members of organization. This study shows how learning to span organizational boundaries appears critical to maneuver in an extreme context.

Oliver et al. (2017) draw a distinction between endogenous limits, which derive from factors internal to the organization, and exogenous limits, which derive from the external environment in which the organization operates. They acknowledge, however, that this distinction can be blurred and depend on the interpretation of different members of the organization (Oliver et al., 2017). Nonetheless, both limits are connected and this connection may be the cause of strategic failure. Oliver et al. (2017) show how exogenous limits can be created as first line of defense and protect from having to only count on endogenous limits that are constrained by the individuals' cognitions. Nevertheless, both types of limits can be revealed by the changes that happen in the external environment in particular when that environment is characterized as an extreme context. When an extreme event occurs, limit violations may quickly escalate and because of the failure of collective sensemaking quickly turn into a disaster, which is what happened in the cockpit of Air France flight 447 in the three and a half minutes between the surprising violation of a crucial exogenous limit and the crash of the plane.

"When events create problems or challenges that are beyond the organization's current capabilities, survival requires that the organization discover or create new capabilities." (Farjoun & Starbuck, 2007: 544)

Extreme contexts often pose challenges that are out of the normal range of the organizational capabilities. This is why creation is such a critical process that happens in extreme context strategizing. When the organization's capabilities, as perceived by the organization's members, are not sufficient to respond to the extreme, it is essential to create new capabilities or new ways of dealing with the organization's lack of capabilities to operate in the extreme context.

> *"All organizations have limits in the range, amount, duration, and quality of things they can do with their current capabilities, and these limits may originate in their members' perceptions, in their policies, in the technologies they adopt, or in their environments"* *(Farjoun & Starbuck, 2007: cited in Oliver et al., 2017: 730).*

As the above definition emphasizes, the organization's limits are first and foremost defined by its internal capabilities. In this first sense, limits are perceived as a matter of possibility, of what the organization can do in a specific context. Going beyond limits usually mean exceeding the limits of the organization's capabilities which is what happened to NASA and was revealed to the world with the extreme event of the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle (Farjoun & Starbuck, 2007; Starbuck & Farjoun, 2009). As Farjoun and Starbuck (2007) explain, limits can be exceeded as a result of intention or surprise. However, the perceptions of members and the organization's policies also described in the above definition reveal a second source of organizational limits, namely the limits present in the mental models of its members. Limits in cognition of the members of the organization can also affect negatively sensemaking (Oliver et al., 2017).

This study revealed such limits in understanding contextual cues; mental models can constrain understanding of the extreme context and lead to failed sensemaking. Learning about and overcoming these limits is therefore an important aspect of the sensemaking and learning in the extreme that are part of extreme context strategizing. In addition, organizational mental models contain limits imposed by the organization's mission or vision. In this sense, they represent what the organization should do. This study shows how extreme contexts challenge and reveal both types of limits.

Creating is actually a critical aspect of organizational life even when the context is not extreme. However, the process of creation in extreme context strategizing is emphasized here as a response to the extreme and moral dilemma that accompanies the context, opening up new

possibilities. It is not a process of selecting routines, strategic options known to the organization and based on internalized practices, but a creative process that expands new fields of action for the organization and even for other organizations. Learning makes it possible to experiment with actions that have never been carried out before by the organization, and sometimes by no organization at all. In contrast with the study of Mumford et al. (2010), there was no measurement and potential scenarios, but creative strategic thinking and action were observed in response to real moral dilemmas in extreme contexts of the past, as they actually unfolded. Furthermore, although prioritization may seem obvious when an organization is faced with extreme events that disrupt meaning and order, the process of prioritization in strategizing has not received much attention as an object of research in the field of ECR. This study takes seriously the iteration between creating and prioritizing when a moral dilemma arises, and links these to learning in extreme context strategizing.

Moreover, the creation of new ways of doing things through acts of improvisation can involve what I have termed misbehavior. Improvising has been discussed in ECR as a means to make sense of the context after a collapse of meaning (O'Grady & Orton, 2016) and as means to respond to the extreme context (Weick, 1993). This study has revealed that misbehavior is an act of improvisation that further involves the crossing of boundaries established by the organization and expressed through its practices. Such (mis)behavior in the extreme context stems from moral emotions.

Although misbehavior can lead to both strategic success and failure, it is often detrimental to the individual's role within the organization (loss of reputation, credibility, difficulties in future communication and collaboration, and can even lead to dismissal or resignation). At the organizational level, misconduct can be used to describe collective efforts to act beyond organizational boundaries in a way that is perceived as reprehensible by others inside or outside the organization. As this study shows, such misbehavior can create tensions that are difficult to resolve, and can develop into crises (e.g., a crisis of trust within the organization). There is, however, another strategic option, not addressed by Farjoun and Starbuck (2007). This option can both ensure the organization's survival and protect its limits, because members are convinced that a certain threshold must not be exceeded; this option is renunciation. Expanding variety through creation; in other words, doing more is not synonymous with doing well or doing better. This study addresses the important notion of when and how to leave the extreme, as creating new capabilities may, in some cases, be more damaging to the organization than giving up.

In the literature review, it has been discussed that most researchers place the locus of knowledge on either the individual or the collective (Felin & Hesterly, 2007). It is argued that the two are co-dependent and necessary to understand the place of knowledge in strategizing, especially in extreme contexts. Here, both levels are integrated in the model of extreme context strategizing. That is because individual efforts to fill the knowledge gap in the extreme context only become relevant in decision-making and action when socially accepted within the organization, as shown in Vignette 1.1 (CASE 1), Vignette 1.2. (CASE 2), Vignette 1.3. (CASE 3), Vignette 1.4. (CASE 4) Vignette 3.1. (CASE 1) and Vignette 3.2. (CASE 4). Learning in the extreme at both individual and organizational levels is therefore part of extreme context strategizing.

6.3.2 Learning from the extreme

In this section, I focus on the place of learning from the extreme in extreme context strategizing and relate it to developing strategic learning in the sense of organizing for high reliability and eventually building a learning organization. The power of *learning from the extreme* is demonstrated by its impact –whether positive or negative– on extreme context strategizing. The impact of deutero-learning (Argyris & Schön, 1997) in extreme context is highlighted with the study's concluding finding that extreme context strategizing involves a process of redefinition at both individual and organizational levels.

As described in the literature review, strategic learning can be understood as "organizational learning that improves the strategic capability of the organization and changes the basic assumptions underlying the stable generation mechanism that structures the strategic behavior design process" (Kuwada, 1998: 719). This study contributes to the understanding of strategic learning in how it develops in extreme contexts and impacts the strategizing process.

When it comes to preparing the organization for future extreme events, there is no secret recipe. The idea of preparedness is particularly forsaken for disrupted contexts since by definition, they encompass the idea that organization is not prepared for the disruption in the context. This is why I discuss organizing for high reliability instead. While this study has shown the benefits to allowing adequate space for sensemaking, prioritization and creative strategic thinking, as well as understanding the impact of ethical decision-making, it is primarily through the evolution of the practices and mental models of the organization's members, which arise

naturally from learning from the extreme, that the organization can organize for high reliability and tend towards the idea of not only a HRO but a learning organization.

One of the strengths of this study is the focus on not one but on two units of analysis, the organization and the individual which is not a common approach. When presenting a typology of OL research, Edmondson and Moingeon (1998), the primary unit of analysis was either the organization or the individual (see **FIGURE *6***). Nonetheless, OL is about the two, because it is a process that is dynamic and happens in both (see **Erreur ! Source du renvoi introuvable.**). As discussed in the literature review, organizational learning starts with individual learning that becomes social activity and can then be embedded in organizational practices.

Further, it is both within each case study and from one case to the other that the role of organizational learning in extreme context strategizing appears with this study. Throughout the different cases, it appears that MSF values learning from the extreme because individual learning and organizational learning are integral to the extreme context strategizing process. However, organizational learning does not directly lead to strategic success. Instead, the analysis of the case studies showed learning to act differently, learning to increase variety in the sense of the organization becoming more than what it was before. Most of the time, individual learning from the extreme starts a form of questioning that will enable the organization to adapt and bring organizational change which can be the only viable way to navigate in the extreme context.

This study showcases that organizational learning from learning in the extreme is also important for strategizing. Learning is present and visible in the cases studied through individual questioning and various organizational learning loops as discussed in the previous section. However, it is interesting to note that learning from the extreme cannot be described as always positive or beneficial for the organization. Learning is accompanied by new definitions, new divisions and possibly strategic choices and actions that may be deemed inappropriate or even harmful, not only in the extreme context, but generally for the organization. Sometimes, individual questioning has led to an organizational member no longer wanting to be part of the organization and resigning, or the result of an organizational learning loop has led to paralysis for fear of repeating a mistake and making the problem worse.

The possibility of learning leading to undesirable outcomes for the organization is rarely addressed in the literature. Learning is essential for all human beings and, consequently, for all organizations. Nevertheless, (Starbuck, 2017: 30) warned that "in the 1950s, academic researchers naively assumed that learning produces improvement", and seventy years later, most people still assume that learning is simply a good thing. The extreme contexts studied here have created imbalances within the organization that can either lead to extraordinary collaboration within the organization and/or with external stakeholders or create a real crisis within the organization and/or with external partners as shown in Vignette 3.3. (CASES 3, 4). The division within the organization between individuals with their own unique moral sense and learning, and sections which, culturally, sometimes have opposite reactions as to how to deal with failure and harsh criticism, led to actions and interpretations which eventually became a major crisis of trust within the organization at all levels: between individuals, between field and headquarters and between MSF sections. In fact, "learning often produces undesired outcomes" (Starbuck, 2017: 31).

However, this crisis brought the organization to work on its learning system and introduces deutero learning understood here as meta-learning as defined by Visser (2007) since the focus was on reflecting on how to improve single-loop and double-loop learning for developing a learning culture within the organization. In that sense, learning from the extreme may also lead to building a learning organization. In fact, this study shows that extreme contexts provide a particularly rich terrain for building learning within the organization, which is in line with the idea that "major disasters have the potential to change dominant ways of thinking and acting" developed by Birkmann et al. (2010: 637).

The type of crisis experienced in the extreme context of my last case study (Case 4) can go several ways, it can lead to the loss of unity in the organization, with more divisions, each section cutting the others off from its strategizing, making future collaboration on other cases barely possible or on the adaptability of the organizational identity through organizational learning to reconcile different viewpoints and move the organization forward. Moreover, memories of what happened and the organization's strategic choices in these extreme contexts were contested, and the crisis was blamed on the strategizing of other sections. It was this crisis not only of trust but also of organizational identity resulting from extreme context strategizing that led to the investigation of the extreme cases studied and, later, to further cases with the 'Speaking Out' case series that formed the basis of my data. This has probably given rise to much more within the organization, which clearly sees learning from the extreme as part of the

strategizing process. Years later, it is visible in the learning culture of the different sections with examples such as the creation of the Centre de Réflexion sur l'Action et les Savoirs Humanitaires (CRASH) [8] in 1999 by MSF-France and the creation of the Unité de Recherche sur les Enjeux et Pratiques Humanitaires (UREPH) [9] in 2006 by MSF-Switzerland.

Although public and internal perception of the MSF organization could lead to characterize it as a high reliability organization (HRO) according to the typology developed by Hannah et al. (2009), this is not what the past cases studied here have revealed. MSF in the cases studied here can be better characterized as a trauma organization. Trauma organizations experience extreme events more often than HROs, however, the probability of consequences for the members of the organization is usually low. That is because organizations like MSF are used to risky and emergency contexts, but they are in new territory when it comes to disruptions accompanied by a high level of uncertainty and equivocality. Being involved in solving problems for other people (and even saving their lives) does not mean that the organization has invested internally in learning to be ready and prepared for the unexpected and the complexity that as clearly showcased int this study made it particularly vulnerable and at risk. That is especially true when the problems faced by the organization reveal moral dilemmas that cannot be 'solved' but require a strategic response. This is why the extreme contexts explored in this study have required the organization to rethink its own identity and mandate. It is in that learning to strategize in the extreme that this study makes a strong contribution to academic knowledge.

Even if, in my analysis of MSF (of the past cases), the organization could not be called a HRO, the strategic learning developed by the organization in extreme contexts has led it on the path of organizing for high reliability. To some extent, the five principles of organizing for high reliability described by Weick (2010) are visible in the data : *preoccupation with failure*, *reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations*, *commitment to resilience* and *deference to expertise.* Further, this study's analysis of the organizational learning from the extreme shows

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[8] CRASH "is a unique structure in the world of NGOs. Its purpose is to inspire debate and critical reflection on field practices and public positions, in order to improve the association's actions. The CRASH team consists of six permanent employees, from the field, with university training. Backed by a scientific committee made up of volunteer research professionals, it works closely with the operational leadership of Médecins Sans Frontières. CRASH team members conduct and direct studies and analysis of MSF actions. They participate in internal training sessions and assessment missions in the field." (https://msf-crash.org/en/crash)

[9] The UREPH participates in reflection and analyses on humanitarian action in relation to projects implemented by MSF in the organization's fields of intervention (https://msf-ureph.ch/objectives-and-activities/)

that organizing for high reliability eventually leads the organization on the path to becoming a learning organization.

An organization cannot simply self-proclaim that it is a learning organization as Senge (2006: 10) explained, but it can strive to become one by "practicing the disciplines of learning, of getting better or worse". This encompasses the idea that learning can be positive and negative for the organization as demonstrated here. In other words, the organization can continually become a learning organization by developing adaptive mental models, which was observed in the cases of extreme context strategizing analyzed in this study. Consequently, this study aligns with the idea that the learning organization is built into the vision, values, and mental models of organizational members (Senge, 1990; Senge & Sterman, 1992).

The creative strategic paths revealed in the data, such as calling for armed intervention during the genocide in Rwanda, posed many challenges for the organization that can be brought back to one simple question: *did the creative strategic choice embrace the shared vision within the organization?* Senge (2006) discusses building shared vision as critical dimension for building learning in organizations. In other words, organizations that truly learn foster a vision that is not imposed by a leader but shared by the members of the organization and in that sense motivate them to want to learn (Senge, 2006). This vision comes to life in shared "pictures of the future" (Senge, 2006: 9) by members of the organization who chose to enact them. Thus, the temporal modality of the future is in the strategizing in the extreme context. With hindsight, the organization responded positively to certain creative choices in terms of the shared vision within the organization (like the first call for armed intervention) but at the time of the events, it was more unclear. Learning from the strategic choices made in the extreme context is therefore particularly relevant to building this shared vision and becoming a learning organization.

7 Conclusions

This thesis makes several theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. I begin with the theoretical contributions relevant to management and organizations studies and in particular the field of strategic management (SM) and extreme context research (ECR). Then,

I develop the methodological contributions including those for research practice, and finally end with the practical contributions.

7.1 Implications for research

This section highlights the two types of theoretical contributions of this study: (1) the contributions to the scholarship on extreme context research (ECR) and on strategic management (SM), highlighting that the contribution lays in the intersection of these two fields, and (2) the methodological contributions and contributions to research practice when trauma is involved.

7.1.1 Contribution to ECR and SM

The first contribution to scholarly knowledge is a more nuanced and detailed understanding of the process of strategizing in an extreme context. Past research has mostly investigated the strategizing process in non-extreme contexts. Few examples include Mintzberg et al. (2003) who explain strategy process through ten perspectives, Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) who explain strategizing through a practice lens, while Burgelman et al. (2018) show the combinatory nature or process and practice in SM and provide the SAPP framework.

However, a number of studies have researched strategizing in an uncertain environment (e.g., Courtney et al., 1997; Engau & Hoffmann, 2011; Furr & Eisenhardt, 2021; Spender, 2014; Wernerfelt & Karnani, 1987). Nonetheless, an extreme context in not simply characterized by uncertainty. Few studies even discuss strategizing in an extreme context. Taken individually, each of the theoretical perspectives of these studies seem to focus attention on one or two of the essential dimensions of extreme context strategizing. For instance, they have done so in investigating the reasons for failure in an extreme context (Buchanan, 2011), how leaders think and act in an extreme context (Buchanan & Hällgren, 2019; Geier, 2016; Hannah & Parry, 2014; Hannah et al., 2009; Kayes & Kayes, 2021; Kayes et al., 2017), how organizational members make sense of and enact the extreme environment (Weick, 1993) and how and why organizational learning is triggered by extreme contexts (Dwyer & Hardy, 2016).

This thesis extends the understanding of these elements by offering a nuanced and authentic account of the practices and processes that shape extreme context strategizing over time. This contributes to scholarly knowledge insofar as we now understand extreme context

strategizing as an overarching process that is not only socially constructed in practice and knowledge-intensive as has been described in the SM literature, but is also intensely shaped by sensemaking, sensing, improvising, ethical decision-making and learning, which are predominantly processes the literature situated in ECR. By providing an integrative model of how these processes together shape the strategizing process in an extreme context, this research makes a strong contribution in the literatures on SAPP and ECR and builds a solid theoretical bridge between these two literatures.

Indeed, this study of four extreme past cases does not only deepen our understanding of these cases but enriches our understanding of the forces at play in the process of strategizing in an extreme context. In doing so, it illuminates the place of the past, present and future in extreme context strategizing. Although each extreme context is unique, the process of extreme context strategizing is influenced and even shaped by the mental models and organizational practices of the past, the present situation and the projected images of the future. This blending of the three temporalities do not only determine strategic action, success and failure, but also ignite both reflection and reflexivity for organizational members.

The second major contribution to scholarly knowledge presented in this study is the enhanced understanding of how extreme events can catalyze reflection and reflexivity under time constraints, leading to unexpected behaviors that may foster the creation of a desired future. It is often only in the aftermath of such extreme events that organizational members fully grasp the severity of the situation and recognize the necessity to act swiftly and responsibly within a limited timeframe. This study highlights that initial reactions to extreme events may not always be appropriate due to the lack of time for reflection and engagement in sensemaking practices. However, the findings indicate that retrospective awareness of the situation's gravity –sometimes coupled with the lived consequences of these reactions– makes reflection and reflexivity crucial components of strategizing in an extreme context.

Moreover, the urgency and clarity imposed by the extreme nature of the situation compel organizational members to engage in deeper reflection about their identities within the organization and their individual roles and sense of self. Thus, this study reveals that strategizing in extreme contexts often leads practitioners to a heightened level of reflection, which can result in unexpected behaviors aligned with their evolving sense of self within the organization.

In an extreme context, individual reflection may not always lead to a clear sense of direction but often fosters personal development and deeper involvement in the unfolding events. Organizational members navigate these situations by engaging in two distinct ways: through their formal roles within the organization or by acting on their moral convictions beyond their prescribed roles. These pathways may sometimes conflict, requiring individuals to make critical decisions about which to prioritize. This decision-making process reflects an acknowledgment of the individual's limited control over the situation, aligning with the concept of humility in strategy, as discussed by Chia and Holt (2023).

This study also reveals acts of resistance within extreme contexts, where individuals defy institutional pressures and organizational boundaries by acting according to their moral convictions. Such behavior mirrors the actions of Dr. Ballour and Dr. Dr Hamza al-Kateab who went beyond their organizational roles to fulfill their ethical responsibilities during the Syrian civil war (Essex, 2022). Similarly, cases of whistleblowing often involve individuals who, through self-reflection and critical reflexivity, choose to diverge from organizational directives. This can relate to the notion of phronesis, introduced by Aristotle, which can be described as "the stance one takes in relation to any given situation that calls for standing up for what one stands for" (Antonacopoulou, 2019: 16). In other words, individual organizational members can exercise their choice and act in a way that show their character as individuals (Antonacopoulou, 2019).

Emotions, particularly strong negative emotions like fear and powerlessness, coupled with moral convictions, play a significant role in shaping reflexive practices (Hibbert & Cunliffe, 2015) and, as this research has shown, strong negative emotions such as fear and the feeling of being powerless coupled with moral emotions have led to a strong will to change the context and/or create new ways to operate in the extreme. As Hibbert, Callagher, Siedlok, Windahl, and Kim (2019) point out, reflexive practices can lead to either engagement or avoidance to change oneself or the social context. In this study, engagement has been observed as part of extreme context strategizing. In overcoming extreme events, individual agency becomes crucial. Understanding the dynamics at play means resisting a fatalistic approach and instead finding ways to actively engage with and influence the situation presented in the extreme context.

The third contribution to scholarly knowledge lies in advancing our understanding of how strategizing in extreme contexts prompts organizations to reflect on their identity and

purpose, encapsulated in the questions '*who are we (as an organization)?*' and '*what are we doing (here)?*'. These reflections emerge from the struggle with potential, which refers to the exploration of what is possible, what is desirable and what is appropriate.

Extreme events initiate a process of sensemaking, where organizational members perceive, interpret, act, and then enact their environment. This process often leads to a deeper form of sensemaking—where the organization collectively reassesses its identity and mission. The moral dilemmas posed by extreme contexts create an opportunity to critically examine and redefine organizational priorities and responses. As members navigate these dilemmas, they engage in reflexive practices that challenge and potentially transform their understanding of the organization's role and responsibilities.

Strategizing in an extreme context is not just about responding to immediate threats but involves dealing with potential outcomes –both what can happen and what should happen. At the organizational level, this struggle is tied to a broader sense of social responsibility. Organizations may not control events through direct cause-and-effect mechanisms, but they do influence outcomes by shaping their responses and enacting the context as they interpret it. This understanding of strategizing underscores the organization's role in navigating uncertainty, risk, and complexity, emphasizing the ethical dimensions of decision-making and action in extreme situations.

> *"As organizations and systems grow in scale and complexity, the issue of how we develop our organizations—and ourselves as actors—to handle unexpected and extreme events grows ever more pressing"* (Oliver et al., 2017: 741)

In the 'will to power' logic as described in the literature review, obstacles in the environment are mere invitations to start anew (Chia & Holt, 2023). This study highlights strategic action that prioritizes organizational adaptation over the preservation of a fixed identity. Specifically, the study examines how Doctors Without Borders, an organization defined by its commitment to operating 'without borders' has interpreted this principle in extreme contexts—not just geographically or politically, but in terms of its practices and organizational learning. Although it was necessary to operate at the extreme on several occasions, this came at a considerable cost to the organization: loss of members, loss of trust, loss of meaning and direction.

These challenges reveal the limits of the organization, limits that may surprise strategists and necessitate a redefinition of organizational boundaries. Despite these challenges, the organization's response to these extreme contexts has been to engage in a process of strategic learning. This type of learning, as defined by Kuwada (1998: 719) as "organizational learning that improves the strategic capability of the organization and changes the basic assumptions underlying the stable generation mechanism that structures the strategic behavior design process".

Through the investigation of chronological case studies, this research demonstrates that extreme context strategizing does more than just address the immediate challenges posed by extreme events. It fosters deeper organizational learning by prompting members to critically assess and reconsider existing assumptions, practices, and routines. This reflective process enables the organization to evolve and adapt, ensuring that it is not only responding to the current extreme context but also preparing for future extreme contexts. The study ultimately shows that organizational learning becomes a vital tool for survival and growth in the struggle with the present extreme context, which is also struggle with potential. This learning process pushes the organization to its limits and redefines those limits in the process.

7.1.2   Contribution to research methodology and research practice

In this section, I focus on the fourth contribution of this study which is a contribution to methodological knowledge and the fifth contribution for research practice especially for ECR that involves trauma.

This thesis demonstrates how archival data used as primary and only source of data can reveal a critical process of organizational life. It is shown how a researcher can reveal the organization's strategizing in an extreme context from the study of its archives. I argue that this archival study makes an important contribution to qualitative research methods by using secondary data as primary data to observe the unfolding of the strategizing process and *unfreeze* the lived experiences of organizational members in archival data which remain *frozen* in time in a sense (see Miralles et al., 2019). By *frozen*, I mean that archival documents keep in a dormant state the lived experiences of the individuals who experienced the extreme context and strategized in it. In doing so, the lived experiences are kept safe and still in a way that they are protected from time which may strongly affect the memories of lived experiences. While some memories may remain clear for a lifetime, others can fade, become distorted, or be reshaped by

new experiences and information. Data that was collected at the time of the extreme context and preserved in archival documents are more protected from potentially distorted recollection of memories over time.

In this research, organizational archives granted a certain form of access to the stories of lived experiences of workers in the field and to the stories of the strategists' in showing their thoughts, discussions and actions at headquarters in response to the extreme context at the time. Archival data revealed how the stories from the field inform the strategizing in the headquarters and how the procedures developed in the headquarters aim to guide and limit what happens in the field. However, reality (of the extreme context) tends not to follow what the strategists have in mind, so in the field things go down differently than the procedures prescribe. The heterogeneous abundance of evidence in the four archival reports used in this study provides an opportunity to study the complex process of strategizing over time for a single organization that choses to operates in extreme contexts.

Additionally, archival research allows for the study of processes with the benefit of hindsight, enabling researchers to identify patterns and trends over time. This retrospective analysis can uncover evidence from primary documents that might not be accessible through other means. Although archival data are mostly used as an additional source of data in qualitative research and tend to receive little methodological attention (Miralles et al., 2019), it is demonstrated here how archival data can actually reveal organizational phenomena. This archival study has allowed the production of an account through stories synthesized from the data and of a model of extreme context strategizing. Further, there is much to be gained from using data in the form of organizational archival reports in areas that are difficult to study, such as research on extreme context where trauma is present.

The fifth contribution of this thesis is the interest and power of archival research to study hard-to-get-to-phenomena that involve trauma, especially in ECR. Because I looked at these extreme contexts, such as the Genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994, this study naturally links to trauma research. While this literature is outside the scope of this research, the findings are of high importance for trauma research and research practice because the lived experiences of extreme context strategizing include traumatic experiences –as shown in the following quotes– which is an important aspect to consider for the type of research that investigates an organizational phenomenon that involves trauma.

"Samantha Bolton, press officer Nairobi, met the teams returning from Kigali off the plane yesterday evening. The MSF Belgium, France and Holland teams are all totally traumatised. They all say "It's total butchery, there is nothing we can do". Apparently as they were driven to Kigali airport by the French military, the road was lined with headless bodies and they witnessed ten Tutsi women being killed" [Extract from 'News of evacuated MSF staff' MSF International Secretariat Situation Report, 12 April 1994.] CASE 1

"The team is traumatised and considering what to do. Should teams be reduced or withdrawn, allowing local teams to take over the activities? We have not yet made any decisions." [Extract from Minutes of the 24 January 1997 Meeting of the MSF France Board of Directors (in French).] CASE 4

A special issue edited by Miralles et al. (2022) stresses the increasing prevalence of traumatic experiences, driven by factors such as climate change, the psychological toll of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts like those in Eastern Europe, and high homicide rates in various advanced nations. These emerging challenges highlight the importance of archival resources in researching trauma-related phenomena, especially in extreme contexts where conventional research methods may be impractical or impossible.

Archival resources, including documents, photographs, and videos, have long been recognized as valuable tools in regular research (Bell & Davison, 2013; Lee, 2012; Lee et al., 2021). However, their significance is even more pronounced when studying extreme environments marked by trauma. In such contexts, the collection of data through interviews or direct observation can be highly challenging for both the researcher and the researched, making archival data a crucial alternative for understanding these phenomena.

Trauma is inherently linked to extreme contexts, which are characterized by rare, overwhelming events that exceed typical coping mechanisms (Hällgren et al., 2018; Hannah et al., 2009). Traditionally, these contexts were infrequent, and few people, aside from those like MSF field workers, regularly engaged with them. However, the frequency of extreme contexts is increasing, potentially normalizing what was once considered rare (Hällgren, Geiger, Rouleau, & Sutcliffe, 2021). As we move into what Charles Handy (2012) termed "the age of unreason", where the unimaginable becomes commonplace (cf Taleb, 2007), it becomes

essential to consider in trauma research. Preparing for research where extreme events become part of everyday life requires integrating an understanding of trauma into our research practice.

An important consideration is whether the challenges outlined in section 4.2.2 for the researcher when trauma is present also pertain to research utilizing archival methods. Although archival sources often complement primary data collection methods like interviews and observations in qualitative research or surveys in quantitative studies, this contribution focuses on the interest of archival sources when they serve as the sole data source for ECR. Utilizing records as windows into past events offers several advantages. These records are sometimes the only available sources and provide significant flexibility, addressing a wide array of research questions across different philosophical perspectives. Additionally, they are often easy and inexpensive to obtain, making them a cost-effective option for conducting large-scale research. Moreover, archival records offer a transparent audit trail, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings derived from them (Lee, 2021).

Crucially, for research in an extreme context, archival methods can allow for non-intrusive and safe collection of natural evidence over extended periods. One of the key benefits of archival research is its reduced potential for re-traumatizing participants or causing secondary trauma to researchers, readers, and the families of those involved. This makes it a preferable method in sensitive research areas such as ECR where trauma is present.

7.2 Implications for practice

Most organizations, if not all, evolve in a fast-changing environment today. Further, organizations are increasingly aware of extreme contexts, probably because they must face extreme events more frequently than in the past. The Covid-19 pandemic and the many crises (such as wars, refugee crises, global warming related events and natural catastrophes) we have faced in recent years have made it increasingly clear that organizations must prepare for but even more importantly learn to strategize in an extreme context. Therefore, most organizations are facing risks and dilemmas, and need to undertake complex strategizing in complex contexts. In the logic of situation introduced in the review of the literature, such extreme circumstances make an important constituent of strategy.

The extreme cases studied here embrace novelty, uncertainty and threat and show how an organization and its members engaged in critical questioning and defining by embracing

reflexive practices. In this sense, this study provides a valuable example for practice by showing how learning from the past, being in the present and preparing for the future are deeply entangled in the strategizing process in an extreme context. Strategizing in uncertainty especially in case of an extreme context gives us that chance not just to look forward to the future or backwards to the past, but to take a close look within, within the organization's processes, practices, principles, within its r*aison d'être*, and within one's role within the organization.

I have come to realize that when talking about strategizing in organizations that most people (outside my academic circle and my surrounding who plays chess at a good knowledge level) still only think long-term plan. The process of strategizing is very little understood. Unequivocally, it is a complex process. Many strategists often rely on the conceptualizations of strategy taught in business schools, where we were introduced (myself included) to means-ends logic and data-driven models such as those proposed by Porter. These models tend to overemphasize the role of the individual agent and prioritize intellectual reasoning over other senses and organizational dynamics. With this work, I build on the efforts of many others to expand this traditional view by highlighting the importance of considering the strategizing process in connection with other critical organizational practices and processes. I am confident that this broader perspective opens numerous avenues for fuure research.

This study has shown that in the extreme both the organization and its individual members have acted in a way they should not have. Here I mean, not just in an unusual way, but in a way that goes against what is expected of them, in a way that may even be detrimental to their role within the organization, to the organization's future, and in the worst case hurting or killing people. It may be argued that they should not have done it, but the hard truth is that they should not have had to. Such is the reality of extreme contexts. No magic solution exists to emerge unscathed from a disrupted context. It is essential for practice to consider the potential consequences of extreme contexts, not only in terms of the immediate issues that arise when an extreme event occurs, such as the immediate loss of life or assets, but also the impact of the past on sensemaking and action in the extreme context and on the future of the organization and its members, on the long-term effects of extreme context strategizing for the organization, such as its reputation, legitimacy and redefinition, and for individuals who may find their organizational role called into question.

Practitioners need to be aware of and think about what it means to strategize in the extreme. They must not only assess and address risks; they must be allowed and enable others to make sense, prioritize, create, act and learn according to what the context demands, their organization requires and their moral sense dictates. It is necessary to learn during and after the extreme context, to make sense not just of the context, but of what happened within the organization.

From this study, I draw a comparative table highlighting the differences between generic and extreme contexts across the dimensions of **sensemaking**, **ethical decision-making**, and **organizational learning**:

TABLE 4: Comparative table highlighting the differences between generic and extreme contexts

Dimension	Generic Context	Extreme Context
Definition	- *Nature of the Context*: Typical, routine organizational settings with moderate complexity and uncertainty with no particular risk posed to the organization or its members. - *Risk Level:* Moderate to low: risks are usually predictable and manageable. - *Uncertainty Level:* Relatively low, with access to sufficient information and mostly predictable patterns.	- *Nature of the Context:* Unusual, dynamic and high-stakes environment characterized by extreme uncertainty, urgency, and risk for the organization and its members. - *Risk Level:* High to catastrophic: risks are often unpredictable and require rapid and efficient action. - *Uncertainty Level:* Extremely high, with insufficient or ambiguous cues and unpredictable extreme events.
Sensemaking	- *Nature of Sensemaking:* Under normal conditions, structured and deliberate based on established organizational frameworks. - *Information Availability:* Abundant and reliable information allows clear interpretation. - *Approach:* Slow, analytical and deliberate. Focused on uncovering patterns over time.	- *Nature of Sensemaking:* Under pressure, nonlinear, fragmented and emergent due to the chaotic and dynamic nature of the environment. - *Information Availability:* Sparse, ambiguous, or conflicting cues requiring emergent understanding. - *Approach:* Rapid, intuitive and reliant on collective inputs to interpret fast-changing realities. Produced by bodily sensations and moral emotions to understand the context and restore a form of order.

Ethical Decision-Making	- *Nature of Dilemmas:* Low-stakes dilemmas where clear norms or guidelines for resolution exist. - *Stakeholder Consideration:* Predictable and stable stakeholder expectations shape decisions and action. - *Process:* Follows predefined ethical codes, often consultative and deliberate.	- *Nature of Dilemmas:* High-stakes moral dilemmas where ethical norms may conflict with individuals' moral sense. - *Stakeholder Consideration:* Diverse and fluid expectations under intense scrutiny making unclear the proper course of action. - *Process:* Requires swift judgment, balancing competing values and prioritizing critical outcomes.
Organizational Learning	- *Learning Environment:* Stable environments allow for gradual learning and incremental changes. - *Knowledge Sharing:* Structured systems for knowledge acquisition and dissemination. - *Potential Outcomes:* Emphasis on refining processes, efficiency, productivity and incremental improvements.	- *Learning Environment:* Unstable and high-pressure environments prompt organizational learning loops and strategic learning. - *Knowledge Sharing:* Informal, rapid, and often occurs during or soon after extreme events. - *Potential Outcomes:* Emphasis on resilience, adaptability and embedding lessons from critical incidents, prompting redefinition of the organization and future preparedness.

This breakdown demonstrates how the mechanisms and approaches within these categories adapt to the context's demands, stressing the complexity and heightened stakes of extreme contexts.

In conclusion, below are six takeaways from this research for strategists.

1. *Heighten Awareness for Strategic Alignment*: Ensure that organizational members are attuned to contextual signals crucial for sensemaking, particularly in extreme contexts. If initial sensemaking proves faulty, encourage a reassessment to align the organization's response with the external reality. Failing to do so risks creating misaligned action that is bound to fail.

2. *Encourage Flexibility in Extreme Contexts*: In the face of extreme events, rigid adherence to established routines will not be effective. Empower your team to improvise and, when necessary, challenge norms to develop the strategic responses required by the situation.

3. *Navigate Ethical Dilemmas with Integrity*: In extreme contexts, clearly identify ethical challenges and address them using the organization's ethical framework and the moral compass of each organizational member. When conflicts arise, trust that individual freedom and organizational responsibility will guide ethical and effective strategizing.

4. *Leverage Time Constraints for Innovation*: While extreme contexts present significant risks, they also force creativity and rapid prioritization. Embrace this dynamic to explore new practices that, if socially accepted within the organization, could become valuable and routinized.

5. *Know When to Exit*: Sometimes, the best response to an extreme context is to withdraw. Like an individual choosing to flee from a stressor, recognize when leaving a situation is the best course of action for the organization in the long-term.

6. *Continuously Redefine Organizational Identity*: Treat strategizing as an ongoing, dynamic process of redefining both the organization's identity and the roles of its members. Regularly ask: *Who are we? What do we stand for? And what is our best course of action in this situation?*

7.3 Limitations and further research directions

In this subchapter, I discuss several suggestions for future research. This study has offered a multi-level model of extreme context strategizing based on empirical data. In doing so, it has refined the understanding of what constitutes strategy over time when the unexpected and unimaginable happens. The hope is that this study encourages more research on extreme context strategizing.

The organization that I have studied is a not-for-profit organization. I am aware that most management and organization studies, and consequently the vast majority of those cited in my literature review, study business organizations. It may be argued that this makes a noticeable difference in terms of strategizing. The foundational values, goals, and operational contexts of these two types of organizations differ in important ways, even when they experience the same phenomena. Literature on for-profit organizations often focuses on financial outcomes and efficiency, while not-for-profit studies prioritize mission fulfillment, sustainability, and stakeholder relationships. For-profit organizations operate on the basis of financial motivation and market competition. Not-for-profit organizations are often confronted with donor

expectations, regulatory oversight and public accountability. As a result, for-profit literature may emphasize scalability and profitability, while not-for-profit discussions may focus on sustainability and transparency. Interpretations and insights drawn from for-profit literature may not be directly transferable to not-for-profit organizations. Researchers should assess whether stakeholder priorities and influences in the literature match those in the not-for-profit context. I had to adapt my interpretation of the literature review to ensure relevance to not-for-profit dynamics. Although, the objectives of the different types of organizations are clearly different, the moral and strategic dilemmas that are present when organizations are immersed in extreme contexts influence the strategizing process indistinctively of the *raison d'être* of each organization since it affects its inherent quest for survival. Furthermore, the interest of qualitative case study research is first and foremost to understand the case(s) studied. The aim is not to replicate results, but to find value in the specific context of each case and theorize potential transferability. To this end, I have strived to achieve trustworthiness. In doing so, I am convinced that the essence of the process of extreme context strategizing is captured in the model, and that this study contributes to the understanding of extreme context strategizing for different types of organizations. However, studying the model of extreme context strategizing presented in this study, in business organizations or public institutions is interesting for future research to be able to further nuance the findings in the different types of organizations.

In addition, this study focused on a single organization. As Meyer (1982) argued, distinctions between organizations that can provide competitive advantage can be revealed in contexts that are uncommon and unstable. Differences in strategic responses to such environments can reveal attributes that are less apparent in more stable settings. Future research may benefit from conducting comparative case studies of multiple organizations operating within the same extreme context, offering deeper insights into how organizational variations shape strategic responses.

While this study revealed the interplay between the levels of the individual and the organization in sensemaking, decision-making, doing and learning that together shape strategizing in an extreme context, there is a level that could not be studied with the secondary data used in this study: the team level. Integrating team level to the model offered here would further refine the understanding of extreme context strategizing.

Golden (1992) warns that researching strategy through the retrospective accounts of the strategists may be tricky because his study shows that "retrospective errors appear to occur

systematically and may be attributable to faulty memory or to attempts to cast past behaviors in a positive light" (Golden, 1992: 848). In the archival data, some excerpts from interview transcripts are retrospective accounts of organizational members' experiences when they were in the extreme context and their recollections of the organization's strategizing. It can be argued that these accounts may be partly inaccurate. However, the quantity of data containing a wealth of accounts from organizational members at the time of the events made it possible to cross-reference information for the researcher during the analysis. These accounts include reports and communication extracts between the field and headquarters in addition to factual information, such as newspaper articles containing interviews with members of the organization or press releases from the organization.

The temporal distance between studies conducted about the past (here from 1994 to 1997) and their relevance to current circumstances poses both challenges and opportunities for interpretation. This gap must be addressed to ensure the findings are appropriately contextualized and remain relevant for contemporary research. Over nearly three decades, organizational environments, societal expectations, and technological advancements have significantly shifted. For example, digital transformation, globalization, and evolving stakeholder priorities (e.g., environmental, social, and governance considerations) now play critical roles in organizational operations. Historical findings must be re-examined through the lens of these changes to account for evolving norms and practices. Cases from 1994-1997 provide valuable insights into the phenomenon of extreme context strategizing and provide a better understanding of sensemaking, ethical decision-making, and organizational learning under extreme conditions. However, new dimensions, such as the prevalence of remote work, AI and heightened interconnectedness, require reinterpreting these lessons to suit present-day environments. Some phenomena –such as extreme context strategizing– remain consistent over time, offering timeless insights. However, the specific triggers (e.g., geopolitical shifts, pandemics, or cyber threats) and their systemic impacts today are distinct. Applying findings from past cases must involve identifying enduring principles while recalibrating for current triggers and contexts. Researchers should critically assess whether assumptions, frameworks, or interpretations from studies about the past align with or diverge from contemporary realities. To bridge the temporal gap, a combination of longitudinal analysis and updated contextual research is necessary. Critically comparing historical cases with more recent ones can illuminate patterns of continuity and divergence, offering richer, more nuanced insights. In summary, while past cases provide foundational lessons, their relevance depends on a careful

analysis for contemporary circumstances. Researchers must account for shifts in technology, societal expectations, and global dynamics to ensure that historical insights remain actionable and meaningful today.

Some may perceive a contradiction between the emphasis on practice in this study and the fact that I relied on archival analysis rather than direct engagement with practitioners in the field. While I could argue that fieldwork is not always feasible when analyzing historical cases, there is a deeper argument here. Drawing on the example of hammering, Heidegger (2010: 69) shows that one discovers the "*handiness* [Zuhandenheit]" of a tool through its use, suggesting that practical engagement brings deeper understanding. However, Heidegger also emphasizes that one can only appreciate this handiness when stepping back and observing the tool's role within the larger process. In my case, by immersing myself in the rich archival data, I was able to take a step back and discern broader patterns of strategizing that may not be visible through direct immersion alone. While I did not physically enter the field, my analysis allowed me to see practices in a different light –one that provides valuable insights for practitioners. As Jané et al. (2022) note, although ethnography and carnal sociology emphasize immersion in the context, my immersion in the data itself enabled me to develop a thorough understanding of extreme context strategizing. The richness of the secondary data gave me a strong grasp of the processes at play, as outlined in 7.1.1. Like Corrigan (2022), whose research relies on written documents, I recognize that there may be concerns of focusing too much on the micro-level. Yet, I believe I have struck a good balance between analyzing the fine details of practices and understanding the larger organizational context.

The learning system where both individual learning and organizational learning happen is critical in strategizing. This learning system can go beyond the boundaries of the organization exploring learning from the extreme within CoPs and beyond in the dynamic landscapes of practices (LoPs) (seeWenger, 2010) since practitioners develop their competences in a specific CoP, but cultivate their 'knowledgeability' of the body of knowledge they are interested in a LoP (Pyrko, Dörfler, & Eden, 2019).

It is also important to explore certain limitations associated with the use of archival data in relation to this study. The analysis was based on extracts from interview transcripts that I did not personally select, and more importantly, I was not the original interviewer. The role of the interviewer is integral to the interviewee's sensemaking process by "facilitating perspective-taking on the part of interviewees by affording access to alternative cognitive frameworks

(Sonenshein, 2007)" (Maclean et al., 2012: 24). Additionally, because I was not present during the interviews, I lacked access to crucial contextual cues, such as tone, body language, or other non-verbal elements. Neither video nor audio recordings of the interviews were available, meaning that my analysis was limited to what could be gathered from the transcripts alone, and even more so from extracts of these transcripts. This limitation is significant, as the interpretation of the studied phenomenon also depends on a researcher's ability to capture the subjective dimensions of experience, referred to as 'qualia' (Jackson, 1982). Qualia represents the conscious, subjective aspects of experience that are inherently difficult, if not impossible, to articulate fully in words. Similarly, Polányi highlighted the notion of tacit knowing, he wrote "we can know more than we can tell" (Polanyi, 1966). Therefore, intuition and introspection are necessary to fully comprehend the strategists' experiences of the strategizing process. Aware of this inherent loss of information, I deliberately chose to rely exclusively on archival data for this study. While this was a bold decision, it was not without merit. The logic behind this choice is both intellectual and intuitive. From the outset of the secondary data examination, I recognized the exceptional opportunity for an exploratory study of extreme context strategizing because of the richness and depth of the data. This initial intuition was affirmed as I delved further into the material, revealing its power to illuminate the phenomenon under study. Collecting primary data might have afforded greater control, yet it would not have matched the richness or volume of the archival data. Given the temporal distance from the cases and my position as an external researcher, replicating such comprehensive and detailed accounts would have been exceedingly difficult. Thus, while embracing the limitations of archival data, I was confident in its capacity to provide valuable insights for this study.

Lastly, revisiting the recent extreme context literature is an essential and timely step as I prepare to publish my study. Over the eight years it took to complete my research, the field has grown significantly, especially considering recent extreme events like the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, and humanitarian disasters. By incorporating these contemporary contributions, I can enhance the relevance of my work, connecting its historical depth with the latest insights and frameworks. This approach will help ensure that my study resonates with both current academic discussions and practical applications.

7.4 Reflections

"Nothing in the world is worth having or worth doing unless it means effort, pain, difficulty". Theodore Roosevelt

In their special issue, DeGama et al. (2019) ask qualitative researchers to question and re-imagine 'good' research in management and organization studies. The contribution of Hurd, Dyer and Fitzpatrick in this special issue emphasizes the importance to slow down and take time to "breathe" during the research process (DeGama et al., 2019). By doing so, qualitative researchers grant themselves space for reflection and can bring out the authenticity of research participants' experiences and the richness of the data collected (DeGama et al., 2019). Qualitative research is messy (Hurd, Dyer, & Fitzpatrick, 2018). Embracing this messiness can allow the researcher to refine the study over time and bring more authenticity to the research process (Hurd et al., 2018). As Hurd et al. (2018: 27) argue ""good" things take time"; including qualitative research. Indeed, the qualitative research process also depends on maturation (Hurd et al., 2018). Time, when negotiated between timely research delivery and the time needed to construct good research, also allows the individual to develop as a researcher (Hurd et al., 2018). I am confident that I have followed their advice. I have given my research and myself the needed time to 'breathe' when I felt the need to and to develop as a researcher, and I treated the data I collected with a certain kind of respect that allowed me to 'listen' to it. However, I did take a risk by not using standard qualitative methods, in particular by choosing not to interview a single participant. This was a bold choice at a time when one is beginning to build an academic career. However, I was fortunate to receive support from my supervisors and to meet great scholars, Prof Mark Saunders and Prof Bill Lee, experts in research methods, at academic conferences, who showed interest in continuing down this path. It is becoming increasingly accepted to build alternative methods thank to publications such as Wright, Middleton, Hibbert, and Brazil (2020) who develop the technique of 'participant deconstruction' or Pratt et al. (2020) who encourage qualitative researchers to do methodological bricolage and tailor the methods to the particular study.

However, the analysis of the secondary data posed several challenges which I had not anticipated, especially during the analysis of the different cases where I encountered extremely powerful narratives of intense suffering which affected me as a person very strongly. Reflecting on this experience as a researcher, I chose to write the methodological and emotional challenges

I faced in this research and looked into the literature on struggles experienced by researchers in different fields when studying extreme events that often lead to traumatic experiences. This idea was born out of a meeting with Prof Bill Lee, an expert in research methods, at the 2019 British Academy of Management annual conference. I had the chance to see him again a few months after, which was an opportunity to discuss my research in more details. This exchange led to a new angle to explore the emotional challenges of the researcher, also focusing on the methodological and ethical considerations when researching trauma. This inspired me to organize a special issue on the theme of methodological, emotional and ethical challenges for the qualitative researcher investigating trauma (see Miralles et al., 2022) with Bill Lee and my two supervisors Viktor Dörfler and Marc Stierand. For this special issue *in Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management* entitled *'Investigating Trauma: Methodological, emotional and ethical challenges for the qualitative researcher'*, I served as the lead guest editor. This editorial work was a cathartic exercise for me and several of the contributors, in addition to sharing experiences and challenges among qualitative researchers and bringing forward reflective essays to discuss the 'unspoken' and sometimes even the 'unspeakable' for researchers. The reflexive process, in design and execution, is paramount in such sensitive research.

All in all, I realize at the end of this journey that it was as complex as the subject of this study. Nor can it be described as linear or static. At times, it has been interesting, exasperating, difficult, painful and joyful. I loved it and hated it. I have experienced great joy and personal fulfilment, but I have also experienced vicarious traumatization, guilt, exhaustion and stress. Combining the PhD with a full-time job and family life for eight years has been extremely difficult. This had a very tangible impact on my mental health. The fact that society (including academia) has become fast-paced and there are palpable expectations of doing things fast, whether it is going back to work after giving birth, completing a PhD in only a few years or publishing a certain number of academic papers has been draining. Sometimes I needed to stop and sometimes I had to allow myself to dwell in the data to regain my balance. I am aware that my personal situation, working at the same time, having two young children and collaborating with my partner (who has been working seven days a week since he started his business a year and a half into my PhD) to set up his business and develop it during the PhD, made things more difficult, but there was no way I was not going to persevere and allow myself to do this for me. I never really considered quitting because I have always chosen difficulty to regret, and I would have regretted it. However, finding what I called 'me time' – which was time to work on my

dissertation – was a daily struggle, accompanied by a lot of frustration and guilt. I had to push myself through difficult times related to the PhD (e.g., when I was analyzing data and came across stories of indescribable trauma) or my personal life (when I had a miscarriage, when my newborn child was hospitalized after birth and when my father passed away). I think I was able to do this because I was genuinely interested in my research topic. However, when my father died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 55, I rejected the PhD for a while, perhaps because after all these years he would not be around to see me finish and it lost its relevance. To be honest, almost everything lost its relevance and meaning for a while. I had to grieve, work out my emotions and take the time to remember that I had not undertaken this journey to make someone proud of me, but that I had done it for myself, out of intellectual curiosity, to learn and to grow.

Despite the difficulties, I also was very fortunate to receive support from family and friends. I am extremely grateful to my master (in the master-apprentice relationship), Marc Stierand, who let me take charge of my PhD, doing it at my own pace and on my own terms, and who taught me much more than I could put into words. He and my first supervisor Viktor Dörfler, guided and supported me along the way, never ceasing to believe in me, my intellectual abilities and my future contributions. They have inspired me and are true examples of brilliant scholars and professors. They have paved the way for me (and so many others). I was also awarded an end-of-thesis grant that extended my work contract and allowed me to work on my thesis during my working time for six months of my PhD. This scholarship was part of a new programme of the HES-SO (University of Applied Sciences of Switzerland) which includes 28 schools in Switzerland. It recognized the potential contributions of this thesis and supported me as a researcher to put the thesis forward while maintaining financial security.

When I started this journey, I was 25 years old and just curious and eager to learn more about strategy and knowledge management. Now I am 33 and I am still curious and eager to learn more. I consider it a good sign to pursue an academic career despite some disappointments, such as the 'publish or perish' culture and the reality of an academic career. The difficulties of being an academic are slowly beginning to be recognized and I share the hope put forward by Korica (2022) to see 'a more human academia'. Life is a long learning journey. I have grown immensely during this particular journey, both intellectually and emotionally. I am proud of all that I have learned so far and eager for what I will learn tomorrow. During my thesis, my partner achieved the supreme title in the sport of chess and became an International Grandmaster. It was a different journey with many trials, but something he needed

to accomplish to turn the page and start a new chapter. I am looking forward to starting my own next chapter.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix 1: Representation quotes for the data structure

First Order Categories	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
	Individual perception of the context	**Sensemaking under pressure**
Intuitive understanding from a field worker of the new reality of the extreme context	"I will never forget the moment when Reginald took the floor and couldn't string two words together. He started crying and said: "I can't… what I've seen is beyond telling. I have no activity report to give today". Then he pulled himself together and finally read his report. But he remained in tears for a while. And then Reginald wrote a paper that used the term 'genocide'. I did not think that the argument was very good, but he had sensed it. And in this business it is necessary that at a certain moment, people sense things. Afterwards it is important that the point is articulated, but first we need people who sense it." *[Dr. Bernard Pécoul, General Director, MSF France (in French).]* CASE 1 "The Belgians spoke of genocide. They spoke with intuition but without any political conscience." *[Jean-François Alesandrini, Director of Communication Department, MSF France (in French).]* CASE 1	
Field worker sensing the risks in the context before the extreme event occurs	"Kibeho could become a powder keg, given the growing number of people and the presence of infiltrators and troublemakers. Any incident will prompt the IDPs to head to Burundi." *[Extract from Sitrep from the MSF France coordinator in Rwanda to the programme manager, 9 December 1994 (in French)]* CASE 2 "According to Mr de Milliano, there had been 'a rise in terror' in the camp from the previous Tuesday. The massacre did not take place out of the blue. Everyone knew something was going to happen, stated the director of MSF. A few days before the massacre, MSF received indications that things could get "out of hand." MSF sounded the alarm, without getting any reaction, he said. On Thursday, 21 refugees were killed. As MSF entered the Kibeho camp on Saturday about noon, the Rwandan army (a Tutsi majority) opened fire.	

	According to Mr de Milliano, the soldiers continued to shoot the Hutu refugees for almost an hour and a half, all the while singing and whistling. The shooting was interrupted between 16:30 and 17:00 but was resumed shortly after 17:00. In all, the soldiers continued to shoot for 5 hours one day and for two nights, he stated. The Rwandan government had promised that the Kibeho camp as well as other camps in the region would be evacuated correctly and without violence, pointed out Mr de Milliano. In the absence of a believable lower figure, MSF estimates that at least 5,000 people were massacred." *[Extract from 'MSF: Humanitarian aid is superfluous as long as the guilty have not been brought to justice,' Vers l'Avenir (Belgium), 30 April 1995 (in French).]* CASE 2
Field worker knowing for sure without knowing for certain that MSF is being used for unethical reasons against its own mandate	"I suggested three or four times that we leave and close the mission. I remember talking to Lex (Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director) in Kigali around Christmas. I presented my arguments. My information on the massacres around Chimanga, statements from the people who'd escaped, the fact that we'd been used as bait… I have a very clear recollection of their questions and their thoughts. "Did you hear the killers? Are you sure this was a massacre? You had stories from villagers saying they arrived two days later and killed people but you don't have any eyewitness statements." After the problem with the figures, they were very, very cautious. Things were completely paralyzed!" *[Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency intersections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).]* CASE 4 "Emergency Coordinator Maï Saran went into the field himself and clearly told us on the phone, "These people were victims of violence before coming here? I find that hard to believe! They all have the same tale; it's a completely stereotypical story. They look pretty healthy, they have all of their belongings with them, and when you ask them about the massacres they witnessed, it's always 'a friend of a friend of a friend' who saw it." Maï was very sceptical and his opinion carried a lot of weight. Thierry Fournier and several other headquarters staff were also over there during the initial phase. They were more removed from it than the field workers. A debate started among us, which seems normal to me." *[Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, MSF France Programme Manager (in French).]* CASE 3
	Organizational frames and representations
Failed sensemaking by organizational members	"It wasn't a war. But that wasn't picked up in Burundi. It was viewed with that ability of MSF of getting used to certain situations, of seeing it as somehow normal: "After all, it's war, it's horrible, that's the way it is." A somewhat

committing to their mental models of the past	fatalistic attitude. Sometimes, there are those at MSF who think it normal that people can die without our knowing why. In Burundi, a lot of people were dying, but it was as if the MSF people thought it was normal because there was a war. They thought it normal that these people were refugees and that no one was asking why they had fled, what they had fled and who they really were. This attitude of accepting that "the world is tragic but at least we are here to help" is the reaction of an alien, of a saviour who's no longer interested in the nature of people's problems. I think the teams in Burundi and Rwanda were in hero mode. Massacres were taking place and it wasn't our problem. Our problem was to tend to the injured." *[Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF Legal Advisor (in French).] CASE 1*	
Failed sensemaking by organizational members committing to the internalized practices	"It wasn't until Bernard Pécoul [MSF France General Director] came in early June and started explaining to us, point by point, what had happened in Rwanda, that the link between the exodus and the genocide became clear. That's when we started to understand the genocide, who had committed it, the strategy they had used and so on. We put together what had happened in the camps and what had happened in Rwanda." *[Nicolas de Torrente, MSF France administrator in Tanzania, November 1993 to June 1994 then MSF France Coordinator in Rwanda, August 1994 to March 1995 (in French).] CASE 3* "The whole approach to the aid program in these camps was based on the bad experience that we had with the Burundian refugees the previous year both in Tanzania and Rwanda. The aid system did not function well - there were breaks in the food pipeline, which caused terrible malnutrition. Our entire operational approach from the outset aimed to maximise assistance to the Burundian and Rwandan refugees, a systematic distribution to all children less than 5 years old to prevent malnutrition. In Benaco we were reacting to the previous crisis … I was already working for MSF in Tanzania when the refugees arrived in Benaco at the end of April 94. We got on a plane and went up there on the second day. We saw them arrive and we witnessed the entire set-up of the initial mission… It was the first time that I had ever seen such a large influx of refugees. I had never seen so many people, or such a big emergency. We just dived headfirst into it all. For sure, there were problems in Rwanda. I had understood the exodus, I could see that the refugees were organised, but I didn't realise that they were killers. I shook hands with the mayor of Rusomo, a notorious killer, and with other people. Of course I could tell they were	

	organised. It was obvious. They grouped themselves in communes. In a camp of 150,000 people, the Tanzanian Red Cross and the Rwandan Red Cross food distribution took place without so much as a fight. A week and a half after their arrival, we put together a measles vaccination campaign with a coverage rate of 90%. The level of organisation and the amount of people mobilised was incredible. We had noticed the organisational structure of the camp, but I wasn't quite able to add up the facts. I was in daily radio contact with an officer from UNHCR, who was at the border and who kept saying, "They're there; they're going to bust through." We didn't quite understand what it was all about. We knew that the RPF was behind the refugees, so we thought the refugees were fleeing the army's advance and that they had been blocked at the border by the Tanzanians who wouldn't let them in. We didn't understand that it was their own army, the FAR, that was blocking the way, and who then finally let them through. In reality, it was an organised exodus…we knew about the genocide; we had read about it, been told about it, but it wasn't really clear. You almost have to witness those kinds of things to understand them. We were running a camp; there were 35 or 40 people in our team; it was crazy. We worked like maniacs; we were completely immersed in what we were doing." *[Nicolas de Torrente, MSF France administrator in Tanzania, November 1993 to June 1994 then MSF France Coordinator in Rwanda, August 1994 to March 1995 (in French).]* CASE 3
Action centered on second-order sensemaking at HQ based on the first-order sensemaking in the field	"I went once to the Kigali prison. It is one of the most powerful images I've ever seen in my life. There were 10,000 prisoners standing on their feet. Hands and arms were outstretched through the bars. People were staying close to the bars so that they could breathe a little. […] It was unimaginable: human engineering at a level of sub-human degradation. I've never seen anything like it! When you saw the state they were in, you would leave with a sense of overwhelming, complete disgust. This affects our own sense of what it means to be human. There are two possible reactions. Either you don't see them as fellow human beings and so you distance yourself from them, or you say, "These are human beings like me and there but for the grace of God go I." And then you shudder from the depths of your soul. You say to yourself, "How can humans be reduced to such a state of degeneration? This is nothing more than a stockyard." [Dr. Eric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director (in French).] CASE 2 ""What kind of game are we playing? The prison is like a factory that produces patients and people on the verge of

death. We fix them up a bit and send them back to the slaughterhouse." When prisoners we brought back to health went back to prison, you had the feeling that there was no solution. Things were going to stay like this. The prisoner death machine was humming along quite nicely. Given that the negotiations didn't offer much hope--especially for opening additional prisons — we said to ourselves that taking a position might change things." [Dr. Arnaud Veisse, MSF France physician, Kabgayi Hospital, from September 1994 to June 1995 (in French).] CASE 2

"We couldn't save prisoners because the prison sent them to the hospital when they were at the point of death. That way, they could reduce the mortality rate in prison … and increase it in the hospital's. Arnaud, the MSF doctor, said, "It would be worth it if we could be proactive." So we set up a project to evaluate mortality, count prisoners, create dossiers, etc. We could also determine whether our activities reduced mortality or if we ought to give up because we weren't making a difference. Above all, that project gave us access to a strategic and key statistic: mortality inside prisons. That put us in a position of strength — we could criticise the incarceration policy if we could prove that with those rates, no one would live long enough to go to trial. ICRC was working in prisons under confidentiality rules that covered mortality rates, so they could not speak out. But we at MSF thought this information could have a significant humanitarian impact on the prison population so we worked on the project. We showed mortality rates in the prison over six months. We concluded that certain improvements were necessary if people were to survive. [Extract from Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal adviser (in French).] CASE 2

"I was in contact with the team by radio and with Paris. Paris pushed me to give numbers — how many dead, etc. Didier said to me, "This is the first time I've walked on so many bodies." They crossed a checkpoint and walked 150 metres — walking on piled-up corpses the whole way. They managed to get out at the end of the afternoon. I said to them on the radio, "Can you give me an estimate for Paris? They're pushing me — they want to publish the numbers right away." That was difficult. How do you push a team that's been completely traumatised by an event like that? I said to them, "We'll talk about it again, but try to give me a figure anyway." They answered, "Thousands!" "Thousands? That's good enough for me, that's a massacre!" So I called Paris and said, "You can tell the press there are thousands dead." [Extract from MSF France Emergency cell, then coordinator in Rwanda from March 1995 to September 1995 (in French).] CASE 2

	Individual sense of morality	**Dilemma-driven ethical decision making**
Confronting the limitation of humanitarian aid at the individual level	"From that moment, one question would haunt us: What good was it to treat and care for people who might be killed the next day? Should we continue working under such conditions?" *[Extract from Geneviève Legrand (MSF France nurse on the Kibeho team) 'Testimony on the Kibeho Killing,' April 1995 (in French).]* CASE 2 "When I asked him about Dr Canissius, he said "you should be careful because you are not a human rights organisation. You did not come here for human rights." I said "no but it's stupid to treat people and not to take care of the fact that they are going to be executed after the treatment, if you don't mind dear doctor"." *[MSF Belgium coordinator for Byumba and Bugesera (Rwanda), from May to September 1994.]* CASE 2	
Ethical decision of emergency pool coordinator to leave the field and resign from MSF to not participate in the rehabilitation of genocidaires through humanitarian aid	"It has also become clear that several mayors and other leaders within these communities organised the mass murders. And in the camps these leaders are reoccupying their old positions… This is even true within the health structures set up by MSF… I could no longer face this dilemma. It forced me to make a personal, clear choice. Upon my return from Tanzania, I rejected an invitation to go to Zaïre, where the same dilemma is occurring on an even larger scale. As a final consequence, I handed in my resignation as a member of the field emergency team… But especially in such a dilemma we, as an independent organisation, must make a choice. By withdrawing from the camps in Tanzania, we would no longer open ourselves to the risk of being used by criminal power structures, thus enforcing our advocacy activities." *[Extract from Arjo Berkhout, 'Our aid is keeping criminal power structures intact', Ins and Outs, September 1994.]* CASE 3 "Arjo Berkhout, the coordinator in Tanzania, resigned, saying "I am stopping working for these people because I cannot take any further responsibility for this project". He came back to Holland and wrote a small article in a Dutch newspaper explaining his dilemma. As a director, I found it a very good thing. I remember in the office a lot of people said, "why is he saying that in the newspaper?" but my reaction at the time was," Great! He has something to say." I asked him to come to the office and organised a debate. That was even before the first report. Arjo was already thinking about the limits of humanitarian action in such a situation, about our responsibilities etc. He contributed to the internal discussion." *[Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director.]* CASE 3	

Ethical decision to collaborate with local authorities to keep activities running	"I don't have any moral problems with developing direct relations with authorities. Talking is not the same as collaborating… Once you have built these contacts, you can in some cases, choose to speak out publicly, like we did on the plight of the refugees south of Kisangani. It helped to save the lives of possibly 50,000 refugees… I suppose we just have to live with that big gap between the Dutch, who write solid, UN like reports, and the French who are very *médiatiques*. But to be honest, however angry I am at the French for their behaviour during the crisis, at the end of the day I feel closer to them than I do to the Dutch, in terms of approach to advocacy." *[Extract from Dr. Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager. Interviewed by Erwin Van't Land in "The Advocacy Interviews" September 1997.] CASE 4* "After a discussion with the desk in Amsterdam on 21 May, it was decided to lobby directly to Geneva (UNHCR) and to consider a press statement to witness the situation of the Tutsi. After a discussion with a responsible in Geneva, (MSF Holland) HQ was told that UNHCR had refused to intervene to evacuate the Tutsi. The responsible (of UNHCR) was told that MSF was considering a press statement. Off the record, approval was given. A press statement was prepared in Goma with some team members most involved with the issue. The idea was to WITNESS not to DENOUNCE, hence why any reference to UNHCR or IOM or ICRC or too much focused on the role of the Zairian authorities was studiously avoided." *['Response on the Reaction of UN/ICRC to MSF in Geneva-Attempts to Help the Tutsi,' Message from Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, Coordinator in Goma to Wouter (Van Empelen), programme manager in Amsterdam, 27 May 1996.] CASE 4* "The situation there is tragic. If we decide to take action, the risk is that the authorities will try to steer us towards a particular course. The warring parties have understood how to manipulate international aid. We believe we must go and continue to serve as witnesses while maintaining security. We are calling on the international community to establish protected zones and humanitarian corridors." *[Extract from Minutes of the 8 November 1996 meeting of the MSF Belgium Board of Directors (in French).] CASE 4*	

"After receiving information this afternoon that the MSF council is planning an advocacy campaign concerning the humanitarian situation, primarily in Kisangani, MSF in Goma held a team meeting. The following points were unanimously decided:

1. MSF committed itself to increased communication with ADFL authorities following last week's uncoordinated advocacy campaign. To launch another campaign without first addressing these issues to the ADFL will further erode our credibility. Without an open dialogue between MSF and ADFL, the rebels will have no opportunity to respond to our statements except to attack MSF.

2. Accusations that ADFL is manipulating aid agencies in Kisangani will be extremely difficult to substantiate. Based on reports from MSF Holland team members and sitreps from MSF Belgium, access to Kisangani camps is increasing slowly every day. Stable refugees are being repatriated, the transit camp is better established, and refugees too sick to move are allowed to remain in the transit camp. Although the situation in Biaro is dire, aid agencies in Kisangani held a medical operations meeting on 02.05.97 to coordinate their activities and inputs. It is not clear how MSF will defend public statements to the contrary.

3. The current security situation is precarious. MSF cannot assume that extreme elements within the ADFL of the militant local population will respond peacefully with simple denials in the press. Already, the local image of MSF is not positive. The accusations of last week by MSFF continue to circulate in eastern Zaire on radio France (...) and Voice of the People. Headquarters should take note of recent security incidents, such as aggressive statements towards MSF in Kisangani, the placing of landmines outside the MSF clinic in Kasese, and the hard-line ADFL response to previous MSF statements. There is no certainty that reprisals would take place only in Kisangani, which places the Goma and Bukavu teams at risk.

4. In light of these concerns, the MSF-Holland team in Goma is not convinced the current advocacy strategy is the best way to proceed." *[Extract from 'MSF Advocacy in Eastern Zaire,' Message from MSF Holland team in Goma to the programme manager, 3 May 1997.] CASE 4*

"So, in fact, if the Alliance really wanted to expel MSF, they could do it right away. Therefore MSF can still negotiate with the Alliance. What to put on the table????

	Arrival of the Senior Officer, Dominique Boutriau.... The declaration is from MSFF and not MSFB. What access will MSF have? Unconditional, satisfactory, or at a trickle? By the end of the week, we will have more information to help us decide whether to withdraw if access is not open enough. (NB: getting expelled tends to cast doubt on any advocacy...) The Zairian NGOs in place, Omnis and EUE, do not have the right profile for advocacy. What about Oxfam?" *[Extract from Account of the phone call with Vincent [Janssens, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani] at 16:00 + task force [working group],' by the MSF Belgium programme manager, 29 April 1997 (in French).]* CASE 4

Culturally-embedded organizational ethical models

Confronting the limitation of humanitarian aid at the organizational level with MSF ethos	"I asked him to come to the office and organised a debate. That was even before the first report. Arjo was already thinking about the limits of humanitarian action in such a situation, about our responsibilities etc. He contributed to the internal discussion." *[Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director.]* CASE 3 "The critical humanitarian conflict arises again: the moral and medical obligation to assist, regardless of political affiliations and past crimes, versus the use of NGOs as pawns on a political chess board. It is hard to turn our back on suffering, so always search for middle ground - where we continue our work and use advocacy to put pressure on the international community to act. However, in this region, the additional problems of disintegrating security for expats and freedom of access will make a compromise difficult. MSF should recognise the worth of its own advocacy and speak out about what it sees, even if this means we have to leave. If we continue to work in a country where we are forbidden to mourn the murder of the three expats, and we voice no protest, need we bother with advocacy at all?" *[Extract from 'Contribution to the Advocacy Debate,' Message from Amanda Harvey and Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Goma to the HQ, HAD and MSF Holland Kigali, 31 January 1997.]* CASE 4 "Barely a few days after the shock of discovering the hidden military agenda, we were reminded today, once again, that humanitarian agencies, in general, and UNHCR, in particular, are impotent. We are being encouraged not to believe that UNHCR is complicit in the tragedy now unfolding. We are ashamed to have to face up to our own powerlessness. Neither the number or tenor of the condemnations can make up for this third failure. Each time

their number is reduced and so is the feasibility of repatriation. With UNHCR powerless, we have only the to ask soldiers for authorisation and protection (the population remains hostile and unpredictable) to someday gain access to the refugees; nothing more cynical than after today's demonstration. The train is blocked and MSF has no independent air transport. So complete non-access: non-access to the refugees and non-access to information about the refugees.

Conclusion: operations are impossible.

To avoid sinking into despair, we are planning future response scenarios regarding the likely spots where the phantom refugees might be: Kilometre 82 (because there's a health facility), Kilometre 95 (because there's a landing strip), Ubundu (because it's a departure point for repatriation by road): shelter, milky bar, treatment, oral rehydration salt, primary health care, screening, water, latrines, etc. for approximately 50,000 refugees (figure provided by Rwandan delegation). We don't know whether we should expect a grouping or not. [...]

We realise that staying makes us responsible for nonrepatriation - and without even a guarantee of being able to save individuals. We know that if we leave now we will face the unbearable prospect of not being here just when we would have access to the refugees again. Either we try to carry out advocacy while staying on site or we make a massive retreat from the Great Lakes region and issue a political condemnation.

... The aeroplane/no aeroplane issue started up again today (no authorisation). Someone from the Rwandan delegation rejected the agreement to give us a place on board, saying the flight is political and will continue on to Kigali. Dominique will say that we should plant ourselves on the tarmac to force the question. The team doesn't agree any more. We'll tell UNHCR that if we're not included, we're closing up shop. If this has now become a game to get to be included, you'll need to send other people to play. In this environment, we see no possibility for operations or advocacy.

We're now doing what we have to do to close the mission and we propose waiting for two pieces of information to conclude:

- Including MSF in the assessment flight - Your feedback with a clear and feasible position for follow-up

	For now, we're not trying to criticise anyone, it's just an observation that we've come to the end of the line. Greetings from the biggest shit I've ever been in Vincent" *[Extract from Sitrep, Vincent Janssen, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani, to MSF Belgium, France and Holland programme managers, 25 April 1995 (in French).]* CASE 4 "I can assure you that MSF Belgium's interest in the Great Lakes region is unrelated to the Belgian government! And even less so to money!!! MSF B rejects such an assertion and I expect that the other sections would agree!!! MSF B is prepared to continue its operations in the Great Lakes region because a major crisis is underway there. The populations are in a precarious situation, it is a post-genocide situation and the conflict continues. Our duty of assistance and advocacy is to be close to this kind of population, even if assistance and advocacy don't always work hand in glove … In difficult circumstances, aggravated by the security situation, it is up to us to find a way to carry out our mission. I think the other MSF sections share this view" *[Extract from Message from MSF Belgium to Kigali to MSF Belgium, Spain and Holland officials, 28 January 1997 (in French).]* CASE 4	
Confronting moral dilemmas at the organizational level	"Should we continue to give humanitarian aid to people, especially to the so-called leaders - who had planned such atrocities- and about whom it is said that while receiving the good care of the aid agencies they are preparing themselves for a return to Rwanda to continue their murderous practices? Moreover, UNHCR is employing people selected by these 'leaders' to patrol the camp… Choosing to whom to give or not give aid would be impossible. We are not judges who have the evidence to decide who is guilty of such a crime. MSF's charter demands us to give humanitarian aid indiscriminately. We should continue our activities in the camp, but at the same time we should continue to press publicly for these perpetrators to be brought to justice and no impunity should be given to those suspected of having committed gross violations of human rights… MSF International has written several letters to UNHCR and the Security Council and issued a press statement calling for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. Wouter Van Empelen desk manager for Rwanda and Hanna Nolan, department of Humanitarian Affairs, also visited UNHCR in Geneva in person to make our position known once more." *[Extract*	

	from Hanna Nolan, 'Presence of alleged perpetrators of genocide in the camp: explanation of MSF Holland position,' Memo from the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, MSF Holland to all MSF Holland staff working or having worked in Benaco camp, 18 July 1994.] CASE 3 "We agreed to say that it was clearly Rwandan troops doing this kind of thing. But did we reach the point of attacking Kagame directly? Was this a matter of local abuses, pursuit maneuvers, and local commanders' decisions, or would we suddenly attribute it to Kagame's own strategy? Today, I would be pretty comfortable saying, "Yes, it was Kagame who organised things." But at the time, the argument against saying that was that we didn't know; we weren't sure it was organised as such. The Shabunda report had just come out. It was hard to know. It's one thing to say, "Kagame was the one who decided to have them killed," and another to say, "Those are local commanders' decisions." It's so complex. I was stuck with refugees who were telling me they wanted to go back to Rwanda. If we said that Kagame had decided to have them killed, there was no reason to plead for their return to Rwanda. If they were going to be killed in Rwanda or their plane was going to be shot down, they might as well just die in the forest. We kept tripping all over ourselves. Between the political scenario and the spontaneity of the advocacy, there was a serious conflict." *[Dr. Éric Goemaere, MSF Belgium General Director (in French).]* CASE 4	
Crisis of trust between sections related to actions taken following different ethical models	"MSF Accuse," that's total hypocrisy. We made a decision, we sent the text. I spent the weekend at MSF Belgium's GA. I came with the report and announced that we were putting it out. During the weekend, I was questioned by Stephen Smith of Libération, etc. "MSF Accuse" came out on Monday morning. Think it was a surprise in Belgium? No way! I remember clearly that Lex Winkler was at the MSF Belgium GA. At that time, we'd lost Jacques de Milliano [former Executive Director and then President of MSF Holland]. So, quick advocacy was over for MSF Holland." *[Dr. Bernard Pécoul, MSF France Executive Director (in French).]* CASE 4 "Serious and intolerable dysfunction within MSF • Jean-Hervé (Bradol) – very angry – asked that these events be put in context. This isn't a recent dysfunction. For two years, a part of MSF has been determined to hide this kind of information and not take a position. He calls for the board of directors to vote tonight to stop all international exchange until we know the results of the inquiry into what has just happened, with a statement regarding who's accountable and conclusions.	

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• Jean-Hervé says he can draft a guideline on how information is suppressed! If you are convinced that refugees are being exterminated by every means possible, how can you propose a 'silent advocacy' strategy in response? This is part of MSF's collective responsibility and is beyond the pale of what we are willing to understand, even while trying to be constructive.

This position led to the killing of several thousand people. He's tried several times to alert the board of directors to a serious problem. Operations blocked the communication. There was an official veto on Sunday and on Friday, Brussels (Eric Goemaere) vetoed the use of the Shabunda report in the form he had.

There are two operational policies that have been out of sync for a long time and a repetition of this kind of event in the Great Lakes area. We have to be able to learn lessons. Let's determine who's responsible and deal with it on the spot so we don't miss the boat yet again.

• Philippe (Biberson) thinks that in the face of this kind of operational pathology, it's almost like having to control a perversion. Doesn't this intent to hide/elude/conceal indeed hide other debates? Today, MSF has a team of communication professionals who know how to define a message and deal with timing. How can this team be paralyzed?

• It seems that fundamentally different policies lead to fundamentally different attitudes. We should lay out these policies and debate the ideas (Odile [Cochetel]).

• For Serge [Stefanaggi], the problem is the mindset that says we should 'save the international movement at any price.' We may be headed towards an international confrontation and have to start over from zero. [...] On Monday morning, Vincent Janssens (MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani) had said that if the teams couldn't work normally, MSF would withdraw and issue a condemnation. That night, he said that MSF would stay and reduce the teams. Who led him to change his mind so radically? Marlène felt very isolated. People were talking about not abandoning the refugees, but we haven't had access to them for four days. A coordinator even said that "We were talking about genocideurs here and we couldn't even manage to condemn their killings!"

• Bernard says that Vincent had been under pressure not to speak and that this new direction followed several phone calls. We know that a team in the field is easily influenced.

• Jean-Hervé thinks there's a policy problem. We have to rely on what the people coming back from the field say. We make mistakes and certainly we'll make more, but it's the intention that counts. Today in some areas, MSF's only policy is to keep things running.

• There are mindsets that oppose speaking out. That can't be tolerated any longer. There has to be a break. We can't ignore this kind of thing. Silence has killed tens of thousands of people (Frédéric [Laffont])

• Brigitte Vasset and Bernard Pecoul refuse to agree that the veto has caused deaths.

Determining responsibility

• Are there individuals who hushed up this matter because of influence? If that's the case, they must resign or be removed from MSF. We cannot allow such people to hold positions of responsibility and there have to be sanctions. The system has been disrupted and we have to be able to make sure this kind of thing doesn't happen again. This raises issues of accountability and competence (Frédéric [Laffont])

• Does hiding information constitute malpractice that should be punished? This raises the question of professional responsibility. If there was bad faith or incompetence, you have to be able to impose sanctions (Françoise Saulnier).

• We have a professional responsibility and if we make mistakes, we have to be held accountable. There are incompetent people practicing medicine (Maurice [Nègre])

• A doctor's professional responsibility is to not abandon his patients. That doesn't mean anything in this context (Odile [Cochetel])

• Let's be careful when we use the term 'malpractice.' The idea of responsibility exists, but it's something else to stigmatize an individual. Who's going to define the misconduct? Going down that road is difficult and complicated. We are responsible--but as an organisation-for failing to condemn what was happening in Rwanda (Jean-Luc [Nahel]).

•Professional responsibility is more important than committing malpractice (Brigitte Vasset.)

• Let's try not to mix up objective and irrational arguments. If only one person out of 32 raises the issue of speaking out, that means the others are afraid. I can't understand the others' fear. Today there's a force at MSF putting pressure on people. That leads to a loss of free will. That's what's scares me. How can people stay silent when we don't have any financial interests at stake (Philippe Biberson)?

The idea of undertaking an inquiry to determine responsibility doesn't seem to me to be a solution. Who would have the right to investigate whom? Let's not make fools of ourselves. On the other hand, let's not hesitate to express our shock and then challenge the process, not people (Philippe Biberson). - The people who voted for the veto didn't do so because they disagreed with the assessment, but out of concern for the teams on site (Bernard Pecoul).

[...] <u>Violate procedures if necessary and recover the will to fight.</u>

• Procedures have always been what's blocked us, so to find a solution we have to ignore them permanently. When several sections are involved and one says we should speak out, let's not accept a 'security veto,' but rather an 'advance security warning.' We inform the others that in 24 hours, we're going to speak out. We can't give in to the terrorism that says speaking out is no longer possible because there are teams in the field. (Françoise Saulnier).

• We have to stop putting advocacy against our presence in the field. Today, when we don't agree, we lack the will to fight. We've got to get it back to be able to win. No one wants to argue anymore and we just chatter during the teleconferences. The person who thinks s/ he's right should take his/her arguments all the way. We are suffering from a certain fatigue and we've got to get our energy back (Bernard Pecoul).

• It's true that you've got to win over a discouraging number of people when you're convinced of something. You don't even know who you need to talk to in when you're dealing with this cumbersome machine (Martine [Lochin]).

• We don't have a solution, but we've got to struggle (Brigitte Vasset).

• [...] Today, the forest is full of refugees and we don't know who's in charge, operationally, for Kivu. Let's have an in-depth conversation about the region in terms of operations and policy. We can't respond to Kivu if we don't address

Rwanda. Kigali is behind the extermination policy and we have to talk about it among ourselves. Let's say loud and clear that the refugees can't go back to Rwanda (Françoise Saulnier).

• Shouldn't it be said that these people must be granted refuge, but somewhere else besides Rwanda? Everyone is giving up, but what we need is to propose something else. We need an initiative that breaks out of our current isolation and negotiates a space where these people will be taken in. Let's pressure the Dutch, the British, and the Americans to find a solution. Let's work with Oxfam, MSF-US, etc.

MSF has to move out of its traditional way of operating and move into a lobbying mode that will allow us to find a solution. If we lead an anti-Kigali campaign and get to the point of pointing fingers, that's different from what we usually do (Bernard Pecoul).

[...] The Board of Directors must take a position

This isn't a matter of criticising the field, but of seeing what's not working at the operational and decision-making levels. It's important that the board take a radical position and that that can help people resist pressure (Christiane).

[...] The motion passed by the Board of Directors: - The Board of Directors of the French section of Médecins Sans Frontières expresses its outrage regarding the veto that prevented us from speaking out on the physical elimination of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire. -It confirms the primary purpose of MSF action, which is focused on defending populations in danger. This purpose must guide MSF's action, giving absolute priority to principles of international consistency and internal functioning. - On the latter point, the Board announces that security vetoes of advocacy actions will no longer be accepted, but only advance security warnings with a deadline to ensure team safety.

[Extract from Minutes of the MSF France board Meeting, 25 April 1997 (in French).] CASE 4

"(NB: reaction by MSFB following MSFF press release of this WE: MSF Belgium director of operations wrote to MSFF.

MSFF broke 2 ethical rules:

1/ Report without being present in the field

	2/ Report without consulting the teams present in the field)" *[Extract from 'Account of the phone call with Vincent [Janssens, MSF Belgium Coordinator in Kisangani] at 16:00 + task force [working group],' by the MSF Belgium programme manager, 29 April 1997 (in French).]* CASE 4	
	Individual misbehaving	**Creating new pathways**
Acting with no planning, discussion or permission	"The day after I arrived, we had a big meeting with the staff. The Tutsi staff asked to leave the country as they were fearful for their lives. I still didn't really understand the context, of course, as I had just arrived. They were really scared for their lives and they wanted to leave. I saw in their eyes that they were really desperate. I said to them "OK, tomorrow, I am going to evacuate you." Then I had a big fight with my logistician because he didn't want to be part of that. The next day, I lined up three big Land Rovers – perhaps naively because I thought that I would manage to evacuate the local staff. I had the three cars and there were six of them because they had their husbands and their wives and all their children and all the luggage they could carry. We stuffed the three cars. On the border in the town of Butare — we didn't even leave Butare — we were stopped. One of the cars was taken away from us. All of the people in that car were scared to stay in Butare. So, I said, "Look, let's get in the other cars, leave some luggage behind and get in." You never saw so many people in two MSF cars — they were almost on top of each other. So we passed a lot of roadblocks — scary stuff. I had already radioed Bujumbura. They had sent cars to the border to pick up the passengers… So we arrived at the border and there were men with knives and machetes around the cars. You could not see who was in the cars because the steam from their mouths had put steam on the windows — but obviously, there were a lot of people inside. They refused to let the Rwandans cross because they had no papers, etc. I talked and talked and talked to the border guy and offered him money but he wouldn't let them go. Earlier, in Butare, two priests who wanted to leave had joined our convoy in their own car. The priests became very handy at the border. I went to them and said, 'it's your turn, please help me.' The priests went to the guy and talked about Jesus and what Jesus did, and asked whether he believed in Jesus and so on — he talked for 15 minutes. And the guy said, 'ok, let them go.' So the priests saved their lives." *[Wouter Van Empelen, Emergency Cell, MSF Holland, in Rwanda in April 1994.]* CASE 1 "For your info, I am sending you an extract of a BBC TV script (by Alex de Waal yet again, about aid agencies and the	

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	Kivu crisis) to which we are going to reply. Alex is a bit of a one-man band, but his criticism has definitely had an (probably long-lasting) impact in media land, particularly in the UK. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT THAT WE DO NOT DROP OUR GUARD. I have read on CCmail [MSF Intranet] that Nicolas Louis has been quoted as saying that hundreds of thousands of people are about to flood into Kisangani (or was it another town?). Once again, we are venturing figures that may turn out to be totally exaggerated. You may not be in the firing line in your country, but we are here, and the UK media is very influential in Europe and the US. We just cannot take a parochial view of this problem. I am urging you to brief your teams in the field to ensure that they do not describe rumour and estimates as fact. I know that all the mass graves of eastern Zaire are not open yet, and that access is still not possible, but the attitude of the media HAS CHANGED, and we cannot go on as if nothing had happened. There are going to be lots of 1996 retrospectives in the media over the next few weeks, and the issue of the responsibility and accountability of aid agencies will be raised again. Please let us know what you can do." *[Extract from 'Negative Publicity,' Message from Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director to all Directors of Communications, copy to Press Officers in delegate offices, 9 December 1996.] CASE 4*
Tricking another MSF section to be in the field during the extreme event	"I knew that the refugees were going to arrive but I had to fight with everyone to get there. Since I was following the story, I had to move with the journalists, not with the teams. I had the support of Jean-François Alesandrini, the communications director for MSF France. I told him, "I have to collect information. We must speak about what is going on. I will have a telephone and I will call the teams and get them to tell the journalists what we know, but I must be with the journalists." There was a huge fight at headquarters level because no one could agree. They were very strict and said that I couldn't move if there was no team and no operation. I discovered that there was a French explo team taking a boat from Bukavu to Goma. Nevertheless, I took a plane. Jean-François covered for me and told me to go. I'd asked the Dutch, who had a program in Goma, "Can I go to Goma? This is going to be the biggest story that we've ever had in Goma. I must be there." They replied, No, you can't go. We don't need you. We are going to do it ourselves. Our mission heads are competent, etc." So I sent a radio message directly to the teams saying, "There is an AIDS prevention project for pygmies which I would really like to cover up where you are. Now is a good time, not much is going on. Can I stop by to cover this project, which I find very interesting?" Obviously, the head of mission replied, "Sure, it's great that

	you're interested in the pygmies. Of course you are welcome. Nobody pays attention to us here in Goma." I remember receiving his answer on Wednesday or Thursday. I faxed the message back to Jean-François, telling him, "When they wake up on Monday, I'll be in Goma." I sent it to Amsterdam very late on Friday night so that they wouldn't have time to react. I knew that they were not really following what was happening in Rwanda because they'd not predicted what would happen in Zaïre. I arrived in Bukavu and slept on the ground in a sleeping bag with the journalists. I paid CARE to use their phone to talk to the teams and to other journalists, to tell them what was going on, what we were seeing. Then two logisticians arrived. We took the car and left Bukavu for Goma. When I arrived, Wouter Van Empelen, from Amsterdam, had contacted his teams. He was furious .He said, "How could you even think of inviting her? It's unbelievable; she's there for Rwanda! She will screw things up! She's coming with French teams." He had been brawling with the French. Jean-Hervé [Bradol, MSF France programme manager] and Jean-François were behind me and told him, "Even if she doesn't stay and work with you, she will, nonetheless, stay there and speak on behalf of MSF France." The Dutch had been there for years, but MSF didn't have any projects there. And besides, they'd invited me. I arrived at the house in Goma. There was a terrible atmosphere in the team because everyone thought I'd come to work on the pygmy story. I talked to the head of mission and convinced him. I told him, "You have your work to do. I'll still write a story about your project, but I have to follow the news because I am missing information about what's going on with the French soldiers. And the refugees are going to arrive, I am sure of that. You're going to be right in the middle of a world event." He allowed me to stay one week. I was able to get a car. ICRC, OXFAM and MSF were the only ones there." *[Extract from Samantha Bolton, MSF International Press Officer for East Africa, 1994-1995 (in French).]* CASE 3
Promising another section to collaborate on a mission without permission and having to back out.	They asked me, "what did you do on Friday with the French?". I replied, "Oh, Marco and I agreed we would do an explo and if there is need we will do a mission together." "They could have killed me! " What the hell did you do that for? All our resources will be eaten up. We are busy because we have a secret mission called Pluto in the northern part [of Rwanda]!". It was not so secret that others in MSF didn't know about it, of course. But we had people from an emergency team arriving from Uganda behind the RPF troops in liberated territory, and starting a mission. So they said to me, "you call Marc and you refuse." But I said "no, I gave my word. My word is my word and there is no way I

	can go back on my word. I promised we would do this mission together and we are going to do this mission together unless you sack me." Lex and Jules told me, "Let the French go to zone Turquoise and let them do the zone Turquoise thing. What did you exactly agree on with Marc?". I told them word for word. "OK, you agreed and promised an exploratory mission together but you didn't as yet promise a common mission." So they said, "you can go, you do your exploratory mission but we are not going to do a common mission". I had only been in the office for a couple of weeks. They were the big hot shots. So I called Marc and said, «Marc I have to tell you…». I was really uncomfortable - I didn't like this phone call and I think Marc knew. After this whole affair, Marc was accused of being associated with the French army in zone Turquoise. There was nothing I could do. Now, after so many more years, I have a lot more authority in MSF Holland and I could tell Lex to go to hell with this whole shit, and I would do what I thought was right. But at that time I couldn't - I was too little." *[Wouter Van Empelen, MSF Holland Emergency cell then programme manager (in English).] CASE 3*
Imposing a veto or breaching the veto of another MSF section	"The motion passed by the Board of Directors: - The Board of Directors of the French section of Médecins Sans Frontières expresses its outrage regarding the veto that prevented us from speaking out on the physical elimination of Rwandan refugees in eastern Zaire. -It confirms the primary purpose of MSF action, which is focused on defending populations in danger. This purpose must guide MSF's action, giving absolute priority to principles of international consistency and internal functioning. - On the latter point, the Board announces that security vetoes of advocacy actions will no longer be accepted, but only advance security warnings with a deadline to ensure team safety." *[Extract from Minutes of the MSF France board Meeting, 25 April 1997 (in French).] CASE 4* "MSF F communication: due to the deliberate incident of this week-end (press communiqué sent from Paris breaking security veto and without any previous consultation with other sections/field teams), we will not inform MSF F about Great Lakes region starting now...waiting for further explanations." *[Extract from 'Kisangani,' Sitrep from Dominique Boutriau, MSF Belgium programme manager, 27 April 1997.] CASE 4*
	Unprecedented organizational actions
Calling for armed	"We said: "Even if it means supping with the devil, MSF is calling for armed intervention." *[Dr. Philippe Biberson,*

intervention for the first time	*President, MSF France from May 1994 (in French).]* CASE 1 "This was a different type of problem calling for a different response. This was our main concern; other concerns were secondary. But it was such a big concern that it overcame the resistance of those amongst who said: "An aid agency shouldn't be calling for violent action". *[Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF France (in French).]* CASE 1	
Filling the gap left by other organizations by doing things that are not part of MSF's mandate	"Human Rights organisations exist to denounce violations committed by governments, but when there is no government, when there is only chaos- they're at a loss what to do. There were no (Human Rights) organisations present, but when Réginald Moreels made his appeal in the media they all woke up and said «we totally agree, but we're not used to working in these types of situation». MSF offered to take a certain number of representatives of these organisations to the field and Réginald ask me to accompany them. We went to Rwanda for 15 days to see what they could do for the country… We ended up outlining a number of possible pragmatic actions that no Human Rights organisation as such could implement. A minimum of things that we considered necessary, realistic and relatively positive, and that did not have any negative effects. Thus MSF and these organisations decided to create together the Réseau des Citoyens (The Citizen's Network) which was operational immediately: it thus received funding from the French and Belgian sections. Six months later, the bilateral cooperation was to be set up." *[Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier, MSF legal advisor (in French)]* CASE 2 "UNHCR would just not acknowledge that there was a problem in Masisi. They were just too involved with the camps and said, "This is not our job—this is displaced people and first, we don't work with displaced people—we work with refugees." So I went into the manuals of UNHCR and found out that of course they work with displaced people. They have to do something about it. I had a very good relationship with the head of ICRC. We had actually split tasks between ICRC and MSF. He was doing all this diplomatic work but I felt that it was going too slowly and things were not happening. At the same time, we had located the other people who hadn't been killed and we had to get them out because we knew that they were going to be killed. So we worked with ICRC to try to get an evacuation of these people. But we couldn't get anyone to do it. The ICRC wouldn't evacuate them; UNHCR wouldn't evacuate them— no one would touch them. We said that we were going to evacuate them and so we did. Wouter gave me $10,000 and	

	we got a truck, came back to the village, got the people into the truck, and took them to Rwanda where they went to a camp on the border. They were mainly women and children. Many of the men had fled to take up arms and fight." *[Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaïre) from February to September 1996.]* CASE 4

"These refugees should be sheltered temporarily in a country in the region other than Zaire and Rwanda where their security can be guaranteed." *[Extract from 'Three Proposals to End the Policy of Extermination of Rwandan Refugees in Zaire,' MSF France Press Release, 26 April 1997 (in French).]* CASE 4

"International relief group Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Sunday accused rebels sweeping across eastern Zaire of stepping up massacres of Rwandan refugees and said survivors should be granted asylum abroad." *[Extract from MSF Urges Halt to Massacres by Zaire Rebels,' Reuters (UK), Paris 27 April 1997.]* CASE 4 |
| Attempting a new 'Greenpeace type' action in an impasse | "I'm going to do this, it's a Greenpeace-style action, it's symbolic, we know we'll get permission to go over. We'll have a five-person team stay between the Rwandan and Zairian border, which has been blocked for a week or two, until something gives. We want Samantha Bolton to come here and work with the reporters." On the phone, Jacques told me, "Fifty to one hundred thousand refugees are crossing the border from Goma to Rwanda." I said, "Let's go! We can't wait!' … Afterwards, it was totally bizarre. The reporters were allowed to enter. They wrote stories about the wounded and dead in the streets. We had surgical kits and a great team of Spanish expatriates with a surgeon and nurse anesthetist so we were ready to go to Bukavu and get to work from the first day. But, we were systematically rejected. The reporters were permitted to go in but not the humanitarian organisations. It was very, very strange." *[Extract from Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency intersections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).]* CASE 4 |
| MSF striking in the field to force improvements in the refugee camps run by genocidaires and avoid having to leave the field | "Last Friday, MSF asked for a one-week reflection period in order to consider our position. MSF expatriate staff remained on standby. We are very concerned that UNHCR did not appreciate the reasons behind this difficult decision. The security situation and the presence of alleged war criminals in the Benaco camp remain of critical concern to us. The presence of alleged war criminals has contributed to the rise of tension among the refugee populations in Benaco and has created serious conditions of insecurity. […] Furthermore, persons who have committed war crimes |

	cannot be considered refugees under the 1951 Convention relating to the status of refugees. In this light, MSF shall assess the security situation during the coming two days. MSF will also monitor and follow up on actions taken towards alleged instigators of war crimes committed in Rwanda. Pending the outcome of these assessments, we shall decide at the end of this week whether or not we shall reassume our duties. *[Extract from Draft of MSF Holland letter to UNHCR Geneva, 21 June 1994.] CASE 3* "After a week of arm-wrestling with UNHCR, all MSF sections rejoined the other agencies that had resumed their activities after only two days of stoppage. In the months that followed, this conditional aid strategy would, in a sense, trap MSF France because its only real means of pressure was the threat of withdrawal, pure and simple. Relations between MSF and UNHCR were tense, and this was a difficult weapon to wield because the situation was becoming increasingly complex. In fact, the situation in the camps improved partially and gradually, but without changing the fundamental context." *[Extract from Nicolas de Torrente, 'MSF Activity in the Rwandan Crisis: A Critical History', July 1995, p. 40 (in French).] CASE 3*	
	Individual sense of priority	**Prioritizing practices**
Field workers taking great risks to provide medical assistance or save lives	"- The Burundi border would close at 6 p.m. so we absolutely had to get through before 5.30 p.m. 'A', newly arrived in the Burenge mission, tried to negotiate a passage for the Rwandans. Time was passing and night was about to fall. The N'Zanga-Maza team, which had already had to leave its Rwandan staff behind, wanted to go through as soon as possible. By contrast, some of the Burenge team wouldn't leave without their staff, even if it meant spending the night (!) at customs. At 5.15 pm, 'A' was still negotiating, but only for four Tutsi women who were certain to be killed. The customs officers still refused point blank. 'A' started to shout out loud, which created considerable tension and led to a temporary break in the negotiations. Then the coordinators of each camp made their decision: the Rwandan staff would set off again with the impounded vehicles towards the N'Zangwa-Maza compound. Emotional scenes followed. I said good-bye to my driver, who had been with me for several months, and to others who I liked a lot, but I felt I had done all I could to try and get them to come with us. Other expats burst into tears at the sight of them leaving. 'A', depressed by his failure, went to find the coordinators and informed them bluntly that they would have the death of thirty Rwandans on their conscience. He was still convinced we could have got them through, that	

nothing could happen to a group of 30 expats overnight at the border…

Everyone gulped back their tears and their anger, and at last we went through with our Zaïrean staff, who were allowed to leave the country, but only after another strict control. It was 5.45 p.m. The rest of the journey was uneventful. Nobody felt like talking. We passed the Burundi border and arrived at the MSF-Kirundo mission to spend the night. The following day everyone went down to Bujumbura. This was a quiet trip through superb landscape. There was a rift in the group between the majority, who had wanted to go through without the staff, and the others who thought that we should have continued to negotiate, that we had let 40 people go to their deaths. In Bujumbura, during sessions organised by two headquarters staff that had come to help us 'air our dirty laundry', all the animosity came out. The coordinators' difficult decision to go ahead without the Rwandan staff had been the right one. It was out of the question that we should spend the night with those soldiers who had no commanding officer and were drunk as well. Moreover, MSF cannot infringe the laws of the host country. The Rwandan staff continued to work in the camps, but we heard that 17 of them were killed, and, no doubt, the rest met with the same fate." *[Extract from End of mission report, Loïc Schneider, MSF France logistician in Rwanda, April 1994 (in French).]* CASE 1

"After touring the hospital, the Australian soldiers came to see us and said "There are three newborns alone in the paediatrics unit." "You don't want to go back and get them?" "No, it's too dangerous. There are snipers everywhere." "We'll go."

I asked Christian to come with me because I was afraid and didn't want to go alone. We left. The Australians were yelling at us, "You jerks! You stupid idiots!" But they had to escort us because there were RPA troops in the hospital. We went over there. Eight babies, between two weeks and two months, lay naked on a bed, shrieking with hunger. The blue helmets didn't want to put their guns down so Christian and I each had to carry four babies. I went to get my radio and I hid it between the four infants in my arms. We brought them back and the ICRC evacuated them…The RPA had "cleaned out" the hospital. There was only one patient still alive. We found dead patients with their IVs still in place. We had to put the bodies in the grave with the IVs. We had to move so quickly there wasn't time to remove them. It was obvious that the soldiers had executed the patients in the hospital." *[Dr. Didier Laureillard, MSF France physician, Gikongoro,*

	Rwanda, from December 1994 to May 1995 (in French).] CASE 2
Field workers leaving for safety reasons	"I'd been there altogether 12 days or so. And every day, somebody left and wanted to be replaced. So everyday, I had to go to the border and every day became worse and worse and worse …" *[Extract from Wouter Van Empelen, Emergency Cell, MSF Holland, in Rwanda in April 1994.]* CASE 1
Field workers leaving for ethical reasons	"Arjo Berkhout, the coordinator in Tanzania, resigned, saying "I am stopping working for these people because I cannot take any further responsibility for this project"." *[Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director.]* CASE 3
	Extreme-imposed organizational priorities
Putting medical assistance or the safety of field workers first depending on the understanding of the context	"We write this article merely to stimulate debate on the tremendous decisions that face MSF in the Great Lakes region in Africa regarding advocacy and the continuation of our medical programmes. We are aware that speaking out about human rights abuses can deny MSF's obligation to provide medical assistance to those in need. This is particularly a consideration in emergency response. However, increasingly in this region, the division between advocacy and the Hippocratic oath cannot be ignored." *[Extract from 'Contribution to the Advocacy Debate,' Message from Amanda Harvey and Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Goma to the HQ, HAD and MSF Holland Kigali, 31 January 1997.]* CASE "On 6 February, following the killing of the UN observers, MSF Belgium announced that it would withdraw its teams from the Rwandan prefectures of Cyangugu and Kibuye. On 7 February, the MSF teams announced that they would halt their activities at Tingi Tingi because of insecurity related to the site's proximity to fighting." *[Speak Out Case 4, p.83]* CASE 4
Headquarters placing field workers under the banner of the ICRC, suppressing the organization's voice and	"Potential for confusion: the work has to be done exclusively under cover of the ICRC. For reasons of safety - it is best not to mention MSF when speaking on the radio." *[Extract from MSF Situation report - Rwanda n° 7, 14 April 1994 (in French).]* CASE 1 "We knew that the ICRC was going in and that they needed surgeons. Fairly quickly we offered to go with them. They

independence for medical assistance and security reasons	accepted, but they asked us to be identified as ICRC people, without the MSF logo." *[Dr. Marc Gastellu, Deputy Director of Operations, MSF France (in French).] CASE 1* "We had placed our teams under the banner of the ICRC and we had forbidden ourselves to speak, of course. We weren't allowed to. That was the agreement that had been struck with the ICRC. It was for Philippe Gaillard of ICRC to speak about the situation. No one else spoke… What's more he gave a very good account of what was going on. There was no MSF statement as such, but in any case I always thought that if we could have spoken on behalf of MSF, we couldn't have put it any better than he did… So either due to the gravity of the situation or because of our cowardice, we accepted that Philippe Gaillard would speak and that we would not. And then at a certain point, when Jean-Hervé was over there, we started to think, "What are we doing?" *[Jean-François Alesandrini, Director of Communication Department, MSF France (in French).] CASE 1*	
Headquarters imposing a 'silent diplomacy' strategy to the field	"I think that apart from the weakness in the organisation, there was also an idea that we could not use the Shabunda report publicly because we prefer to continue our operations even if we have very limited access—not a lot. So it was not an unconscious thing—it was a conscious decision that was taken by a few people and not actually discussed here." *[Extract from Pim de Graaf, Director of Operations, MSF Holland.] CASE 4* "The motivation is very straight forward: if there are serious human rights violations occurring in our project, according to our own statements, in our témoignage part of our mission, we have an obligation that these violations are not going unnoticed. So in this case, witnessing, we interpret as being there, documenting what you have seen, seeing what you can do with this information in the international arena. We thought that in such a case with such sensitive information, our operation running, and our people on the ground, we had to handle this in a very confidential way. So we had our actions in the UN and we wanted to give the information to them for follow up so that the name MSF would not be attached to this. That is the motivation. The decision to keep it confidential—the field asked the desk or the OD at the time—and we would be advised that the field was very concerned so we only got the information on the condition that we would not go public with it—otherwise, they wouldn't have even told us. If we had said that we were going to go public with this, the field would have said, no way. That trust was broken afterwards. It was extremely damaging for the field." *[Hanna Nolan, MSF Holland Humanitarian Affairs Department (HAD) officer.] CASE 4*	

	"I can tell you the idea behind silent diplomacy. It is that: if you talk to the right people in the (US) Congress or Senate they can raise questions and that is one way to put pressure. But also in terms of giving them the information, they know that you know and they know who you are giving the information to. If everyone knows like the British know, the Canadians know, the Dutch know, then they don't act on it. There is an increased chance that they can be called on it later. Or they can be pressured into doing it now. In MSF Holland, they did not want to close their programmes in the field. They were afraid if they did CNN, or any media, there was a big chance they would get kicked out. The idea was to go to people who they have relationships [with] Â in the press and who they trust and explain to them what is happening and then have them go and investigate what is happening themselves. One thing was that the report was shown to some journalists and then taken back. They were not given the report. It was really based on people in the field and the discussions taken at that level. Maybe some of the people in the field were naïve, thinking that if they did some form of diplomacy everything would be okay. I remember the intensity in the headquarters. It was the emergency desk and they were the ones coming up with the plan. And it was just so intense, a lot of people were scared. Perhaps the people who were making decisions did not have the experience necessary in terms of advocacy. I could be wrong, but I am not sure they had so much input into how it would be applied. They came up with the report, but operations people, I think, were really in charge of how it was to go." *[James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team, 26 March to 3 April 1997.] CASE 4*	
One MSF section telling another section what it is not allowed to do/say	"The only time that I stopped something was in the zone Turquoise when MSF France proposed sending teams into the zone where the French military was already present and I said no. I didn't want MSF to be too close to any army and I had a big argument with Marc Gastellu because he wanted to go there and Wouter wanted to go as well and I said, "You can go there but MSF Holland will not." I didn't want to get too close to the French Army. Like elsewhere in Rwanda, the conditions were bad so it was obvious that assistance was necessary. But from a political point of view, I was completely against intervening because we can't be seen together with, I think it was the French Foreign Legion that was there — they're killers. It was quite clear that they were protecting the Hutu. We couldn't be there… An MSF volunteer is an MSF volunteer. For me, it didn't make a difference whether it was a French or Belgian or Dutch team. MSF is MSF and for a journalist, it doesn't make any	

difference either. The French and Belgian colonial history in Rwanda, and the Congo and Zaïre was an issue as well as the fact that it was quite clear that French arms had been flown from Europe to Goma and into Rwanda and it was just not done to be present in that particular part of Rwanda. But Paris was upset and Wouter was upset with me but I simply did not want it to happen. I think that he was too emotionally involved. He had witnessed slaughters in Rwanda which I understand because I have seen that myself. You have to be careful that you don't lose your objectivity. Especially for MSF Belgium and the people in Paris — for me, they were sometimes too emotionally involved for obvious reasons. Here in Holland, we don't have a history with Rwanda and Zaïre — there are no colonial ties." *[Jules Pieters, MSF Holland Emergency programme manager (in English).] CASE 3*

"We went to London and I was about to go to the Foreign Office and we got a call from Brussels saying, "No, don't go! You cannot go!". They were trying to give us an order, arguing: "We are worried about our people in the field." We were there at the door and we had the appointment in five minutes. So Phil (Doherty, MSF Holland Desk) made the decision to go ahead because we do not take orders from Brussels." *[James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team, 26 March to 3 Avril 1997.] CASE 4*

"The security veto imposed by the MSF B director of operations has been lifted on the new 'cleaned-up' version of the Shabunda report. This report may be distributed to reporters using MSF's name.

Best wishes and smooth sailing to all, Françoise Saulnier

Dear Françoise and Bernard ,

I am very sorry but this is not the way you can deal with a report from the HAD department of MSFH. We are responsible for this report, the contents and the distribution. I think this has to be respected. When there is an agreement on using a part of our report this up to MSFH to agree on the version to be used. I don't think it is up to MSFF to decide on the text of a 'new' summary. Of course we are happy that the veto is lifted and that we can continue with the agreed plan of action but I strongly stress the need to make this a combined agreement between the sections. It is not up to MSFF to take the decision and formalise it the way it is done now." *[Extract from E-mail from Françoise Saulnier, MSF France Legal Advisor to Peter Casaer (MSF Belgium) 24 April 1997, 17:06 (in French).] CASE 4*

	"23 April: teleconference (including directors of operations, executive directors, desks – depending on section). Proposal to proceed in two phases: speak out publicly on the fact that it's impossible to gain access to Kisangani - even as of now and; something stronger later if the killings are confirmed. Pim vetoed for a few hours, long enough to alert the teams ("It's a complete change in strategy for the Holland section"). Despite agreement in principle, later no agreement on a press release and no external communication." *[Extract from 'History of Communications on Zaire,' written during summer 1997 by Jean-Marie Kindermans, MSF International General Secretary (in French).] CASE 4*	
	<u>Individual questioning the strategic behavior of the organization</u>	**Learning from the extreme**
Field worker criticizing the organization's practices and rules applied in the extreme context	"I think that the analysis of the conflict in Rwanda was poor and not very relevant. Even though we'd been working there for several years, there was no thinking in the group here, and even less internationally, that integrated the work of others to better understand the conflict. As a consequence, MSF did very little to sound the alarm about how dangerous the situation was… We didn't have much of a political understanding of the conflict. That's how I saw it when I started working on the Rwanda Desk and when I went there in June/July 1993. The two Heads of Mission in the field were pretty much doing a good job. I was especially impressed by the Dutch team, which was assisting internally displaced people in the north of the country. From a medical point of view, they had aspects of their program that were very well run and they saved many lives. But at the same time, I felt ill at ease with them because there was little attention paid to the nature and dynamics of the conflict. It was largely a material response to the consequences of the conflict. I don't think we properly took into account the conflict's gravity or severity. […] The real criticism we can make of MSF is that we had a real presence on the ground that gave us the means to have gathered information and data to expose the whole plan and we did not do it. Neither MSF France nor the other sections called a meeting to organise this." *[Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF France (in French).] CASE 1* "When Maryse and I arrived and were sent into the field we were given a list of frequencies and cell-call numbers for HF [hight frequency]. All the frequencies and cell-calls were wrong. […] Security in the area west of Kigulube is precarious. This has mostly to do with the lack of transparency of our communications systems. The insecurity which exists due to inadequate communications is true for	

the expats, local staff, as well as for refugees. It is clear that the Alliance possess enough HF radios to be able to cover most of Zaire. MSF alone lost 60 vehicles many of which were equipped with HF radios. HF material was stored at the Shabunda Catholic Mission. While we were in the field, communications in Swahili and other local dialects were heard on our frequencies, some of which have been identified as military. Another problem with security is the misuse of and disrespect towards radio codes, by local staff and expats alike. Codes of locations are revealed by switching back and forth between them and real names of locations within the same transmission. It is clear that there is no security in the use of codes in that region. I suggest that codes should be changed regularly and their use should be adhered to. If not locations of expats, local staff and refugees will continue to be monitored. Another problem is the fact that MSF is giving refugee numbers and movements over the radio. This means that anyone listening can figure out where paths which refugees may use through the forest are [situated], or regions where heavy concentrations of refugees may be. In this context where the militaries' prime objective seems to be the elimination of the refugees, we are only facilitating their work." *[Extract from James Fraser, 'Exploratory Mission Report - Kigalube - Catchungu - Shabunda,' beginning of April 1997.] CASE 4*

"I was really pissed off. One time we were going here and getting all this info and they (MSF coordination team) were demanding that we pass the information over the radio. They kept demanding that we do it! This was happening - all these people were being killed - we had a pretty clear idea that this was happening, and they were still providing intake information of how many refugees were coming in at what time over the radio. Then it was like everywhere, the info the medical coordinator needed to know. We were telling everyone where the refugees were coming from, how many, which town. Wherever we were in Kivu we were supposed to send in the information on the refugees. So you could probably tell the concentration of refugees, where they were coming from, all those kind of things. The military was listening - I can't imagine they weren't. I told the coordination team I could not tell them now. I could not tell them anything. I guess they could have been unaware, I just thought it was a very stupid thing to do. I tried to tell them things, but our codes were not very effective. If you say "200 strawberry", everyone knows where you are. They know how many people they'd just killed; they are going to know what you are talking about." *[James Fraser, MSF Holland Shabunda explo team, 26 March to 3 Avril 1997.] CASE 4*

Field worker challenging the strategy imposed in the field	"If, as a doctor, I cannot continue to treat my patients for political reasons, I have a duty to speak out. I believe the failure to speak out in this context is a sign of cowardice and, even, betrayal of the populations in danger we sought to help. I do not understand how one can remain silent in the face of such injustice and inhumanity. In Kisangani in April 1997, I felt very isolated and was tremendously disappointed by the desk supervising my team." *[Extract from Work and Remain Silent—That's Cowardice,' Statement of Marleen Monteyne Mansour, doctor in Biaro during the emergency mission in Kisangani, Upper Zaire, 31 March to 23 April 1997; Messages (MSF France internal publication), 26 April 1997 (in French).] CASE 4*	
Crisis of trust between field and HQ leading to the resignation of several field workers	"On several occasions great concern was expressed once more about the communication process surrounding the report "Breaking the cycle". Team members were worried about not having been aware that Amsterdam was preparing a report, about their fears for the security of the team, which had not been taken seriously by Amsterdam, and about some of the recommendations, although the content of the report was not really the issue. Miscommunication between HQ and field was identified as one of the main causes of the above concerns. Advocacy should be done in the field. The field felt overruled in the final decision to publish despite their concerns and concluded that the project manager should have the final say in such matters.(…)" *[Extract from "Report on my visit to Zaïre (Goma) and Rwanda (Kigali) - 3-11 January 1995" by Hanna Nolan, from MSF Holland Humanitarian Affair Department - 12 January 1995.] CASE 3* "We really are fed-up, frustrated, tired and demotivated by the way this report business is going on. It seems that we who are running the biggest risk have little or no influence in the process and that people sitting in offices at a 9,000 km distance, preferably from sections who don't have any projects in this country, are taking decisions of which the results are doubtful and which endanger our position. We totally lost trust that HQ will control the information that is sent to them which puts serious question marks about the information we should send them anyway. Although the contents of the report seem accurate, why does MSF's name need to be all over it when you still have a sizeable team in the field trying to remain operational? Further, what is the use of talking about 'selected journalists' and 'confidential' if reports like this are still sent to MSF Paris who will send it straight to the international press anyway? What did we	

learn from the last time, when it was made clear to Dominique that the Alliance will not accept reports in the international press, which are not discussed with them? It appears we learnt nothing. The option given to us to present this report to the Alliance was a further indication to the field of how little comprehension HQ has of what is going on here. By opening a dialogue with the Alliance, we do not mean that we wish to march into their office and hope to discuss, calmly and rationally, that they are all mass murderers (and by the way, you have just passed the same message to the press, again). That type of approach just doesn't cut ice here..." *[Extract from Message from MSF Holland teams in Bukavu and Goma to MSF Holland and MSF Belgium programmes managers and Executive Directors, 17 may 1997.]* CASE 4

"I had a discussion with the field. I felt that we should not only release the report but confront the authorities on the ground with it - we should give it to them and say: "How is this possible?" Not accuse but ask: "How is this possible?" And I had a discussion with the person in charge in Goma who said, "Are you crazy? We could never do that here." I thought that we should. But they refused to do it. Of course the people were angry. After the release of the report - the team in Goma had agreed, but then when it was released, they were very angry with me as well - extremely angry with me, and quite a few people resigned. They said they resigned not only from MSF in Goma but also from MSF in total. That changed later but I got several letters from people saying that I had not dealt with it in the correct way. There was the person in charge in Kinshasa that resigned too. And they all sent letters all over the MSF network. It was a total mess. After that-in June - I wanted a holiday. I had the feeling that I didn't know what was going to happen to me. I felt that I was the guilty person. I wasn't sure." *[Wilna Van Artzen, MSF Holland Emergency Desk Officer.]* CASE 4

"I had just been appointed director of human resources here and I was so disgusted to see people from MSF Belgium, people like Dominique Boutriau, in tears. To some of them, it represented a break with MSF France, with témoignage, with trust. Those people felt that their deepest beliefs had been attacked. It was my duty as head of Human Resources to engineer a kind of catharsis so that people could say what they felt and not repress it. I asked the Heads of Mission for their views and did a fresh analysis. I included the decisions taken at the Executive Committee and the teleconferences in the dossier. Bernard Pécoul acknowledged that at some point in the decisiontaking process, he had made a mistake, etc… that data had been obscured. People will say that of course

	that's the Belgian version. OK, but I'm talking about international documents. I think there was a kind of loss of control there, which did a lot of harm. I am very curious to see how you are going to present this because you can only rewrite the story against one section or the other." *[Alex Parisel, MSF Belgium, Human Resources Director (in French).]* CASE 4

Extreme-triggered organizational learning loops

Acknowledging that the organization has made a mistake	"What seems strange to me, in hindsight, is that we in MSF, did not know what was going on. We had a lot of people in the country yet I was not aware of information from MSF people that there was this tension in the country; that the Hutu were planning to kill the Tutsi. That means that we knew nothing about the context, so what exactly were we doing? The people working for MSF Holland in Rwanda were not typical emergency types. They were people for slow, calm situations, technical people who were not concerned by the political context. [...] To tell you the truth, until the day I left, even after I arrived back in Holland, I didn't know that it was a genocide. I had never worked before in a genocide. I didn't know what a genocide was. I knew what a war was." [Wouter Van Empelen, Emergency Cell, MSF Holland, in Rwanda in April 1994.] CASE 1

"We had free space in The Times that we didn't want to use to raise money. We had this public space and we said to ourselves, 'we're going to use it.' The rationale was ridiculous. We never should have followed it. We used the space to publish a joint letter with Oxfam. To my knowledge, it's the only one in the history of the organisation. It was really outdated and I take full responsibility. *[Anne-Marie Huby, MSF UK Executive Director (in French).]* CASE 4

"I'd sent a message to the network saying, "please be careful with the figures. Don't make any assumptions based on the figures." And then Joëlle Tanguy, (Director of MSF USA) gave an interview to CNN in New York. She was trapped and the report came out saying, "MSF says that there are so many deaths per day." The information came out of CNN in New York. It was picked up by the news agencies as "MSF said that…"

I had been endlessly fighting off journalists on this whole question of statistics for days. I told them that we didn't have any numbers to give them; that we didn't know. All of a sudden someone looks at his laptop and says to me, "MSF says in a story that there are so many people dying." What should I do? I said to Jacques, "We've got a problem here. |

They're saying that according to MSF, thousands of people are dying every day." We went back over the entire story. I tried to do damage control with the reporters. "Listen, this press release is based on a study in which we say that if this, if that, if the other thing… It's an extrapolation." Obviously the journalists didn't understand. "You're saying one thing but your Director in New York is saying another." We really had a big problem!" *[Samantha Bolton, MSF USA Communication Director, MSF Press Officer for the Great Lakes November December 1996 (in French).] CASE 4*

"Along with UNHCR and ICRC, we reached the conclusion that we'd obviously been used as bait. On 1 December, during a meeting of MSF, ICRC and UNHCR, the ICRC representative said, "It's not ICRC's tradition, but if we are going to continue working together … we can't treat refugees and later learn from villagers that they were shot after we'd left. There are problems here. We've got to do something." The UNHCR delegate was an Italian, very technically minded, but had sent fairly strong

reports to Geneva. The Banyamulenge authorities found out about them. We said to ourselves, "Maybe we (UNCHR, MSF and ICRC) should withdraw and announce to the world that this is not acceptable. They're killing people five kilometres away from our base and we can't do anything about it."

Just as we were making that decision, in the middle of our meeting, the Alliance liaison officers opened the meeting room door and said, "You want refugees? There are 5,000 on the road! Get to work!" On a micro level, what happened to us in Bukavu was identical to the massive return of refugees driven from Goma to Gisenyi that took place on the day that the threat of military intervention was announced. In our discussions with the authorities, it seemed clear that they were increasingly uncomfortable about the killings. They knew that we were preparing to react and take a position against them. So they opened the floodgates and shoved 5,000 refugees in our direction as a bone to gnaw on. At that moment, we thought that these 5,000 were the first wave of 200,000 refugees whose whereabouts no one knew and for whom we had to prepare, and they had already left for Tingi Tingi …! We said, "We want to work," and that's what we did. We had still lots of problems, -- pressure for authorization for the trucks to circulate, but that changed our strategy entirely. It was only later, when things had calmed down a bit, that we began witnessing the same events. We said to ourselves, "we're in the same situation as two or three months ago. Why did we stop paying attention?" … I had on my conscience the fact that my actions and decisions

	had helped the AFDL group and the Rwandan army to kill 10,000 or 15,000 refugees. It's difficult to say that. We tried to set up our little clinic here, our little operation there, and that's exactly where they disappeared. Afterwards, when we thought about it, we realized that we had indeed been used as bait. We didn't even manage to reach and treat many of them because they always crossed very quickly into Rwanda." *[Dr. José-Antonio Bastos, MSF ET (Emergency intersections Team) Coordinator in South Kivu (in French).]* CASE 4 "Faced with rumours, MSF tried to place someone in the teams to try to clarify what was happening with abuses, but that didn't work. This person was designated as a 'specialist' and the information went straight to headquarters without going via the team in the capital. Maybe we should try again but do things differently?" *[Extract from Minutes of the MSF France Board meeting, 28 October 1994 (in French).]* CASE 2
Changing practices after learning about the dire consequences of applying internalized practices and following the rules	"In the Bukavu area, information on ethnic cleansing did not only become stronger and stronger, it might even have a relation with the work of the humanitarian organisations. UNHCR-ICRC-MSF are working closely together to assist larger groups of refugees who are on the move. When larger groups are found the authorities are aware of this as they monitor our movements very closely. Several times when we wanted to assist a group the area was sealed off for a military operation in order to make the area safe enough for us to go in. When returning there after permission of the authorities, no refugees were found any more. The dilemma, expressed in the last sitrep about our fear that our presence is not improving the chances of the refugees to survive is now even stronger. Are we becoming a risk for the refugees ? It is decided to change our intervention approach towards these groups of refugees. We will encourage people to come to the main roads and spread the news that they will get assistance on the road." *[Extract from Sitrep Kivu , from MSF Kigali, Ton Berg, (temporarily in Bukavu) to MSF Amsterdam, MSF Goma, MSF Bukavu, MSF Kigali and Kivu support team, forwarded to other sections, 11 January 1997.]* CASE 4 "New procedures must be put in place quickly so that aid passes directly to heads of families and the militias are prevented from controlling the camp." *[Extract from 'Twenty People on Average Die Every Day in the Tingi Tingi Camp in Upper Zaire,' Press Release, MSF France, MSF Belgium, 14 January 1996 (in French).]* CASE 4

"The first place we tried to enter was Walikale. I think it was on the 3rd of February. The ICRC, us, and others were on the road. We knew from people in Walikale that the refugees wanted to return to Rwanda, but we did not see them on the road. Then we took the small roads to look for them and help them. And it was clear that once we found people, the next day they were gone and killed probably. It was clear that we were used as a lure and then we stopped immediately to get all off the main roads. Then there was a lot of lobbying, internally with ICRC, toward UNHCR and authorities. But again because you don't get the fact that they were really killed and by who, you couldn't do much more. The only thing was stopping, just using the main road and not looking for the refugees in the bush. We changed our strategy getting the message verbally into the jungle that MSF is on the main road… if they want support … there were a few temporary points where we were that they could come to, they would be taken care of, waiting for the truck to come to be repatriated to Rwanda. It was in cooperation with ICRC and UNHCR. Not a huge number, but some people did it. … But it was all very difficult. It was a real nightmare. And the whole area is so big, so dangerous, so horrible things were happening. It is all the time keeping your head clear in order that your strategy doesn't have so much negative impact."
[Marcel Van Soest, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Goma, January to March 1997.] CASE 4

"Médecins Sans Frontières also warns, as it did for the past two years, against recreating semi-permanent camps, whose refugees were intimidated and manipulated by the perpetrators of the genocide. The camps cost 1 million $ US per day to run and were used as military and political bases."
[Extract from 'Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders Calls for an International Military Intervention to Set Up Safe Zones within Zaire to Prevent Further Human Catastrophe,' Press release MSF Gisenyi (New-York), 4 November, 1996.] CASE 4

"MSF can expect lots of criticism from journalists about over-exaggerated death and refugee numbers left in Zaire

- MSF needs to closely monitor situation in Zaire - Possible will have to update NBO correspondents in a couple of weeks on situation in Zaire - but only if we have reliable medical / field data

- We will be slaughtered alive if anything else we say is based on guesstimates and not on hard facts - especially field medical

	- Most of the serious damage control all sections are going to be faced with is trying to re-establish credibility after 13,000 dead and 1 person every so many minutes dead figures - From now on all sections should keep low profile on political supposition and stick to facts - only way to do damage control - From what we are hearing from established journalists (Kurt Lindyer and NY Times) etc - journalists are now doing two year analysis of the crisis - to see what went wrong - journalists coverage - international aid agencies - - rebels - we can expect major shit" *[Extract from 'Com/info Proposal for Coming Weeks,' Fax from Samantha Bolton, MSF Press Officer for Great Lakes to ET, programme managers and Communication Departments, 26 November 1996.] CASE 4* "On 17 December, a second evaluation by an MSF medical team put the number of refugees at 70,000. [...] Médecins Sans Frontières is aware that armed ex-FAR and Interahamwe groups, leaders of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, are almost certainly present among the populations we are aiding. To avoid creating permanent refugee camps in Zaire, we are responding under a framework of limited assistance." *[Extract from 'Information Bulletin on Kivu and Upper Zaire,' MSF France Press Release, 18 December 1996 (in French).] CASE 4*	
Applying learning from past cases to make decisions	"We know from experience that in similar situations, 10 out of every 10,000 displaced people deprived of aid die every day. We can thus estimate that more than 13,600 people have died since the crisis began 21 days ago (not including deaths from killings), confirming the urgent need to create an international force to set up safe zones." *[Extract from 'Are 13,600 Deaths Insignificant?' MSF France Press Release, 8 November 1996 (in French).] CASE 4* "Our analysis was this: if the media can enter and humanitarian organisations cannot enter in the context where camps are completely dependent on food and water from the outside, we have to speak in terms of the worst case. That's my experience. I said that also after several times because we were criticised. I remember in such a type of situation, when we were optimistic in the past ten years, we always were wrong." *[Extract from Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président.] CASE 4*	

	"We were trying to get the message out again. Journalists were calling, saying, "We can't get to the other side, we'd like to know what's going on, what" We were answering that we didn't know, that we didn't have access. Then we said to ourselves, we can extrapolate from our experience with this kind of population in this kind of situation. Working with the medical department, we researched situations most similar to this one and identified the corresponding mortality rates. We chose situations in which a population of hundreds of thousands had had access to aid in a camp for some period of time and were then cut off for three weeks to a month. We applied the Goma mortality rates, projecting them over a week and a month. You can't fault the method in and of itself. We were very careful to say that these were projections. But as soon as the AFP got hold of them, our carefully chosen words became the following: "Here are the mortality rates predicted by MSF…" All our caveats disappeared … In addition, we couldn't foresee that people were leaving with food and water and in good health." *[Anne Guibert, MSF France Press Officer (in French).] CASE 4*

"At that time, I think there was a real misunderstanding. If you consider the various positions, you can say we all agreed we should do something. But how to and when to do it, there was no real agreement. For me, I agreed to the content, but there was clearly no agreement on when and how. I think also what was very critical here was for the first time in that year, we were establishing an executive committee. So we had had one to two meetings and then in April we all met for the first time to discuss this. And a month later we had this incident. It can also be said that we were not used to working together. That is why a yes from Mr X can be completely interpreted differently than a yes from Mr B. So we did not know how to play the game. If we had been more fine-tuned to each other, this could have been avoided. And also the impact of this crisis asserts that we should have never have done this by telephone, but in person at Brussels. We have learned from this, because from then we were meeting very often in person at least once a month. So we learned but it was too late." *[Lex Winkler, MSF Holland Executive Director and Operational Director 1996 - 1997.] CASE 4* | |
| Discussing the lessons learnt from recent failures in extreme contexts, the organization's | "What lessons can be drawn from this series of failures? Must we resign ourselves to impotent medical power? Is withdrawing the only way to show opposition? Or should we stay to care for the most deprived, in spite of everything? How far should warlords be allowed to go in diverting aid to their own coffers? And above all, what position should we take faced with a political power also in disarray, but one | |

| identity and strategic options in the face of dilemmas | still capable of manipulation? How can we elude its traps and avoid becoming the tool of its hidden strategies? How can we end the confusion of roles between humanitarian aid providers and politicians, when the former are used – to excess - to disguise the inaction of the latter?

These are some of the questions raised during a recent symposium organised by Médecins Sans Frontières in Paris on the topic of humanitarian responsibility in honour of the group's 25th birthday.

Over the years, as the humanitarian movement has become more professional and media-savvy, its role has changed. The initial goal of easing individual suffering has given way to a new ambition: controlling collective destinies. The humanitarian aid movement has been assigned the responsibility of protecting populations in danger, a collective security task previously assumed by national governments.

[...] Jean-Christophe Rufin and Alain Destexhe also note that in the recent Kivu crisis, humanitarian aid "was manipulated" in the service of "a French policy aimed at aiding former Rwandan genocidaires and supporting the Mobutu regime." And, they added, "the NGOs made ridiculous claims. By predicting a humanitarian catastrophe that would result in a million deaths before Christmas – one that proved to be a figment of the imagination – they dangerously overstated the case."" *[Extract from 'Humanitarian Aid Movement in Disarray,' Le Monde (France), 21 December 1996 (in French).] CASE 4*

"That whole numbers thing had a very powerful impact in Holland. There was an internal document written about the statistics. What was missing during that whole period was a sense of perspective and distance. The things that were said were taken out of context. In the end, the context was restored somewhat but at the time, it was a major crisis. I had the impression that afterwards, there was a certain fear of speaking out. And, there was also team security to consider." *[Dr. Jacques de Milliano, MSF Holland General Director and MSF International vice-président.] CASE 4*

"In light of developments in the camps on questions of health as well as of the leaders' control, MSF must examine its involvement and take a stand… Massive international assistance has undoubtedly limited the consequences, in terms of mortality, of the massive exodus. Nevertheless, the health situation remains precarious and there are still significant needs. | |

As several coordinators have emphasised, the situation in the camps in not exceptional in terms of the manipulation of aid and the control of political-administrative leaders. That's not the real problem. Rather, there is sufficient evidence that the same people who perpetrated the genocide in Rwanda are running the camps, using them in one way or another to establish their legitimacy. It is the question of genocide and the prior government's responsibility that must be at the centre of the debate. For NGOs, particularly MSF, the instrumentalisation of aid by the leaders raises the question of manipulation…

What role for MSF?… MSF's possible departure from all the camps was the subject of many conversations. What emerged from the discussion was that no one expects to leave the camps suddenly tomorrow, and that opinions on the issue vary across sections and individuals. However, the discussion did result in consensus on the need to present MSF's possible departure as a final action.

What Should Our Strategy Be? MSF was not slow to denounce the genocide and those responsible for it. However, the international community will gradually forget (if not intentionally neglect) the genocide, and the génocidaires will manipulate the aid. We're also faced with a refugee population held hostage and the unease, clearly and justly articulated, of many in MSF. So we need a breakaway strategy. This is not just about refining our analyses or strengthening our critique. We have to find approaches and a new process. The following strategy was adopted in that spirit:

a) faced with the impunity of those responsible for genocide, we must: denounce the international community's failure to respond appropriately (desire/will to judge those guilty) – denounce the farce of the human rights delegates in Rwanda – develop a pressure campaign targeting UN member states and agencies – support the human rights organisations – push the press to investigate what is happening in the camps – alert and mobilise political leaders.

b) faced with aid diversion, we must: demand that censuses be conducted; carry out food basket monitoring; put pressure on those NGOs (Caritas) that participate in the diversion (as in Tanzania); improve targeting of our activities to vulnerable groups; reduce the currently excessive level of assistance in some camps; conduct a public information campaign.

c) faced with security problems, we must: urge UNHCR to assume its full responsibilities; urge the UN system and member states to react to this problem (security forces); pressure put on the governments of Zaïre, Tanzania, Burundi.

These actions should be taken both in the field and at headquarters." *[Extract from 'Summary report on the International Council's Visit to the Rwandan Refugee Camps,' 17 October 1994 (in French).]* CASE 3

"MSF has experienced some stormy weather in terms of témoignage in recent months, including a series of denunciations and accusations over the tragic plight of Hutu refugees in the former Zaire. We cannot ignore the flood of frustration, bitterness and accusation, nor everybody's incessant questioning: what MSF témoignage? What is it for? Who is it addressed to? What methods do we use? What is its relevance? What causes us to do it and what stops us from doing it? And what about security??

MSF practices three forms of témoignage:

- Information explaining the delivery of aid in a critical situation (MSF is dealing with malnutrition).

- Denunciation (malnutrition is due to the displacement of populations).

- Accusation (these displacements are caused by the authorities in charge).

It is this last form that often causes problems (and which will be chiefly dealt with below), particularly when it is public and jeopardises action in the field (limitation of the humanitarian space) and the security of the teams. I am suggesting several reference points, taken from our original position and International Council texts, so that we can initiate a discussion that should result in a better definition of témoignage, as well as better coordination between HQ and the field in this respect. The subject concerns us all, whether through our responsibilities or our sensibilities, whether we work in the field, the capital or the operations centre, whether we are medical staff, sanitation specialists or work in human resources.

The main idea behind this document is the protection of témoignage, which remains one of our most relevant and original modes of action, as long as we do not abuse it or divert it from its original objectives.

It is a broad domain and the present document is certainly not exhaustive. It has two purposes. The first is to create a breathing space after our media exposure over the last few months and the fallout from the "Libération episode". The second is to initiate an in-depth examination which should result in a (re)definition of témoignage at an International Council debate in September. We should also note that Thierry Coppens, Head of Research at MSF-B, is organising a seminar and workshops on MSF's témoignage policy for mid-October '97.

This instalment is the result of a decision taken at the May management committee. It has been put together hurriedly, as always, with the help of Brigitte Gaignage and Sabine Vanhuysse (document research), Monia (typing) and Edouard Vercruysse (editing). The texts are in French and English; a translation is planned. Give your critical faculties free rein and let's have your informed comments. Send it all to Thierry Coppens before the end of August '97." *[Extract from 'MSF Témoignage in Crisis?' Internal document, Coordination Alex Parisel, June 1997 (in French).] CASE 4*

8.2 Appendix 2: Complete timeline of the four case studies
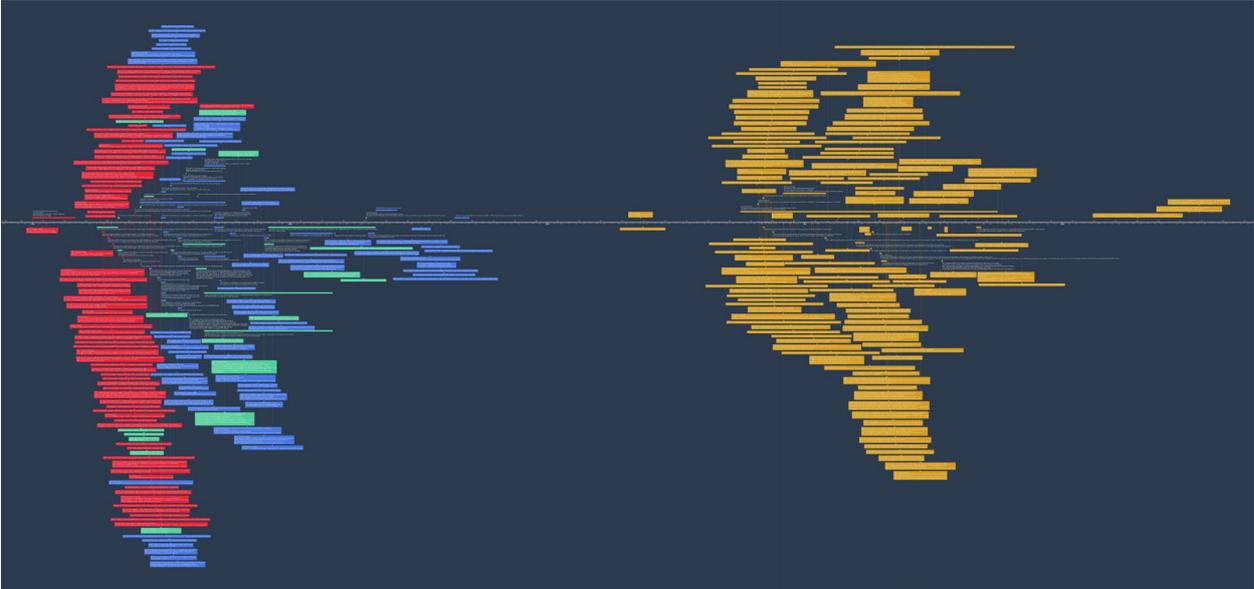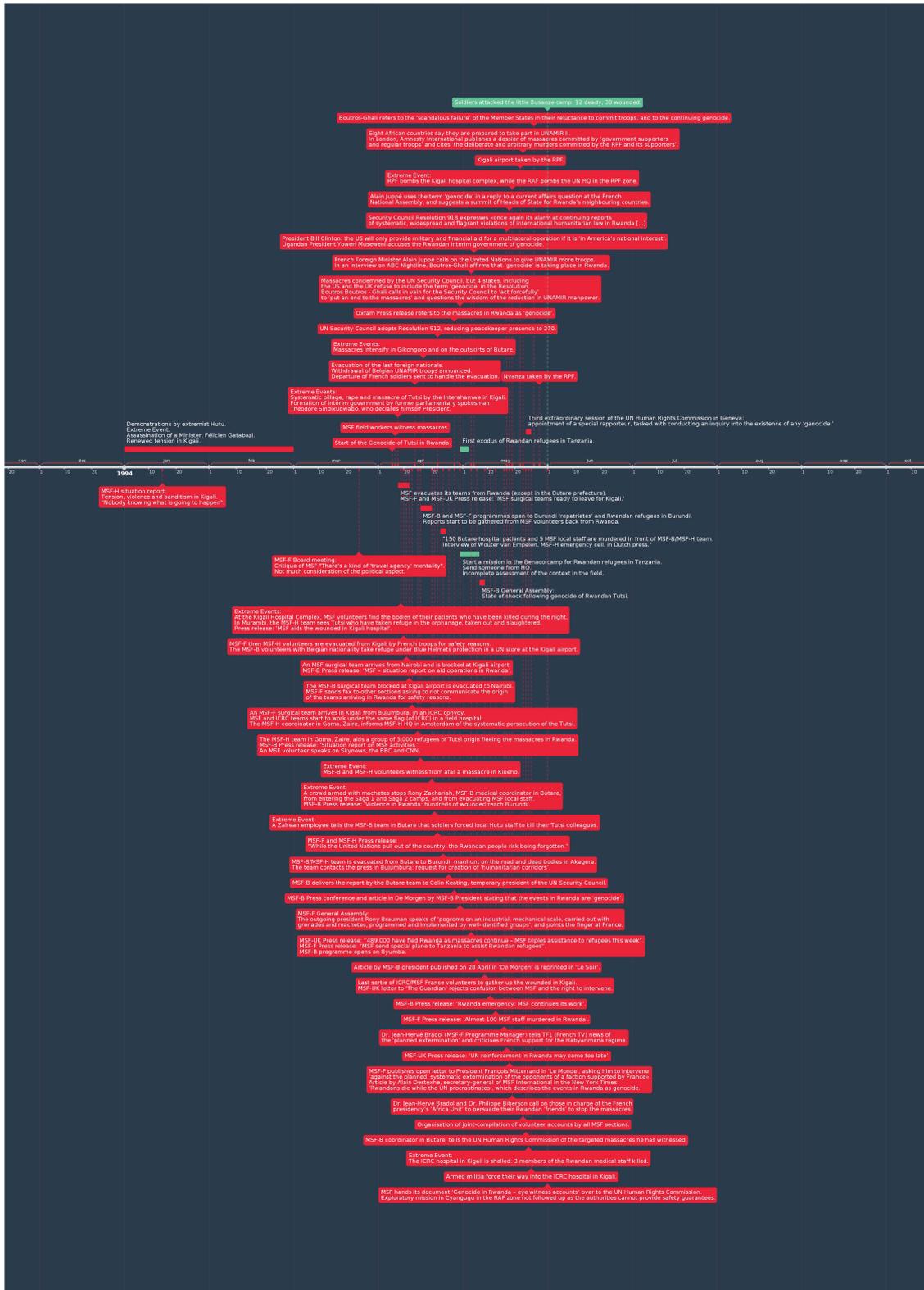
**Source: own figure using the software *time.graphics***

8.5 Appendix 5: Part of the Timeline 1 December 1994 – 1 December 1995
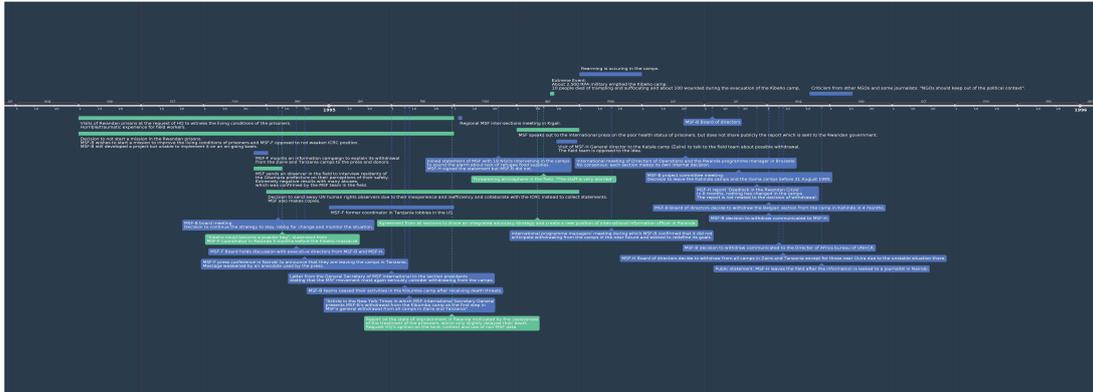

8.6 Appendix 6: Part of the Timeline 1 December 1995 – 1 December 1996

### Source: own figure using the software time.graphics
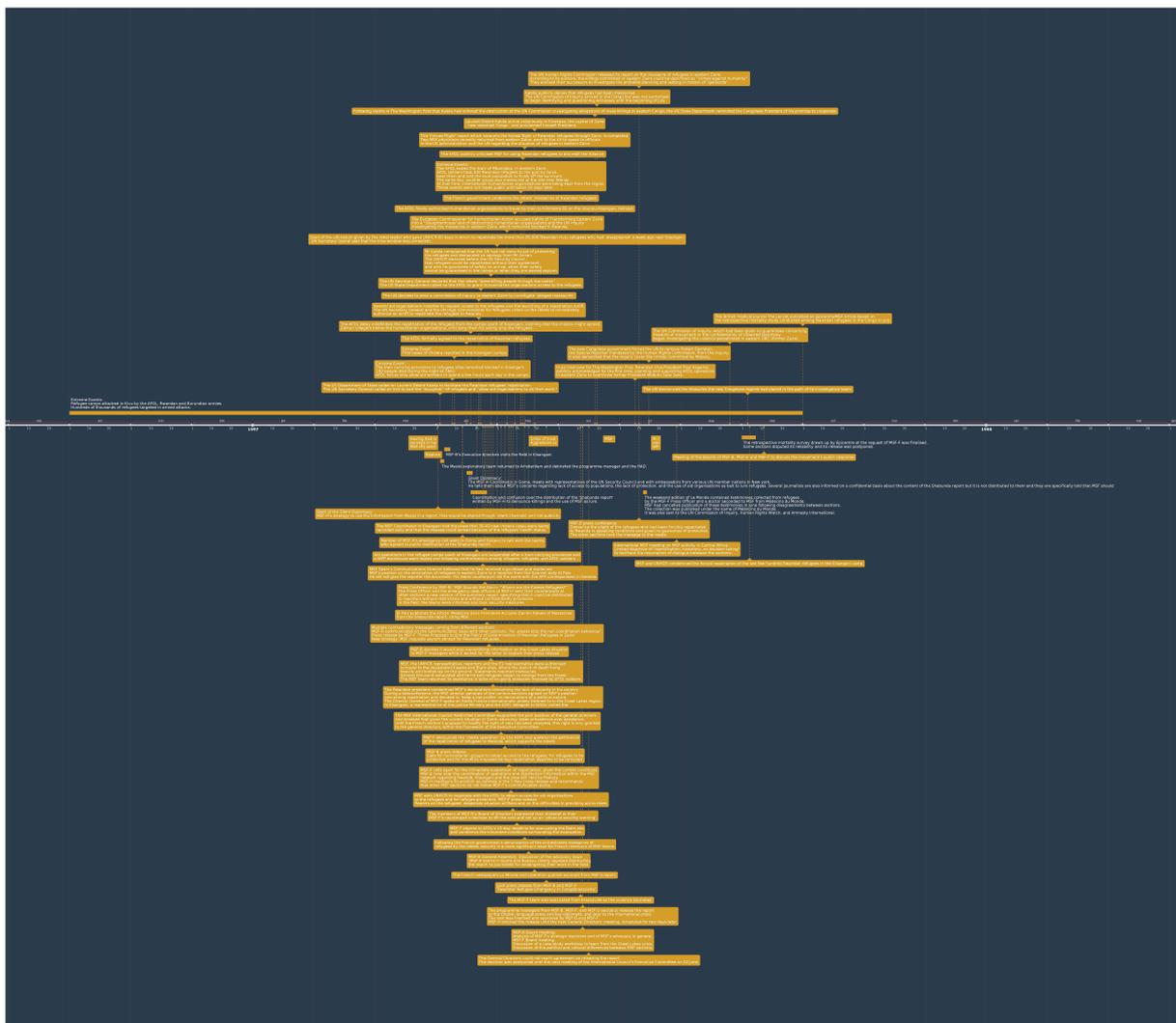
8.9 Appendix 9: Part of the Timeline 1 December 1997 – 1 October 1998

Source: own figure using the software time.graphics
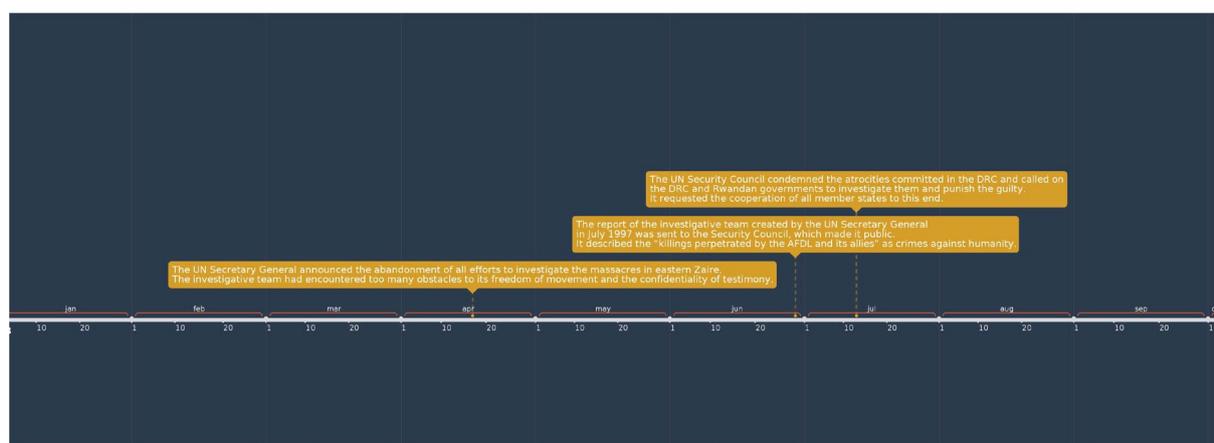
8.10 Appendix 10: Table with additional details on each individual case that supported the analysis

Source: own table

Case	Dilemmas identified by the organization	Details about the case informing the overall analysis
Case 1: Genocide of Rwandan Tutsi April – July 1994	Tension between MSF's humanitarian principles: Silence vs. Advocacy Conflict between organization's mission and urgency of addressing genocide Risk unintended consequences of strategic action: Legitimizing ineffective responses and political appropriation	Critique of MSF ignorance to the extreme context in the field Strong moral emotions for those who witness the massacres and secondary traumatization for other members Intuitive understanding that the context is not war but a genocide Fulfill the medical assistance mandate at all costs, evacuations, work under the banner of another organization Experts sent to the field Strong internal debate over the decision to call for armed intervention Unprecedented strategic actions beyond the organization's boundaries (e.g., call for armed intervention)

		Advocacy takes priority over medical mandate in the hope to change the context
Case 2: The violence of the new Rwandan regime July 1994 – January 1996	Balancing between humanitarian imperatives and potential risks for refugees Overstepping the organization's role and mission to inform refugees Risking complicity to the new regime to be able to carry out missions Tension between MSF's humanitarian principles: Silence vs Advocacy	Field raises the alarm to HQ about the extreme violence of the new regime Priority given to keep operations running over advocacy Discussion over MSF's role in light of other organizations not fulfilling their mandates Unprecedented action beyond the organization's boundaries (e.g., creation of a new NGO) Strong moral emotions for those who witness human rights abuses Limitations of the organization's medical mandate are revealed Moral dilemma over negotiations with the new regime Difficulty to access the victims Security incidents for the teams in the field lead to the debate of leaving the field Collaborative work to stay in the field Reports on the situations observed in the field Struggle to find the right strategic path MSF expelled from Rwanda with other international organizations Advocacy takes priority following the expulsion

Case 3:	Commitment to impartial humanitarian assistance vs. Moral implications of aiding perpetrators of Genocide	Inaccurate understanding of the context
Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire and Tanzania		Field informs HQ of the misuse of humanitarian aid
		HQ shares correct understanding of the context with the field
May 1994 – January 1996		Advocacy about the context from HQ and strike in the field to demand change in the context
	Continuing delivering aid vs. Complicity in committing harm through the instrumentalization of aid	Positive effect but no real change in the context leading to the resignation of a field strategist
		Attempt of collaboration for an international mission but internal political play and different interpretations lead to two distinct strategic paths revealing different value systems (i.e., one to keep a 'clean' image and not get involved when the context can harm MSF's credibility and work, one which puts saving lives above all else)
	Renouncing assistance to a distressed population based on moral principles	Territorial quarrel between sections leading to lies to get in the field
		Fatigue from the field related to new extreme events
		Limitation of humanitarian aid (malaise)
		Ask other NGOs to change their policy to fit the needs in the context
		Management sent to the field for assessment
		Different interpretations between sections of MSF mandate, the acceptable and unacceptable
		Opposite strategies from MSF sections (leave and lobby, coalition, publish a report and advocate)
		International meetings where HQ strategists debate on general withdrawal leading to all sections eventually leaving the field

Case 4:	Speaking out without access meaning advocating without direct evidence	MSF goes beyond its own mandate to fill the gap left by other organizations
The hunting and killing of Rwandan refugees in Zaire-Congo		Danger for field workers and limited actions
	Risking exacerbating harm: Continuing vs. Ceasing activities because MSF was used to lure refugees	Discuss strategy at HQ level (Presidents and General Directors of different sections)
1996-1997		MSF calls for international military intervention to set up safe zones but this time no dilemma
	Choosing one of two deeply flawed options: Advocate for refugees to remain in danger in Easter Zaire or participate in the forced repatriation to Rwanda	Plan for potential extreme events
		One section in charge of assigning missions to other sections and coordinate
		Difficulty to access the victims
		Advocacy to move the international community to act
		Estimate of number of deaths to speak out and lobby without clear evidence leads to the 'Figures crisis' with bad press for MSF
		Access given and taken away by those in power to manipulate MSF
		Unprecedented actions to face impasse in the field
		Plan and avoid repeating mistakes from Cases 1 to 3
		MSF under surveillance leading to the debate over departure
		Change of strategy regarding military intervention following change in context
		HQ symposium on 'humanitarian responsibility' for organizational learning based on these cases
		MSF targeted in the field
		Strategic failure with catastrophic consequences (refugees killed after MSF was used as bait)
		Decision to stay with limited activities and change the way of operating
		Opposing views on the strategy: speak out and put people and programs in jeopardy or do not speak out
		New way: 'silent diplomacy'

		Disagreement and lack of communication between sections Internal crisis of trust over publications of reports and divulgation of information demonstrating a lack of following procedures and risking field members' lives

8.11 Appendix 11: Snapshots of short excerpts from tables created in Excel for each case study to help identify key constructs

## Source: own tables

| Position	Strategizing	Interpretation	Proof Quotes
HQ	HQ criticizes the field	Critique of MSF ignorance in a disrupted context	There's a kind of 'travel agency' mentality. They go to one place and if they don't like it, they move on … **they give no thought to the political aspects: the right to asylum, why people are fleeing, the nature of the enormous conflict between Hutu and Tutsi.** [Extract from Minutes of the Board Meeting of MSF France, 25 March 1994 (in French).] We were in a country at war, which is routine when you've been with MSF for a long time. Our Head of Mission was aware of the political situation. She knew that the Tutsi were being pursued more than the others, but not the extent of it. [Dr. Dominique Boutriau, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF Belgium (in French).] I think that the analysis of the conflict in Rwanda was poor and not very relevant. Even though we'd been working there for several years, there was no thinking in the group here, and even less internationally, that integrated the work of others to better understand the conflict. As a consequence, **MSF did very little to sound the alarm about how dangerous the situation was… We didn't have much of a political understanding of the conflict.** That's how I saw it when I started working on the Rwanda Desk and when I went there in June/July 1993. **The two Heads of Mission in the field were pretty much doing a good jo**b. I was especially impressed by the Dutch team, which was assisting internally displaced people in the north of the country. From a medical point of view, they had aspects of their program that were very well run and they saved many lives. But at the same time, I felt ill at ease with them because there was little attention paid to the nature and dynamics of the conflict. It was largely a material response to the consequences of the conflict. I don't think we properly took into account the conflict's gravity or severity. I thought, "It's a country where life could be good. Why is it that people seem sad all day?" I asked our driver-translator, Ignace, "I find your country interesting, but what makes you so sad?" He replied, "You don't realise that every one of us goes home to our lonely little houses at night and for years now, sit with our teeth chattering as we wonder when they'll come to murder us." Afterwards, as I planned evaluation trips with him and the medical coordinator, I found him increasingly reluctant. He asked me, "Where am I going to sleep in Ruhengeri?" I asked him, "Tell me exactly what's worrying you, we'll find a solution, what's bothering you?" He replied, "I don't like sleeping in dirty places, I have to sleep somewhere with at least basic standards of cleanliness." He was a well-educated, clean guy, like me, no more no less. When we went on trips like that and spent one or two nights in places that weren't very clean, I found him a bit fussy. But when I thought a bit more about it, I realised that he was a Rwandan Tutsi and that it wasn't the dirt he was scared of in Ruhengeri, but of being killed. He wasn't scared of dirt, he was scared of death… **The real criticism we can make of MSF is that we had a real presence on the ground that gave us the means to have gathered information and data to expose the whole plan and we did not do it. Neither MSF France nor the other sections called a meeting to organise this.** [Dr. Jean-Hervé Bradol, Rwanda Programme Manager, MSF France (in French).] What seems strange to me, in hindsight, is that we in MSF, did not know what was going on. We had a lot of people in the country yet I was not aware of information from MSF people that there was this tension in the country; that the Hutu were planning to kill the Tutsi. That means that **it wasn't a war. But that wasn't picked up in Burundi.** It was viewed with that ability of MSF of getting used to certain situations, of seeing it as somehow normal: "After all, it's war, it's horrible, that's the way it is." A somewhat fatalistic attitude. Sometimes, there are those at MSF who think it normal that people can die without our knowing why. In Burundi, a lot of people were dying, but it was as if the MSF people thought it was normal because there was a war. They thought it normal that these people were refugees and that no one was asking why they had fled, what they had fled and who they really were. **This attitude of accepting that "the world is tragic but at least we are here to help" is the reaction of an alien, of a saviour who's no longer interested in the nature of people's problems. I think the teams in Burundi and Rwanda were**

Position	Strategizing	Interpretation	Proof Quotes
From Field to HQ	Context assessment	Field workers raise the concern over the situation when MSF is about to leave. New field coordinator then decides to assess the situation in the field. This resulted in MSF staying due to the needs in the field.	When I arrived at the project in February 1996, we were getting rid of everything because we would leave the camps and everything. A few of the team members said that there were all of these killings going on in Masisi: "Why are we running the project down, it seems that there is so much to do?" I said, "Ok, let's have a look at it and get some information." Indeed, there did seem to be a lot happening. There seemed to be a lot of security problems to get out and as we investigated it more we found out that there was a very active war going on between the Bahutu and the Batutsi. [Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaïre) from February to September 1996.]
Field	Work in extreme context 'civil war'	Context limiting the action of field workers, unaccessible areas, safety issues	We started to move more around in the area and to support health centres to give drugs and to give training and things. Then a lot of people who were coming in showed physical signs of being shot or having machete wounds. **We started to hear more and more about places that we shouldn't go to because this or that was happening and also groups of displaced people were coming in.** There were many churches or parishes where groups of Tutsi were in hiding, being protected by the local priests. You could see the front lines between the Bahundi, the Bahutu, and the Tutsi. They all had their areas marked out and they were fighting over territory. **It was a very classic civil war going on in this small scale. Many times when we were just about to go to a place, we would be turned away,** the driver would find something out along the way. What they often did was put signs along the road, they would put a log across the road, which meant that basically, you shouldn't go there. [Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaïre) from February to September 1996.]
Field	Context assessment	Use local contacts to understand the context better	We also had radio contacts in different places because we had been doing a project for many years in Zaire (a drug distribution programme) and **we had contacts in 350 health centres throughout North Kivu.** So, often we could phone to them and find out what was going on. We also had relations with the church posts so we could find out what was going on. [Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaïre) from February to September 1996.]
From Field to HQ	Concern about context	Field coordinator expressing concern to HQ on the situation in the field	For over 4 months, MSF Goma has been particularly concerned about the plight of displaced Tutsi in the villages of Kitchanga and the Mokoto monastery (displaced Tutsi have been present in Mokoto since late January 1996). Prior to and since the arrival of the present country manager in early April 1996, the concern for these people has been raised over and over by the teams working in the field. **As a result of this concern, discussions have been held between various organisations in Goma, initiated by MSF and ICRC, to try to get something done to protect these people.** […] On 2 May 1996, a meeting was called at the IOM offices in Goma held between IOM, ICRC, MSF, UNHCR, ECHO, OXFAM, WFP and Caritas. At that meeting, both MSF and ICRC jointly raised their serious concerns over the situation of the Tutsi at Mokoto and Kitchanga, stressing that in our view these people needed to be evacuated. [Extract from 'Response on the Reaction of UN/ICRC to MSF in Geneva- Background', Message from Rachel (Kiddell-Monroe), Coordinator in Goma to Wouter (Van Empelen), programme manager in Amsterdam, 27 May 1996.]
From Field to HQ to Field	MSF goes beyond its own mandate to fill the gap left by other organizations	When other organizations do not fill their own mandate to fill the mandate and MSF observes the need in the field, MSF is willing to go beyond its mandate to fill this need. Here, the field observes the need to evacuate vulnerable people and asks HQ for the financial backup to do so which is granted.	UNHCR would just not acknowledge that there was a problem in Masisi. They were just too involved with the camps and said, "This is not our job—this is displaced people and first, we don't work with displaced people—we work with refugees." So I went into the manuals of UNHCR and found out that of course they work with displaced people. They have to do something about it. I had a very good relationship with the head of ICRC. We had actually split tasks between ICRC and MSF. He was doing all this diplomatic work but I felt that it was going too slowly and things were not happening. At the same time, we had located the other people who hadn't been killed and we had to get them out because we knew that they were going to be killed. So we worked with ICRC to try to get an evacuation of these people. But we couldn't get anyone to do it. **The ICRC wouldn't evacuate them; UNHCR wouldn't evacuate them—no one would touch them. We said that we were going to evacuate them and so we did. Wouter gave me $10,000 and we got a truck, came back to the village, got the people into the truck, and took them to Rwanda where they went to a camp on the border.** They were mainly women and children. Many of the men had fled to take up arms and fight. [Rachel Kiddell-Monroe, MSF Holland Field Coordinator, Kivu (Zaïre) from February to September 1996.]

8.12 Appendix 12: Schematic representation of the strategizing of MSF in individual case sudies

Source: own figures

Extreme Context Strategizing - CASE 1

Extreme Context Strategizing - CASE 2

Context

'Genocidaires rule refugee camps'

'Exodus of Rwandan refugees because of the Genocide'

'Diversion of aid'

'Refugees killed in refugee camps'

speak out 'ethical dilemma and explanation'

'Thousands left to die around Gikongoro'

'Propaganda in refugee camps'

'Cholera outbreak in refugee camp in Zaire About 1,000' dead per day'

'Threats to field workers in refugee camps'

HQ

'Send someone'

FS   SR

humanitarian aid

medical assistance

Ethical

StrP

speak out 'Tanzanian camps are a "humanitarian façade"'

'Discussion of the ethical issue requested by HQ'

'Start a shared mission'

'Political dispute between sections'

context assessment 'Troika team'

'Different strategic choices for each section'

context assessment

'Appeal to human rights organisations to change their policy'

CStr

'Limitations of MSF and humanitarian aid more generally'

StrQ

Field

witnessing and reporting

'Media circus Call for help to HQ'

FS   SR

'Contextual cues'

professional code of ethics

medical assistance

Ethical

StrP

medical assistance

CStr

'Strike of expatriates in the field'

'Resignation of emergency pool field worker'

'Small improvement but no real change'

'Prepare assessment before Troika arrives'

'Mission'

'One expatriate brainwashed taken out from the field'

'Extreme fatigue, violence and insecurity'

'Survey Health issues'

May 1994

August 1995

Internalized Practice	Conflicting Practices	Dilemma	Effect
New Practice	Organizational Norms	Process	Exchange

Extreme Event

Strong emotional reactions or trauma

Intuition

Mental Models

EDM   Ethical Decision Making

CStr   Creative Strategy

StrP   Strategic Prioritizing

StrQ   Strategic Questioning

SG   Sensegiving

IR   Identity-Redefining

FS   Failed Sensemaking

SR   Sense-Remaking

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