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Making sense of the corporate philosophy:
Dialogic employee engagement, and narrative positioning

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Abstract

We find an increased interest in the concept of employee engagement within the area of organizational and corporate communication. Employee engagement is an umbrella term for a number of cognitive, emotional and physical aspects (Kahn, 1990) of relating positively to one's work, and research within this area has mostly connected employee engagement to organizational productivity and effectiveness. In this paper, we suggest a new approach to employee engagement by relating it to employee communication and placing it within dialogue theory (Buber, 1970) combined with Bamberg's (1997) positioning theory. Our case is a strategy meeting on the topic of how a corporate philosophy devised by top management and entitled "Business Kind2Mind" is interpreted by managers and what they view is the best way to implement the philosophy within subsidiaries. Theorizing engagement dialogically enables a shift from instrumental perspectives to a more interpretive approach in which true mutuality entails participants' views being heard and incorporated in the corporate philosophy, and engagement is not purely about efficiency and outcome. A dialogical approach enables us to conceive of employee communication not as only upwardly or downwardly directed between manager and employee, but as interactional, with mutual change.

Keywords
Employee engagement, Dialogical theory, Narrative positioning, Power

1   Introduction

The concept of employee engagement, an umbrella term for several cognitive, emotional and physical aspects of relating positively to one's work (Kahn, 1990, p. 694), is recognized as important for organizational effectiveness, innovation and competitiveness, and is therefore a matter of concern for managers (Ruck & Welch, 2012; Welch, 2011). In particular, communication has been suggested to be an important contributing factor in the development of employment engagement (Welch, 2011).

The concept of employee engagement has been approached from several areas, such as business, psychology, and human resources (Macey & Schneider, 2008; Shuck & Wollard, 2010), where it has largely been seen as

instrumental for productivity and efficiency. Our aim, however, is to understand how employee engagement can be understood by examining the role of communication between management and employees and locating this within dialogue theory, where, in a Buberian perspective, dialogue consists of a quality of mutual relationship and engagement (Buber, 1970; Heath et al., 2006). Thus, in this article, we present an analysis of how terms for engagement are shaped by the discursive dynamics of power and identity in organizational meetings in which philosophy and strategy are negotiated. We investigate both how these dynamics occur and what their consequences are for the dialogic, interpersonal relations that arise, as well as for the interpretations of philosophy that emerge. To accomplish this, we analyze how members' positions within a specific setting shape the identity and power relations that set the frame for what is "allowed," both with respect to how participants voice their views and the kinds of views that ultimately emerge through the meeting. This, in turn, has consequences for the degree to which employees engage in mutual dialogue.

In order to explore these issues, we investigate employee engagement within a framework of dialogue theory (Buber, 1970) and in combination with Bamberg's (1997) suggested method for analyzing positioning in interactions. Our case is a strategy meeting within a diverse global group called GLOBALCO on the topic of how a corporate philosophy devised by top management and entitled "Business Kind2Mind" is understood by managers and what they view is the best way to implement the philosophy within subsidiaries. Using Bamberg's approach to analysis enables us to conduct a close analysis of the brief narratives, or "small stories" (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), that are told in interactions, in a way that allows us to examine how power and identity are constructed within a particular situation of interaction — here, a strategy business meeting of a type that commonly occurs in organizations. Positioning analysis enables insights into the progress of the meeting, the struggle over different interpretations of philosophy and opinions about how it should be implemented, how through this struggle, identity and power emerge, as well as which interpretations emerge "victorious" as result of power and identity. Through our analysis, we are able to trace how small stories are used to position the CEO as the member who sets the terms for participation and discussion in the meeting, as well as how different strategies of argumentation reveal different participants' conceptualizations of management's "Business Kind2Mind" philosophy.

Because positioning lays the discursive groundwork for the rules of the game, we see it as part of how, and to what degree, employee engagement is enabled or discouraged. Thus, we are able to discern how positions play a role in the mechanisms by which the interpretations and attitudes of certain members, particularly the CEO, dominate and allocate voice to others. As we will show, the "Business Kind2Mind" philosophy is interpreted variously as a means of branding, of advancing corporate social responsibility (CSR), or of embedding awareness into company culture, and participants voice contrasting views about whether implementation of these uses should occur in local subsidiaries or globally. However, it is ultimately the CEO's interpretations that dominate and to some degree quash others, and no change in the views of participants is achieved.

By combining positioning analysis with a dialogic perspective on employee engagement, we aim to create a bridge between theory, analysis and application, and to suggest how awareness of positioning can enhance managers' awareness of the dynamics of identity and power in meetings, and how this may affect employees' engagement.

This paper is divided into three sections. First, we explore the concept of employee engagement and place it within the communication literature. Second, the article provides a review of the concept of dialogue in communication, which we connect to positioning theory. Third, we analyze our case and discuss how our findings both contribute to a theory of dialogic employee engagement and can potentially inform practice.

2   Theoretical framework

Implementing a corporate philosophy is a complex process that, within a global organization, depends upon the sense-making, actions and practices of employees across geographically and culturally distinctive departments, subsidiaries and organizational levels, within all of which communication plays a constitutive role (Taylor & Van Every, 1999). Managers and employees must negotiate not only the meaning of philosophy, which often is formulated in abstractions, but also what implementation will mean for the organization of work and how it is carried out in day-to day practices. Within this process, we suggest, the issue of employee engagement offers a relevant perspective on how employees' views can be incorporated into the negotiation of meaning and practice.

2.1   *Exploring the concept of employee engagement*

Engagement has received attention among researchers as well as practitioners, due to its association with positive individual as well as organizational outcomes (Saks, 2006). The term evolves from recognition of a general need for

employees to engage with their work and their organization. The term has been variously defined as related to different personal and psychological factors while performing an organizational role (Men, 2012; Saks, 2006). Its definition has been heavily influenced by Kahn (1990, p. 64), who defined engagement as "the harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performance," conditioned by meaningfulness, safety and availability. Harter, Schmidt, and Keyes (2003) similarly defined employee engagement as a combination of cognitive and emotional antecedent variables in the workplace. Sharing Kahn's (1990) perspective on engagement as cognitive, emotional and physical, Schaufeli and Bakker (2004, p. 295) further characterized it by "vigour, dedication and absorption." Researchers have also identified various drivers of work engagement such as working conditions (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), job resources (Albrecht, 2010; Bakker, 2011), day-to-day issues (Bakker, 2011), the communication abilities of leadership teams (Wiley, Kowske, & Herman, 2010), and communication internal to the organization (Bindl & Parker, 2012; MacLeod & Clarke, 2010). In this perspective, engagement in the workplace seems to foster greater loyalty and job satisfaction (Ruck, Welch, & Menara, 2017).

Employee engagement has also been connected to internal communication (Hargie & Tourish, 1993; Ruck et al., 2017) and to organizational effectiveness, as researchers have documented a reciprocal relation between the two fields of study. In particular, the communication abilities of management have been recognized as an underlying factor associated with employee engagement (Kahn, 1990; Wiley et al., 2010) and a critical factor for enhancing performance (MacLeod & Clarke, 2010; Ruck & Welch, 2012), as employees need clear communication from senior management to understand how their own roles fit with the leadership vision (MacLeod & Clarke, 2010; Welch, 2011). Hargie and Tourish (2009) argue that a recurring theme in the communication literature includes the following: adequate information flow concerning key change issues, supervisory communication as a preferred communication source, communication as a foundation of teamwork and positive employee attitude, and face-to-face communication as a primary method of information transmission.

Placing employment engagement within the field of corporate communication and situating engagement at the organization level as well as job level, Welch (2011) defines organization engagement as a dynamic, changeable, psychological state, linking employees to their organization. Welch argues that internal corporate communication involves organizational practices designed to promote employee understanding of the goals of the organization. Thus, connecting communication to engagement, Welch (2011) presents a model that builds on Kahn's (1990) three-component model, suggesting that engagement and organizational outcomes such as innovation, competitiveness and effectiveness are mediated by communication. Building on Welch's (2011) communication-engagement model, organizational engagement is also linked to employee voice (Ruck et al., 2017), where the concept of voice within an interpersonal communication setting (i.e. the voluntary expression of people's views to influence organizational actions (Banerjee & Somanathan, 2001)) is seen as a critical component of employee engagement. This includes being able to voice one's views to management. Truss et al. (2006, p. 45) identify three primary drivers for employee engagement, one of which is the opportunity to feed views upward in the organization. Similarly, Ruck et al. (2017), for instance, identify a direct link between upward employee voice and engagement and a link between senior manager receptiveness and engagement.

Although employee engagement has received wide attention among researchers as well as practitioners due to its association with positive individual performance and organizational efficiency (Saks, 2006), this treatment is somewhat instrumental. Further, most research within the communicative perspective on employee engagement is based on employee surveys, relying on highly quantitative approaches, such as internal communication assessment studies (Hargie & Tourish, 2009) and questionnaire data on employee satisfaction (Ruck et al., 2017), where communication is conceptualized as transmission based, either as one-way information from management to employees, or as two-way processes of listening and responding. We therefore propose to see employee engagement from a very different perspective. By situating employee engagement within the theoretical framework of dialogue theory, we can see engagement in terms of mutuality and reciprocity (Phillips, 2011).

2.2   *Employee engagement as dialogue*

We are inspired by the closely related concept of dialogic engagement, which so far has been mostly connected to public relations (Taylor & Kent, 2014), where engagement is understood in terms of presentness and a willingness to interact, and where a dialogic approach to communication ensures ethical communication, mutuality, empathy, and commitment.

We see a great potential in connecting employee communication to dialogic communication theory, inspired by Kent & Taylor, and drawing on Buber's theory of dialogue. Phillips (2011, p. 25) characterizes dialogue theory as a "a

view on communication as sites of meaning making that are fundamental to human life and culture, multidimensional, emergent, dynamic and context dependent." Dialogue, as viewed by Buber (1965), depends on whether the participants have "in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turn to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between themselves and the others" (Buber, 1965, p. 19). A key element in dialogue is "between," which expresses a mutuality of regard and interest (Heath et al., 2006). Buber thus sees dialogue as based on an I-thou relationship, where people treat each other as dialogue partners in contrast to I-It relating, in which people treat others as objects to be manipulated for instrumental purposes (Phillips, 2011, p. 29).

Kent and Taylor argue that dialogic communicators are "open-minded, patient and empathetic" (2014, p. 391), and that dialogic engagement enables organizations and stakeholders (employees) to interact and create understanding, goodwill, and a shared view of reality. They see engagement as a feature of dialogue that represents a two-way, relational, give-and-take between organizations and stakeholders (employees), with the intended goal of improving understanding among interactants, making decisions that benefit all parties involved, not simply the organization, and fostering a fully functioning society (Heath et al., 2006; Taylor & Kent, 2014). This entails that "decisions are made based on informed participative interactions that involve stakeholders" (Taylor & Kent, 2014, p. 391).

While the concept of dialogue may assume open, symmetrical, relational interaction, and is considered an ethical form of communication because it serves to mitigate power relationships and value individual dignity (Taylor & Kent, 2014), Linell (2009) views dialogism as a metatheory about action and participation in the real world, where asymmetries and tensions are essential, and where power emerges from interaction and is executed in and through interaction. Dialogue is the locus where resistance is born and developed (Linell, 2009, p. 216). Thus whereas monologism tends to describe power relations in unidirectional ways, with the powerful parties influencing or constraining the less powerful, dialogism illuminates the interactional tensions involved in power and powerlessness, as they are intertwined and "the potentially powerful parties cannot fully exercise power unless the other parties let themselves be dominated and silenced" (Linell, 2009, p. 216).

Employee engagement is carried into, and reflected in, the meeting room, where conversations about corporate philosophy, its meanings and its implementation take place. We investigate how this is manifested discursively in the discussion between the employees and manager and the positions that arise as they interact.

2.3   *Positioning*

As developed in the work of among others Davies and Harré (1990) and further reworked by Bamberg (1997), the concept of "position" is a relational one that refers to "the social and emotional stances individuals take towards real or imagined others" as they are discursively constituted (Bamberg, 1997). To analyze positioning is to be concerned with the ways by which participants in interaction are aligned with others or against them, or engage in other, more ambiguous or nuanced relations with respect, for example, to sense-making of situations, attitudes, world views, values and more. A position is distinguished from a "role," according to Davies and Harré (1990), in that a role can be understood as a prior, or given, conception of behavior, separable from individuals, while a position is agentive and consists of discursively constitutive possibilities within situations. According to Harré and Moghaddam (2003), positioning is related to power and entails different rights and moral potentials for persons, institutions or nations to perform certain actions (see Lundholt, Maagaard, & Piekut, 2018).

Similarly, according to Bamberg, these types of alignments, non-alignments and their combinations not only reflect, but also constitute identities and relations of power (Bamberg, 1999) that are emergent and particular to the situation in which they occur. Accordingly, one's identity — and the power with which it is invested — is neither static nor constant but shifts according to whom one interacts with and is positioned by, as much as by how one positions oneself through the use of discourse.

Bamberg's analysis pays particular attention to positioning at it occurs through the use of narratives, often very brief ones, in interpersonal interactions. According to Bamberg, individuals' identities are in constant flux by virtue of the emerging and shifting narratives individuals tell to each other and themselves as means of sense-making (Bamberg, 1997). Accordingly, his three-level narrative positioning analysis is a method that develops out of both positioning theory and research into "small stories," those short, fleeting, often fragmentary stories and narrative snippets that occur in everyday interaction, and which often have been overlooked in studies of the role of narrative in identity (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008). As Georgakopoulou explains, the concept of small stories covers a "gamut of under-represented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events, shared (known) events, but also allusions to tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell" (2007, p. 2). In our analysis below, we include utterances that convey ongoing events as well as more canonical narratives of past events, with temporal sequences (a canonical characteristic of narrative) either explicit or inferable. Because investigations of small stories differ from more traditional narrative inquiry, which favors the types of reflective sense-making that occur

retrospectively and result in more full-blown narrative achievements (Bamberg & Georgakopoulou, 2008), they allow insight into identity and power relations as they arise more or less immediately and spontaneously.

Bamberg's positioning analysis investigates such small stories in interaction on three levels, with the investigation of narrative meanings moving from the story world to the situation of telling to the wider social and cultural contexts that impinge upon specific interactions.

Level 1. Positioning in the story-world (fabula). The analysis asks

How are characters within the story positioned in relation to each other? Who is positioned, for example, as having agency within the story? Who is linguistically positioned as hero, villain, agent or acted-upon? How are these roles reflective and constitutive of power?

Level 2. Positioning of the speaker/narrator within the interactive "here-and-now" of the telling, between the narrator and the audience. The analysis asks

What does the narrator achieve with the use of this particular narrative in this situation, and why is the narrative told in this particular way, in relation to the kind of discourse that is expected within this situation?

Level 3. The narrator's positioning of him- or herself. The analysis asks

What kind of self-understanding does the narrator create within the situation? How might the position be understood in relation to other social and cultural (and normative) narratives, for example master-narratives that dictate norms and behaviors within certain cultural contexts? In the present case, these can be narratives about leadership and management, different roles within organizations as well outside them, and so on. On this level, analysis can help demonstrate how people may position themselves as compliant or resisting other, dominant, narratives.

Importantly, there can be, and often is, coherence among the three levels: the relations and positions on Level 1 are reproduced or confirmed on Level 2, the interaction among participants in the here- and-now, and re-occur in ways on Level 3 (in relation to master-narratives). Moreover, as Clifton (2014) has argued, "positioning in narrative is a discursive resource that can allow the narrator(s) to construct particular versions of (organizational) reality and so enact leadership identity"; this identity is not achieved solely monologically, but "is open to negotiation, resistance as well as acquiescence and can be distributed across participants" (100). We see, therefore, that positioning of, say, a manager, is linked with the positioning work of employees, and that the activity can be understood as a dialogic and interactive one. Through this interaction, situated identities emerge.

3 Case description and data

The present study grows out of a larger investigation of the implementation of corporate philosophy in a Danish family owned global corporation, which embraces a large number of diverse industries which range from technology (Gotech) to sport and fashion (Gosport), shipping (Godeliver), food (Gonutrition and Gogastronomy) and more. Each industry itself comprises numerous companies. In technology, Gotech specializes in the development and manufacture of high-standard egg handling and processing equipment designed for all types of production facilities. Their product portfolio includes specialized vaccination equipment, poultry processing equipment, enzymes and robots. In food, Gonutrition produces cheese powder and egg product solutions. Gosport designs and manufactures sports apparel and footwear, merging sport and fashion into their products. Each of these organizations has subsidiaries globally.

The corporate philosophy "Business Kind2Mind" is inspired by Eastern philosophy, the principle that one's actions have consequences for others, and that doing good for others creates positive returns for oneself. The expression was coined by the CEO, who is the owner of the group and a business celebrity. The CEO elaborates on the term in a book co-authored with a professor of management, as well as in company reports, newspaper articles, and public interviews, prior to the implementation of a global change strategy process at the corporate level that was formally initiated in 2014. The aim of this strategy process was to introduce a platform that would make the organization distinct from other comparable organizations. The term "Business Kind2Mind" had in particular been related to the company Gosport for some time and was connected to a successful turnaround of the business, which was spearheaded by the CEO before he took on his present position as head of the corporation GLOBALCO.

3.1   Data

Our analysis focuses on a meeting in the initial stages of communicating the philosophy to local managers, and together with them, generating ideas for the strategy for implementation of the corporate philosophy "Business Kind2Mind." The meeting was taken from a larger data set that comprises six recorded strategy meetings of two to three hours each from October 2014 to September 2016. In each of six meetings at least one of the authors was present, and all meetings were video and audio recorded, which allowed us to capture the narratives as they unfolded in real time. In section 3.1.1 below, we provide an overview of the six meetings' contexts, aims and participants as well as an overview of the three pillars of "Business Kind2Mind" philosophy before moving on to an analysis of the initial meeting.

3.1.1   The Meeting

As indicated above, the primary purpose of the six meetings was to develop a strategy for the implementation of the corporate philosophy "Business Kind2Mind" with a view to creating a joint corporate vision and establishing a corporate image that would include the entire GLOBALCO organization but also adapt to the individual companies. All the meetings were chaired by the CEO himself. The other participants were managerial representatives from organizations comprising the group, each with their own distinctive background, as shown in table 1:

Table 1. Overview of meeting participants with abbreviations used in the analysis

Selected participants in the first GLOBALCO strategy meetings	
The CEO of GLOBALCO and his two assistants	CEO
HR manager of Gotech	HR
General manager of Gopack/Gonutrition	GM
Marketing manager from Gopack/Gonutrition	MA

Although the corporate philosophy as a "responsible business practice" consisting of "doing well by doing good" was purportedly shared by all the companies represented in the meetings, in the "Corporate GLOBALCO Report," the philosophy was mainly represented through stories associated with the company Gosport, about their involvement in a number of sponsorship agreements with football teams in war-torn areas of Africa and the Middle East and collaboration with an NGO on reconciliation in war-stricken areas. Activities created strong links between the corporate philosophy and the brand specifically associated with Gosport. As we will discuss below, the difference in the degree to which companies identify with the philosophy was visible in the meetings. Participants disputed the way in which the philosophy had been presented to employees and managers prior to the meetings, and it was clear from the meetings that the participants positioned themselves differently according to their different interpretations of the philosophy and different opinions on how it was to be made meaningful in practice for employees across such diverse subsidiaries.

3.1.2   The three pillars of the corporate philosophy

In an attempt to render the somewhat abstract "Business Kind2Mind" philosophy more concrete, it had been conceptualized as constituting three pillars: CSR, Branding and Corporate Culture (see table 2). The first meeting began with the presentation of these three pillars.

Table 2: The three pillars of "Business Kind2Mind"

Business Kind2Mind		
CSR and sustainable growth	Branding	Corporate culture

Dividing the philosophy into three pillars was primarily a means to explain why, as the CEO had repeatedly asserted, the philosophy was "more than CSR," since previously, the philosophy had mainly been elaborated in terms of philanthropic projects for branding purposes:

> "Well, as just said, we are working with three pillars of 'Business Kind2Mind.' As you all know, so far we have focused on the projects, and that's what we have spent time on communicating. Also, we have an internal part or a corporate culture part of 'Business Kind2Mind,' which we communicate through our various communication channels, and especially now, when we get our own NEW SITE up and running, it will become an even bigger element. What may be missing out, or where we have not focused as a GROUP, is on the CSR part of the sustainability component itself, and on doing it as part of our businesses." (Assistant to the CEO)

As the quote suggests, the integration of the philosophy into the culture and practice of the global group leads to unresolved questions that make themselves felt in the meeting and the discussion that ensues between the CEO and the participating managers and employees. In the analysis below, we focus on how positioning occurs through discourse related to these issues of integration and practice.

4   Analysis

The purpose of our analysis is to show not only how the participants interpret the philosophy and view its implementation, but also to understand how this process is influenced by the power and identity that emerge during meetings. The brief narratives told by participants become a means of performing identity and power discursively: interactants position themselves towards each other, revealing how they perform the role of, for example, "CEO" or "HR manager." We see these positions emerging through participants' views about whether the philosophy should be integrated as part of the global and overarching contexts or more locally within subsidiaries, more close-to-home, as well as how these views come to expression in the conversation that ensues. Following the analysis, we will turn in Section 5 to its implications for a dialogic approach to employee engagement.

For close analysis, we zoom in on a sequence of 20 minutes at the beginning of the meeting, immediately after the presentation of the tripartite division of the corporate philosophy. In these 20 minutes, the participants discuss how the corporate philosophy can be understood and implemented. In the analysis, we employ Bamberg's three positioning levels (Bamberg, 1997) within three narrative accounts in the meeting. As we show below, one aspect of interest is how the different identities of the organizations come into play through participants' different views on how the implementation process should occur and what should be focused on, emphasizing a division between local sustainability projects or more global philanthropic branding projects. Concurrent with these positions, different positions among participants themselves emerge, particularly among the HR manager from Gotech and the CEO

respectively, which in turn contribute to the manifestation of different relations of power that emerge through the meeting.

The first sequence below illustrates how positioning occurs in the exchange between the HR manager from Gotech and the CEO of the group. In it, the HR manager refers to the CSR pillar or "leg" of the philosophy and connects it to the local work of the company, as opposed to philanthropic projects alone, which are the focus of the CEO.

4.1   Analysis of narrative 1: The HR-manager of Gotech

Box 1 presents a transcription of narrative 1 with the HR-manager's comment about the graphic presentation of the strategy (seen in table 2).

Box 1. Narrative 1 (25.05 – 26.28)

[HR:] And I also think that this [CSR and Sustainability leg/pillar] - at least out there at our place - that this will be the one that makes it more present for the individual employee, because we do not have the same branding perspective as Gosport and the other ones have. I mean, we do not sell directly to the consumers in that way, so making it feel as if makes sense to the individual [employee], I think this last leg is crucial to us out there. Because that's where I think we can make sense. So, we can all relate to, what's it called, ehh focus on what is called - animal welfare and the environment and all that stuff, sustainability and such in what we do. As for the other things, it's a little more - what is it with this chicken farm down there in Malawi, how does that make sense to our business? So, I'm really pleased that we can focus on the last leg here. I believe that is the right thing to do.

[CEO:] Yes, but we still believe that the individual companies should have and be able to do both'?

[HR:] Yes, yes

[CEO]: So, we both have chicken farm in Malawi, which can deliver this front end ...

[HR:] Yes, yes

[CEO] ... project, even though you are a B2B [Business to Business] company. Plus, you also have your own individual KPIs [Key Performance Indicators] connected to the more traditional CSR based ...

[HR] Yes. Yes. But in relation to the CSR part, I think that it becomes more present than the charity perspective, which until now is what we know most about at our place, that is just a fact.

On the first level of analysis, the characters within the HR manager's narrative are positioned as locally based, with an interest in CSR and its possible role in her company, which is B2B. Within this narrative, the HR manager positions herself in a managerial role in Gotech in which she is aligned with employees there: she explains what she sees as meaningful to "her" organization, and to "us," concerned with the need to make the corporate philosophy relevant to the individual employee within a B2B company. Accordingly, she singles out one of the three parts of the philosophy, namely CSR and sustainable growth, emphasizing this as the aspect most relevant for and understandable by her company. In doing so, she places it in opposition to the "branding" part of the philosophy, voicing her concern about the rather distant branding focus that has been the main emphasis of the implementation plan so far: a philanthropic project establishing chicken farms for impoverished people in Malawi. In turn, this is tied to her emphasis on the geographic distance between the global and local: "the chicken farm down there" as opposed to "the last leg here" (authors' emphasis). By insisting on a local anchoring of the philosophy, the HR manager argues that the corporate philosophy should be broken down into activities that make sense at the level of individual companies (Gotech) and within their business model, such as animal welfare, the environment, and the like.

The positioning that takes place on the first level of analysis is also used as a means to position the HR manager on the second level, the here-and-now of the conversation. Her narrative becomes a means to differentiate herself and the company she is a part of from the CEO and Gosport: that is, as locally, as opposed to globally, based,

CSR-oriented as opposed to branding. Thus, as an individual, she portrays herself as a manager concerned for, and in contact with, the employees in her company, as well as a voice for them; in this way, she aligns herself with the local company and employees, and as distinctly unaligned with more global and B2C concerns of the CEO: "we do not sell directly to the consumers in that way." In her argument Gosport has much more branding potential than Gotech.

The CEO replies to the HR manager by emphasizing a need to be able to do both, i.e. to combine branding projects with more traditional CSR based on Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) and "even though you are a B2B company." Her reply is "Yes, yes. But the CSR part will be the most understandable part of the corporate vision," contrasting this with a charity perspective on branding projects, which does not make sense to her company at "our place." In her interaction with the CEO, she employs a number of face-saving strategies. She begins the narrative on a positive note, "I also think that this [CSR and Sustainability-leg] — at least out there at our place — that this will be the one that makes it more present for the individual employee," and several times she agrees with the CEO, saying "yes, yes" five times. In the last argument, however, "yes, yes", is followed by a "but", marking her disagreement with the CEO, repeating her original position from the beginning of the narrative. Through this she returns to her main argument and takes control over a specific interpretation of the process, namely that focus should be on CSR at a local level. She indicates that she is in a position from which she can say what she thinks is right: "I believe that is the right thing to do," grasping the part of the program that makes most sense to her and to her employees.

Through this second-level interaction, she positions herself as a leader who is concerned for the individual employee, and as such, she is a manager whose approach rests in the belief that a corporate philosophy should be grounded bottom up. This, in turn, is a way of positioning herself on the third level, her relation to the wider social world and its narratives about behavior, profession and job position. On the third level, that of the relation between the narrator and the wider social world, her very participation in this meeting is determined by outside forces, that is, the CEO — who has the power to invite or not, to listen or not. But within these given constraints, she attempts to shape the circumstances for the way the company implements philosophy and makes it meaningful.

4.2   Analysis of narrative 2: The CEO of GLOBALCO

As a continuation of narrative 1 (above), narrative 2 is a brief narrative told by the CEO, in which the CEO tries to take control of the process. "Gotech" refers to the HR manager's company.

Box 2. Narrative 2 (26.48-27.50)

[CEO:] Yes, Gotech, yes, Gotech when it started, but then you can say that we adopted it, and now you run it [...]. What we have talked about - also in direction of Gonutrition specifically – is whether you should have your own project. Where for example, the employees are involved in the process around it and what kind of project we should go into. It could also create increased ownership? So, it doesn't become a project that gets stuck in the throat. But to say, if you now have the tripartite division, front-end project, culture- project, controlled centrally, and then the more traditional CSR. If we take the first one, then going forward, more involving? - Making a pool of potential projects and voting for them at 'Wednesday meetings' - the winner is BANG [CEO raises his arm to signal a winner] - So, that's also an option you could say, to get increased ownership.

In this excerpt, the CEO positions himself as the agent who controls the process and who, as the leader of the GLOBALCO group, has the authority to grant agency to Gotech and Gonutrition, while framing it as their own need to create a project for their own companies. On the first level, although the CEO ostensibly recognizes the effort of the HR manager and the company she represents, the CEO (and his company) are portrayed as enabling the very conditions necessary to do this, and to implement the philosophy through projects. Creating a competition for employees creates a paradox that motivation from the bottom up actually comes from above. He includes himself as an agent of change by means of the ambiguous reference of "we" in "we adopted it." He positions the participants at the meeting as local managers of their employees, with the local managers at first recognized for running the program, but then positioned as passive actors with little agency over the project, so that it risks ending up as "stuck in the throat."

On the second level, that of the interactional here-and-now, the CEO's discourse functions to remind participants that he determines the rules of the game, including the rules for how ownership is to be achieved. Finally, on the third level of this brief narrative, the CEO shapes the circumstances (world) within which manager and employees act and move to fulfill company philosophy. The CEO gives voice to a managerial style that equates

competition (among employee projects) with a way of creating ownership and motivation, emphasized by the enthusiastic exclamation "BANG" and raised arms. The competition thus becomes a way of forcing ownership and motivation upon employees in a top-down process, while at the same time framing it as the employees' own.

4.3 Analysis of narrative 3: The CEO of GLOBALCO

In narrative 3, below, the CEO again underlines his position as the global leader, asserting that individual companies in the group should, and can be, mutually supportive of each other, rather than in opposition. That is, that while each company makes sense of the philosophy in its own way, everyone stands to gain if the uniqueness of the GLOBALCO brand is promoted. In effect, this appeal to mutual supportiveness becomes a means to further his original agenda, in defense of the argument that CSR and branding should be seen in combination. The opening response, "No," is in reply to another manager's question about whether projects across companies should resemble each other.

Box 3: Narrative 3 (34.09)

[CEO:] No. Certainly not. Well, I think both yes and no. Because there is also a challenge in ... [addressed to marketing manager], in your department in relation to branding, you cannot have 1000 projects. It will be very difficult to communicate. And oh, I do think it's very important that we focus on CSR. But, having said that, we should not forget the uniqueness you have in GLOBALCO as well as in the respective companies that are the group, as I said, this quite unique approach to CSR - we call it "BusinessKind2Mind" - where we combine the more branding-based, the more emotional with something that also makes a difference. And we may be the best in the world — we can allow ourselves to show off here around the table — and it's Gosport that has spearheaded the process, Afghanistan projects and the rest. You all know the projects so I don't have to show off in front of you —just to say that we should not forget that either. Because Gotech — you mentioned [name] that B2B, that it is hardcore. It is. But CSR is important. I will come back to that again. But point 1, branding, is also important in Gotech. I mean, I have been there myself, I do not know at how many fairs with Gotech, where we have rows of people in front of us because they think it's exciting, it's sexy, it's different that we do something in Afghanistan. Although it is not even Gotech, we are piggy-backing a little on Gosport. [….]

We received the greatest prize in the whole industry ever. I have never received that prize before. The Golden Award, which runs across companies. And it's only because we made these different, differentiating, and sexier projects. [….]. We have never ever won that prize before in the company's 50-year history. And we only won that because of this. So, this is just to say we should not forget "branding." Therefore, I think we should take care not to have too many projects, so it will be difficult to communicate. […]

But if I have to come up with a proposal, I would say: I think every company must have its own project that is branding oriented, which is emotional, which is sexy, which is different, which is unique. I think, in turn, as we come to realize later, that this needs more involvement from the employees, from the management. That is, what you need, something new in Gotech/Gonutrition.

In excerpt 3, the CEO's "No. Certainly not. So, I think both yes and no" is a response to a question from the marketing manager about the degree to which each company must march to the same drummer, i.e. whether implementation needs to be "streamlined". While acknowledging that branding projects can be a challenge, he points to the communicative difficulties of having "1000" branding projects – by which he maintains a need for more central, streamlined, control.   On the first level of analysis, companies associated with the CEO are constructed as agents: Gosport "spearheaded" the projects, "Afghanistan projects and the rest," that have led to branding successes and reputation. GLOBALCO provides the overarching appeal on which companies and individual approaches can "piggyback." Philanthropic projects in war-torn countries that differentiate the company through appeals to emotion are described as "sexy" and play a role within the discourse of competition that yet again is revealed as a managerial approach and a measure of success. The CSR and employee projects in subsidiaries become means to further the overall agenda: it "needs more involvement from the employees, from the management. That is what you need, something new in Gotech/Gonutrition."

The CEO acknowledges the HR manager's argument about the relevance of focusing on CSR in a B2B relationship (attending to her face). He thus acknowledges that CSR is important, but then with a "but": a lengthier narrative about his experience at a trade fair at which he won an important branding award for the company's unique

approach to CSR as branding. The story is a means to demonstrate how Gotech could win a prize, because they are a part of the GLOBALCO group. In this argument, the CEO directs participants' attention to the mutual benefit for companies of being in the same group, in that they can "piggyback" on each other. Nevertheless, he maintains that CSR must be connected to branding to have impact. In this narrative, the CEO deviates from a local focus on individual companies and separate parts of the strategy to a global focus on the group and a united approach to all parts of the philosophy. But this functions, again, to further his own commitment to the branding aspect.

On the second level, the CEO establishes the rules of the communicative game that is played out in the here-and-now of the meeting: not only does he take the floor for a somewhat lengthy turn, but he indicates that "we can show off to each other around the table" or, that the CEO "doesn't need to show off." This is a creation of a feeling of camaraderie and in-group belonging in this informal setting, which at the same time, however, sets constraints. The CEO sets the terms of how to speak, for example, in his repetition of the adjective "sexy" to evaluate the emotional projects that differentiate the company as unique, and sexiness can rub off on subsidiaries.

The first and second levels ultimately also manifest the third: the conditions for both action and communication are set by the CEO who positions himself as leader and authority. He enacts in this way his own ideology of competition, and through his positioning, the other individual companies and managers become means to further the view that the CEO has had all along. It is telling that narrative 3 is followed by a long monologic narrative of about seven minutes, in which the CEO relates several successes generated by his branding strategies, which again reflects a competition-based ideology that infuses his approach to management.

5   Discussion: employee engagement

Bamberg's three-step approach to positioning analysis enables us to zoom in on excerpts of the meeting and trace how small stories are used by participants to position themselves in relation to others. Accordingly, we see how the HR manager and CEO align themselves with the companies they represent as well as how small stories and different strategies of argumentation reveal different conceptualizations of how the "Business Kind2Mind" philosophy is to be implemented. As we see in the excerpts, positioning becomes a means to establish relations of power through the ways that agency (or the lack of it) and identity are discursively realized by participants in the small stories that are told, the ways these are mobilized in the here-and-now of interaction, and what they reveal about managers or employees within the organizational setting, as well as in relation to the larger social world in which the organization exists. Agency and identity emerge on all three levels of the positioning analysis, and the method enables us to see how these different discursive levels intertwine and reinforce each other.

On the first level, of story, for example, the HR manager uses the spatial reference "down there" to characterize GLOBALCO projects as far removed, not only literally but figuratively, from her company. On the second level, the here-and-now-of interaction, this positions her as different from the CEO, who represents the global group. On the third level, the story's relation to culturally informed narratives, the HR manager is constituted as the type of manager who attends to employees' interests and to what is meaningful to them close to home. The CEO, on the other hand, emerges as a manager whose concerns are much larger in scope and with an emphasis on external stakeholders. On the first level, of story, in narratives 2 and 3, focus is on what the CEO enables, both in the projects he tells about, their appeal for external stakeholders and their potential value for individual companies. This power is reflected in the here-and-now situation of the meeting, particularly in narrative 3, where he is the agent who determines the terms for the discussion through such means as a lengthy turn and the rules for who gets to "brag," which create an ostensible ingroup. Finally, on the third level the CEO's narratives position him in relation to cultural ideas of strong leadership and an ideology of competition, which paradoxically is used to argue for a bottom-up approach to employees' "ownership" of policy.

It becomes apparent that discursive positionings of participants also affect the outcome of the meeting. Both the HR manager and the CEO convey their past experiences with the "Business Kind2Mind" philosophy and verbally acknowledge each other's points of view. The CEO gives the appearance of letting others have a voice, as he seeks the views of the managerial representatives of the companies and responds to their suggestions. Yet his positioning as agent of change and as "winner" set the terms for his version of strategy to emerge "victorious," although without indications that the other participants are in agreement. Although the CEO appears to open up for dialogue by inviting the employees to the meeting and soliciting their views, as the meeting unfolds, the conditions for mutuality are not established. In setting the terms of the communicative game, the CEO is able both to appear to acknowledge the other participants' views and concerns, while furthering his own main argument.

The CEO's and HR manager's mutual acknowledgements of "yes" are followed by "but"'s in which each position remains largely intact, rather than changed. There is, on the one hand, the branding strategy advocated by the

CEO, in which implementation is connected with the employee project that spans subsidiaries, and on the other, the view of the HR manager that implementation should occur through initiatives that are meaningful on a local level, as well as that implementing CSR as a part of company culture should be prior to branding. Despite the CEO's overtures, there is no mutuality, in that parties do not do something together that they could not on their own (cf. Kaplan, 1969, p. 97). In fact, nothing new comes out of the meeting. The CEO's view prevails, and the implementation strategy is neither revised nor moved a step forward through the managers' inputs, although that had been the purpose of the meeting. Using positioning analysis and a framework of dialogism provides insight into the mechanisms of power that are at work and how these may affect employee engagement. Where a monologic view sees power as uni-directional, a dialogic framework enables us to attend to the interactional tensions involved in power and powerlessness. Positioning oneself as CEO, for example, involves being positioned as such by those with whom one interacts (Linell, 2009). Similarly, a dialogical approach enables us to conceive of communication not as only upwardly or downwardly directed between manager and employee, but as interactional, with mutual change.

6   Conclusion

Using Bamberg's three-level positioning analysis, we have investigated how terms for engagement are shaped by the discursive dynamics of power and identity in an organizational meeting in which philosophy and strategy are negotiated. We have shown both how these dynamics occur and what consequences they have for the dialogic, interpersonal relations that arise, as well as for the interpretations of corporate philosophy that emerge.

   Bamberg's approach resulted in insight into how members' positions within the specific situation shape the identity and power relations that set the frame for what is "allowed," both with respect to how participants voice their views and the kinds of views that ultimately emerge through the meeting. Moreover, situating employee engagement within the theoretical framework of dialogue theory enabled us to consider engagement in terms of mutuality and reciprocity (Phillips, 2011). This, as we have discussed, ultimately has consequences for the degree to which employees engage in mutual dialogue.

   Additionally, the dialogic framework discussed above has implications for how approaches to employee engagement may be modified. Theorizing engagement dialogically enables a shift from instrumental and transmission-based perspectives that tend to emphasize ways to increase employee efficiency to a more interpretive approach that seeks to attend to the ways that small stories and other narrative utterances constitute identity and agency in concrete and specific situations, as we have seen in the analysis of the meeting. This agency and identity, as they emerge for all the participants, contribute to the terms that ultimately enable — or hinder — dialogue and mutuality. Communication, therefore, is not alone a matter of feeding views upward or downward, but of interaction in multiple directions. Accordingly, practicing engagement dialogically entails an attention to the factors mentioned here, including a resistance to purely instrumental thinking about efficiency and outcome.

   Our theoretical framework and our analysis suggest that attunement to positioning can enhance managers' awareness of the dynamics of identity and power in meetings and how this may affect employees' engagement. At the same time, our case demonstrates how difficult the practice of mutuality can be when participants with different backgrounds and differing views meet, and where the process is influenced by power executed in and through interaction. In our case, the conversations illustrate a high degree of persuasion by the CEO and only limited mutuality. Consequently, true mutuality, in which participants' views are heard and incorporated in the development of philosophy, requires a shift in concern from productivity and efficiency to meaning, which in itself provides a basis for engagement. True dialogue is, according to Buber (1965, p. 1), when participants "have in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turn to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between themselves and the others."

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