Climbing out of organisational depression: Culture change project after a toxic leadership episode

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Abstract

The thesis aims to offer a culturally sensitive analysis of a culture change intervention undertaken in a Polish subsidiary of a North American Pharmaceutical corporation. This is achieved by first of all examining the context in which the initiative was undertaken and subsequently the many facets of its development and implementation. More specifically, the thesis investigates the underlying assumptions of the cultural intervention, its design and implementation, as well as the experiences and perceptions of different organisation members regarding it.

The findings come from a longitudinal qualitative study. The data collection methods comprise eighty five semi-structured interviews, photo and word collages, observation and documentary analysis. Based on a constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, the study pays special attention to the storied version of organisational reality as narrated by different participants.

The study extends the previous work on the topic by offering insights into a relatively under-explored context of a traumatised Eastern European organisation which attempted to climb out of organisational depression by reinvigorating and promoting its long standing values. The study illustrates how the local situateness of the organisation, such as the communist history of the country, and the changes in the Polish political arena, affected the way participants perceived attempts at cultural manipulation. Furthermore, the thesis discusses how cultural interventions can perpetuate organisational delusion without necessarily leading to the desired behavioural changes. Finally, the findings highlight the instrumentality with which the espoused organisational values are approached and responded to by different organisational actors. To this end, the thesis puts forward the notion of the political reengineering of values to discuss how organisation members, both the agents and targets of change, can creatively engage in the official discourse to promote their individual or group interests.

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1 Introduction

Organisational culture has often been referred to as a very ambiguous, ephemeral and elusive concept (e.g. Harris and Ogbonna, 2002; Sackmann, 1991). Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely due to its ambiguity (compare Giroux, 2006; Jarzabkowski *et al.*, 2009), it is also considered to be 'one of the most dominant contemporary analytic organisational frameworks' (Mathew and Ogbonna, 2009:656). Academics have investigated organisational culture from a variety of perspectives, in a variety of contexts and in relation to an impressive array of topics. Similarly, practitioners have been evoking the organisational culture concept as a panacea for success, a remedy for different organisational maladies or a cause of management failures.

In academia, scholars have studied cultures and subcultures of different organisations (e.g. Gregory, 1983; Jermier *et al.*, 1991; Ogbonna and Harris, 2006; Sackmann, 1992), and looked at the development (e.g. Daymon, 2000; Gagliardi, 1986) and evolution of cultures (Rodrigues, 2006). Organisational culture has, among others, been referred to in discussions of organisational effectiveness (Denison and Mishra, 1995) and performance (Marcoulides and Heck, 1993; Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983), competitive advantage (Barney, 1986; Fiol, 2002), commitment (Mathew and Ogbonna, 2009), employee retention (Sheridan, 1992), control (Ouchi, 1980), innovation (Price, 2007), organisational image (Hatch and Schultz, 2000; 2002), identity (Parker, 2000) and individual sensemaking (Harris, 1994).

As the above quoted examples illustrate, the concept of organisational culture has pervaded the mainstream management research, but it has also been very popular among the more critically orientated scholars. While arrays of scholars have been seeking to investigate practical management issues by referring to culture as an explanatory and dependent variable, others have been focusing their efforts on 'reading organisational culture[s]' (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992). In fact the differences between the perspectives from which organisational culture has been approached and the intensity of the resulting disputes among academics have led some scholars to refer to organisational culture research as a terrain fraught with war games (Martin and Frost, 1996; Martin *et al.*, 2006) and paradigmatic trenches (Amis and Silk, 2008). While this thesis does not intend to contribute to this cultural warfare, it seems fair to state that it is

written with sympathies lying with the more critically orientated scholars. It is, however, predominantly the variable approach to culture (Smirchic, 1983), which sees the skilful handling of culture as part of managerial activity (compare CIPD, 2004) and the responsibility of organisational leaders (Schein, 1985), that has attracted the biggest interest outside academia – among consultants, popular management authors and practitioners.

In fact, the concept of organisational culture has been very popular with the advice industry (Collins, 2006) where it has been successfully commodified (compare Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005) judging by the plethora of consulting websites which lure with tools for conducting 'culture audits', instruments that help, it is claimed, to 'measure' and 'assess' a given organisational culture. Similarly, countless articles in popular management publications extol the virtues of 'designing the appropriate culture', and warn against the risks of ignoring the 'cultural forces' in organisations. In Poland, where the data for this thesis were collected, organisational culture is among the most popular tags in the local edition of the Harvard Business Review, securing a safe place right next to issues of strategy, competitive advantage, career management and relationships with clients. Even in the business supplement to one of the most influential Polish daily newspapers ('Wyborcza'), one can find numerous references to organisational culture made not only by the authors of the published articles, but also by the readers who talk of 'increasing', 'growing', 'implementing', 'shaping', and 'creating' a 'high' and 'favourable' organisational culture.

Given the popularity of the organisational culture concept in academia and popular management discourse, it is not surprising that it can also often be found as a first order concept used by organisation members. Company websites, especially of large multinationals, frequently make explicit references to their official values, and not infrequently take pride in their, as it is claimed, unique and appealing culture (compare Martin *et al.*, 1983). Most importantly, however, organisational culture is not only an academic or popular management concept, but an important aspect of organisational members' reality, regardless of which theoretical perspective or definition of culture one adopts (see Smircich's, 1983, for typology).

As a recent study has shown (Wolff, 2010), culture change initiatives are among the most often undertaken change projects. In times of liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), where novelty is perceived as a highly desired quality, managers often appear to be 'captivated by progress' and, as some commentators point out, 'ensnared in a love of the new' (Rhodes and Pullen, 2010:3). As a consequence, 'stability and continuity [are seldom conceived of as] either possible or desirable' (Sturdy and Grey, 2003:652). Change and organisational revitalisation programmes (compare Callan, 2008), on the other hand, seem to be an integral element of organisational landscape and as such, an important element of organisation participants' lived experiences. In light of the above, the study of attempts at culture change seems a particularly worthy pursuit.

Paradoxically, despite the 'unsatiated practitioners' appetite for culture management initiatives (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002,b) and a comparable academic interest in organisational culture issues, there are still some surprisingly underexplored areas in the organisational culture research field. More specifically, three observations can be made in this regard.

Most of the insights into organisational culture change initiatives come from retrospective studies (e.g. Harris and Ogbonna, 2002; Harris and Metallinos, 2002; Murphy and Mackenzy Davey, 2002; Ogbonna and Harris, 2002b; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). While in principle retrospection is a valuable approach to data collection (Wolfram Cox and Hassard, 2007), it typically gives a fairly static view of the researched phenomenon rather than highlighting its dynamics. Ethnographic or longitudinal studies are frequently adopted when studying organisational culture (e.g. Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Flores-Pereira *et al.*, 2008; Kunda, 1982; Mathew and Ogbonna, 2009; Young, 1989) and its natural evolution (Daymon, 2000), however less so when looking at planned cultural interventions (for some notable exceptions see e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Scheers and Rhodes, 2006; Tornbull, 2001). This seems particularly unsettling in light of conceptualisations of culture as a dynamic process (Hatch, 1993), although partly understandable when one considers the issues of access.

Due to the snapshot nature of the majority of studies of cultural interventions, their insights tend to focus on aspects of cultural programmes, such as their unintended

consequences (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002), their enactment (Marphy and Mackenzie Davey, 2002), impact on selected groups of employees (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003) or staff responses (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990; Ogbonna and Harris, 1998). In-depth studies that aim to 'uncover the trajectory of a cultural change project' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008:55), that is studies which explore their beginnings, implementation, and outcomes, while embracing multiple interpretations of the initiative, are few and far between.

The context in which the cultural interventions are undertaken is also often underexplored, although 'contextually sensitive conceptualisations' of culture (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002a:48) could offer richer insights into the complexities of cultural processes. On this instance, however, it is important to clarity what is meant by context. When I argue the importance of context, I refer not only to the industry in which the studied organisation operates, as suggested by the above quoted authors, but also the organisational past. As Wilkins and Dyer (1988) observe, different cultures change differently. Therefore it seems particularly important to have a broader cultural understanding of the studied organisation in order to develop the necessary 'sensibility' when exploring 'beneath the surface' of the studied phenomena (Pader, 2006).

1.1 Research objectives and research design

In light of the above, the current study is a modest attempt to contribute to the existing body of work by offering a culturally sensitive analysis of a planned culture change initiative undertaken after a toxic leadership episode. To this end, the thesis aims to:

1. review the existing literature on organisational culture, in particular in relation to planned culture change interventions
2. investigate a culture change intervention from a social constructivist perspective encompassing:
- the organisational context in which the cultural intervention was undertaken
- the underpinning assumptions and the design of the culture change project
- how organisation members' perceived, experienced, narrated and finally worked with the culture change project

- the outcomes of the project

3. highlight the implications of the findings for organisation scholars and practitioners

The thesis attempts to meet the above discussed research objectives by drawing on findings gained from an exploratory research project carried out in a Polish subsidiary of an American multinational pharmaceutical company which had undergone a period of toxic leadership. The chosen case is a traumatised organisation (compare Hormann and Vivian, 2005) which has embarked on a project of planned culture change by the promotion of its long standing organisational values. The research in question was spread over three phases of data collection which were to provide insights into the process of working with and experiencing culture change as well as the times preceding the cultural intervention. The data were gathered through the traditional ethnographic triad: interviews, documentary analysis and observation (compare Ball and Smith, 1992; Smircich, 1985). However, these were also supplemented by the incorporation of visual research methods (compare Harper, 2002) which were focused on the generation of richer narratives and used as a means of exploring different aspects of the participant's experiences (Barry, 1996).

1.2 Planned contribution

The thesis aims to contribute to the existing body of work in four ways. First of all, the study hopes to make a theoretical contribution to the existing body of work by investigating the 'trajectory of a cultural change project' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008:55) whereby different facets of the intervention are explored. More specifically, the study looks at the design of the cultural intervention, its underlying assumptions and objectives, as well as its implementation. The study builds on the previous work on the multiple ways different organisational members make sense of and experience the change initiative, as well its outcomes, as reported by those concerned. The analysis is sensitive to the context in which the change project was undertaken, of which organisational past is seen as a crucial element (see Wolfram Cox and Hassard, 2007). Finally, the consequences of the intervention are explored.

Secondly, the study is based in what seems to be an underexplored, yet interesting, context thus making an empirical contribution to the existing body of work on cultural interventions. Although organisational culture has already been explored from a number of perspectives and in relation to an impressive array of other phenomena (see the beginning of this chapter), studies into organisational culture change initiatives, are still predominately based within the Anglo-Saxon context (with some notable exceptions, e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008, Harris and Matallinos, 2002). This study therefore aims to shed light into an Eastern European case which is a context that appears to be underrepresented in international organisational studies journals.

Another important characteristic of the study is the nature of the undertaken culture change programme. Typically, studies of cultural manipulation focus on managerial attempts to introduce a cultural shift by promoting a set of new organisational values (e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Harris and Metallinos, 2002; McCabe, 2010; Scheers and Rhodes, 2006). The current study, however, sets out to investigate an initiative designed around the promotion of long-standing organisational values (compare Callan, 2008, on cultural revitalisation).

It can further be argued that the empirical value of the study also lies in its longitudinal focus. While this is common practise in anthropology, in organisation studies data are typically collected during shorter periods of time resulting in snapshot views of the researched phenomenon. Although numerous authors have called for more longitudinal studies in management research, and in organisational culture (change) studies in particular (e.g. Harris and Ogbonna, 2000; McKinley and Starkey, 1988, Ogbonna and Harris, 1998), published accounts of longitudinal research projects on organisational culture change interventions are still relatively rare, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

Lastly, the study can be regarded as an empirical illustration of the theoretical model of organisational identity dynamics put forward by Hatch and Schultz (2000; 2002). The quoted authors suggested that organisational identity is tightly linked by a series of processes to organisational culture and the image of the organisation, as interpreted by its members. Their model, however, required empirical investigation. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) have already demonstrated how messages coming from the organisational environment can cause organisational members to reconsider their

identity claims, which in turn become integrated into the projected desired image of the organisation and subsequently embedded into organisational cultural practices. In their research, the quoted authors provided an empirical verification of the theoretical model by Hatch and Schultz (2000; 2002). In their research, however, the changes to organisational identity and culture were triggered by external factors. The current study concerns a reverse situation where the point of departure is the dissipation of organisational culture.

Alongside the above discussed theoretical and empirical contributions, the thesis also attempts to be of methodological value by incorporating, modifying and promoting visual research methods of data collection. Although the potential of visual methods has long been recognised (e.g. Ball and Smith, 1992; Bell, 2008; Harper, 2002), they still scarcely feature in organisation studies journals. The thesis presents a modest attempt to contribute to the popularisation of visual research methods. By demonstrating how some of the methods widely used in other disciplines can be modified, it is hoped that more organisational researchers become encouraged to experiment with data collection methods while doing their fieldwork, as already recommended by Deacon (2000).

Finally, the thesis hopes to offer some insights which might be of use also for practitioners. Although the thesis does not have a strong practical focus, some implications for practise are expected to arise from the here presented finings. In particular the study might prove to be of interest for practitioners due to the detailed account of the change initiative it offers. It is hoped that a close reading of the studied case will facilitate understanding of some of the complexities behind attempts at cultural manipulation and highlight some of their potential consequences.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of nine chapters. Following the introduction, **Chapter Two** reviews the literature on organisational culture and organisational culture change. The chapter starts by discussing different approaches and definitions of organisational culture. The concept of organisational culture is then juxtaposed with the notion of organisational identity, which is a closely related, yet here regarded as a separate and highly

illuminating concept when studying cultures. Having considered the multiple understandings and approaches to organisational culture, the chapter turns to discussing different perspectives on organisational culture change. The chapter ends with a consideration of leadership, and its often argued link to organisational culture change. The review of literature locates the here presented study within the wider body of studies on organisational culture change.

Chapter Three, is devoted to the methodology of the study. The design of the research project is outlined, together with its underpinning ontological and epistemological assumptions. A large section of the chapter focuses on the presentation of the methods of data collection and the hallmarks of the study (Yanow, 2006). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the methods of data analysis employed in this study.

Chapter Four, presents some background information to the studied organisation and the market it operates in. The chapter also provides some insights into the wider socio-political context in which the organisation is embedded. It is worth highlighting that the wider organisational context is not only something that myself, as an author with sociological background and some anthropological interests, feels compelled to consider. Most importantly, the wider socio-political embeddedness of the origination featured as an important aspect of participants' accounts of their organisational reality. Having discussed the wider organisational background, the thesis turns to presenting the findings of the study over the course of four chapters.

Chapter Five, referred to as the context chapter, is built around organisational members' accounts of their organisation's past, present and future. Its first section focuses on narratives of the past which shed some light into the way different organisation members narrate and relate to their organisation's history. This section contextualises the subsequent change efforts by taking a closer look at the turbulent times immediately preceding the change initiative - a period in the organisation's history which became a highly symbolically charged theme in participant's narratives accompanying the change project. Having discussed the narratives of the past, the focus shifts to what can be referred to as organisational present - the time of the launch of the project. Here the focus is placed on the relationships among the staff as well as the

perceptions and experiences of the changing reality. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of organisational member's hopes, visions and fantasies of the desired future.

Chapter Six, in contrast, is devoted to the culture change initiative. The findings are structured so as to depict different elements of the project. First, the design and rationale behind the initiative are considered alongside a discussion of initial employees' attitudes towards and perceptions of the project. The next section of the chapter follows the implementation of the initiative. Subsequently, the chapter concludes with an attempt to evaluate the initiative by exploring the perspectives of different organisation members.

Chapter Seven revisits the participants' experiences of the project and the wider organisational changes after the project had officially ended. Here the experiences of the culture change initiative become enmeshed with other aspects of the changing organisational reality. The recounted narratives offer contrasting accounts of the changes, as seen by different organisation members.

Chapter Eight presents a discussion of the findings of the study which are juxtaposed with pervious literature on the topic. The chapter proposes two competing interpretations of the change initiative which bring different aspects of the project to the foreground. Finally, **Chapter Nine** draws conclusions from the study and highlights avenues for future research.

2 Organisational culture in academic literature

As already indicated in the introduction to the thesis, organisational culture has been one of the central notions in organisation studies for over three decades now. As a result, an impressive array of definitions, interpretations and approaches to organisational culture can be found. In this light it is hardly surprising that the body of work on organisational culture is overwhelmingly diverse and vast.

This chapter therefore does not aspire to present a comprehensive review of the wealth of writings on culture, since this task would require a much more voluminous outlet. Neither is the purpose here to thoroughly map the organisational cultural terrain (as this has already been skilfully done, e.g. by Martin, 2002 or Parker, 2000). Instead the chapter is rather designed to help the reader locate the present work on the culture studies map. To achieve this, a general orientation will be presented by sketching the main characteristics of the academic culture discourse. The differentiating junctions will be marked out, pointing to the path I have chosen. Alternative perspectives will therefore not be discussed in great depth, but referred to with the aim of placing this text within the wider context of organisational culture studies.

The chapter starts with a brief summary of the different approaches to organisational culture, as these are tightly intertwined with the ways culture is defined. To do this, one of the most influential differentiations of culture studies will be discussed, namely the typology by Linda Smircich (1983). Subsequently, some of the most often quoted and indicative definitions of culture written within the adopted perspective will be juxtaposed, pointing at their similarities and differences and related implications for culture research. This is designed to present the definition of organisational culture that is adopted in this thesis and show how it differs from its alternative conceptualisations. Having located the current research within the different perspectives on organisational culture and presented the adopted definition of the core concept, the chapter moves on to discussing organisational culture in relation to organisational identity. These two concepts are considered to be tightly intertwined (Albert and Whetten, 1985), yet separate from each other (Hatch and Schultz, 2000; 2002; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). Sensitivity to both of them can prove particularly useful in times of planned cultural

interventions, which trigger increased identity sensemaking while attempting to affect changes in organisational culture (compare, Balogun and Johnson, 2004).

After distinguishing and simultaneously linking organisational culture to organisational identity, I turn to the question of the different ways of reading culture. To do this, I employ Martin's (1992; 2002) typology of culture perspectives, after which I turn to the second major part of the review which looks more explicitly at the issue of culture change. The review starts with considerations of the question of culture manageability which is then followed by a critical review of the existing body of work on cultural interventions. Particular emphasis will be placed here on more critical body of work on cultural interventions to which this thesis aims to make a contribution. Finally, the literature review ends with some considerations of the role of leadership in relation to organisational culture and culture change interventions which is often seen in the mainstream literature as a tool for and integral element of change.

2.1 Different approaches to organisational culture

In the special issue of Administrative Science Quarterly devoted to organisational culture Smircich (1983) has divided the existing research on organisational culture into studies that treat culture as a variable (both independent and dependent) and the ones that employ the culture concept as a root metaphor to study organisations. The variable approaches are typically founded in the objectivist paradigms, such as functionalism (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979), whereas culture as a root metaphor is embraced by researchers with interpretivist assumptions about social reality. A similar differentiation has been put forward by Konecki (1985), who distinguished between determinism and indeterminism when talking about organisations, the first corresponding to the variable approach identified by Smircich, the latter to perspectives treating culture as a root metaphor.

2.1.1. Organisational culture as a variable

Organisational culture is often depicted as an independent variable in studies with comparative purposes. Culture is conceptualised in this strand of research as an inherent element of a country and finds its way into organisations thanks to their members who import the characteristics of their culture country into the organisational domain. Culture as such is typically not the major focus of attention, but rather regarded as a wider background and a variable affecting management practices. One of the best known and arguably most highly contested studies is the work of Geert Hofstede (e.g. 1980; 1991, for critique see MacSweeney, 2002).

Most typically, however culture is approached in organisation studies as a dependent variable and typically referred to as 'corporate' rather than 'organisational' culture. This distinction is well captured by Linstead and Grafton-Small (1992) who describe 'organisational' culture as a more organic phenomenon that emerges naturally from interactions, as opposed to a managerially imposed and transmitted 'corporate' culture. Similar distinctions are made by Anthony (1994) and Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008)[1].

In the 'dependent variable' perspective, culture is conceptualized as a subsystem of an organisation, one among other elements that make up an organisation. In this approach, as observed by Smircich (1983), corporate culture is a side effect of the "real corporate activity", such as producing goods and services and generating profit. This genre of studies, inspired by systems theory (such as the one devised by Talcott Parsons), looks at culture in terms of its potential to facilitate organisational adaptation to the external environment. Culture is thought to serve as a stabilising factor contributing to an organisation's improved effectiveness. In this view, culture can best perform its stabilising function if it is homegenous and works as a 'social glue' that unites the organisation (Alvesson, 2002; Smircich, 1983).

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[1] In this thesis, however, the concept of 'corporate culture' will be used to talk about the culture associated with the parent company of the studied organisation. Organisational culture, on the other hand, will be applied to talk about the managerially sponsored culture of the Polish subsidiary. This distinction, which runs counter to the above referenced work, was made due to the internal issues of clarity.

Much of the early work on culture in organisational setting was, in fact, written with the purpose of addressing the culture-efficiency question (e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kotter and Heskett; 1992; Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983), an issue which still remains highly disputable (Martin, 2002; Alvesson, 2002, for more comprehensive critical publications see, e.g. Child, 1988; Soeters, 1986). Probably the best known and most influential publication in this stream is the book by Peters and Waterman (1982): 'In Search of Excellence. Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies', acclaimed by Van de Ven (1983:624), in his review of the book, as a 'significant contribution to advancing administrative science'. The main assumption underlying their book was the conviction that strong, understood as homogenous, cultures were fundamental to gaining and maintaining competitive advantage. After its initial remarkable success, this approach has been fiercely criticised, mainly in academia, for its numerous shortcomings (see e.g. Martin, 2002; Reynolds, 1986; Soeters, 1986) and presented as 'wishful generalization from very doubtful research' (Parker, 2000:17). Nonetheless, the impact it has had on the way managers conceive of and approach organisations and their cultures should not be underestimated (Parker, 2000; Willmott, 1993), as the case described in this thesis illustrates.

Even now, almost three decades after Peters and Waterman's publication, many still remain, and most probably will remain, enchanted by the alluring promise of cultural engineering (Martin, 2002). Because of the role this publication played in shaping the culture discourse for many years and the apparent sympathy with this approach manifested in the researched organisation, the main premises of corporate culturism (Willmott, 1993) or culturalism (Parker, 2000), as it is also referred to, will be summarised below. The purpose here is not to present an exhaustive description of the culture engineering stream, but rather to highlight focal points of it that will be later referred to in the discussion section, when pointing to the similarities between this approach to culture and the dominant managerial discourse found in the studied organisation.

The culturist perspective, as embodied in work of Peters and Waterman (1982), is based on the following premises:

Table 1: Critical perspective on cultural principles of excellence as formulated by Peters and Waterman (1982).

Cultural principles of excellence	Quotation	Criticism
• Strengthening corporate culture fosters organisational performance	'Without exception, the dominance and coherence of culture proved to be an essential quality of excellent companies.' (p.75)	Highly questionable and empirically unverified (Martin, 2002; Reynolds, 1986).
• Strong corporate culture leads to increased staff commitment	'We will surrender a great deal to institutions that give us a sense of meaning and, through it, a sense of security.' (p.78) 'The institution provides a guiding belief and creates (…) a sense of being part of the best.' (p.323)	Corporate culture and its core values are designed to shape the individual's identity.
• There must be unquestionable consensus around corporate values • If the corporate values are internalised, employees gain more autonomy as formal rules become replaced by the internal (yet corporate) compass	'(…) a remarkably tight-culturally driven/controlled- set of properties marks the excellent companies. Most have rigidly shared values.' (p.320) 'In the very same institutions in which culture is so dominant, the highest levels of true autonomy occur. The culture regulates rigorously the few variables that do count, and it provides meaning.' (p.105) '(…) autonomy is a product of discipline.' (p.322) '(…) the stronger the culture (…), the less need was there for policy manuals, organization charts, or detailed procedures and rules.' (p.75) 'All that stuff you have been dismissing for so long as the intractable, irrational, intuitive, informal organization *can* be managed' (p.11)	Corporate values are used as new media of domination (Willmott, 1993) and 'aparatus of ruling' (deRoche, 1998). There is no room for individual (or any other) values; an organisationally imposed monolithic system of values must be followed and internalised. This can be perceived as a totalitarian and morally dubious attempt at gaining control over employee's affective and cognitive spheres of lives (ibid; Fitzgerald, 1988). In fact, the alleged autonomy is an illusion, as the formal control is replaced by a different, and further reaching, form of control – self-discipline steered by the organisation (Ray, 1986). Autonomy is conceptualised as obedience to corporate values (ibid).
• Corporate culture can (and should) be managed. • Leadership is about management of meaning	'We are fairly sure that the culture of almost every excellent company (…) can be traced to transforming leadership somewhere in its history. (…) The transforming leader is (…) the value shaper, the exemplar, the maker of meanings.' (p.82)	The question of culture as lending itself to management's interventions is a highly complex and controversial issue with many voices refuting this possibility.

In this 'dependent variable' perspective, corporate culture is treated as a tool to achieving excellence, understood predominantly in terms of financial success. 'Appropriate' culture, focusing employees on the 'right' market values, is said to contribute to employee loyalty since it gives them the feeling of security that is thought to be one of the basic human needs. The values that lie at the core of corporate culture must then be espoused, endorsed and internalised by all members of the organisation so that they guide their behaviour, make their choices easier and direct their sensemaking processes.

In this perspective, sensemaking is therefore no longer the property of an individual who negotiates meanings with others. The meaning is non-negotiable (Anthony, 1990); it is given to organisation members in a process of cultural indoctrination (see Czarniawska and Kunda, 2010). It is to be accepted and internalised. Homogeneity is thought to account for strength, gearing every member of the organisation in the desired direction without the need for excessive formal rules and regulations. This takes place, however, at the expense of individuals' freedom, which is to be enacted within the 'rigid' culture rules, which, in effect, according to Willmott (1993), bear a lot of resemblance with a totalitarian system (as brilliantly depicted for example by Goffman, 1961, or Orwell, 1989). The totality of this approach, as argued by Willmott (1993), is manifested in the belief that organisations, in order to be commercially successful, need to colonise not only the behaviours of their employees, but should make a step further and take hold of their thoughts and feelings.

Willmott (1993) consequently equates the declared freedom that individuals can allegedly exercise within excellent companies with nothing less than (mental and emotional) slavery that is presented as commitment and a need for control (Kunda, 1992; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007). This view is echoed by numerous other authors who call into question the ethical grounds (or the lack thereof) on which the culture management movement is based on (see e.g. Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Fitzgerald, 1988; Ray, 1986 or Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990).

Regarding culture as a controllable means of achieving success encourages differentiations between good (efficient) and bad (inefficient) cultures, depending on whether they help fulfil the management's vision or not (e.g. Kotter and Heskett, 1992).

This approach to culture, however, runs counter to the alternative interpretations of culture, as discussed below.

2.1.2. Organisational culture as a root metaphor

Whereas the conception of culture as a variable is typical for researchers and practitioners perceiving the social reality in functionalist terms (as summarized by Burrell and Morgan, 1979), organisational culture as a root, epistemological, metaphor is a characteristic of studies assuming the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Researchers adopting this perspective, as is also done in this thesis, usually treat the whole organisation as 'culture' which is the epistemological metaphor for their research.

Constructivists usually approach organisations from a more anthropological perspective. Organisations are investigated as forms of human expressiveness and treated as the subjective experience of their members (Smircich, 1983), with the researcher typically aiming to understand and interpret the wealth of organisational symbolism. In other words, organisational culture is treated as an intersubjective reality, where the meaning of events and actions is agreed upon in interactions (Weick, 1969). The actions of social actors, in turn, can be understood only in and through the context they appear in (Schütz 1967). In this view, language plays a key role together with rituals, corporate myths and stories. These elements of social reality form a net of intersubjective meaning that is highly contextualized. The underlying belief here is that organizations do not exist, but are constantly happening. Therefore, organisations are often conceptualised as verbs, as opposed to the more traditional view of organisations as nouns (see e.g. Parker, 2000).

As observed by Smircich (1983), studies relating to organisations as culture are by no means homogenous in their conceptualisations of culture. One can distinguish between a cognitive, a symbolic, a structural and finally a psychodynamic perspective. All of these perspectives see organisations as complex social phenomena. In terms of the four perspectives differentiated by Smircich, this work cannot be easily located within one of them, as its inspirations are twofold. First of all, it draws from the cognitive stream of culture research, in particular the work of Karl Weick (1969, 1995) and what is often referred to as the sensemaking paradigm. Secondly, it is also strongly influenced by

organisational symbolism (as described, among others, by Pondy *et al.*, 1983 or Alvesson and Berg, 1992 and characteristic for the researchers associated with the Standing Group of Organizational Symbolism) as it focuses attention on the symbolic domain of human interactions.

2.2 Defining organisational culture

Having presented different approaches to organisational culture and located this thesis in the extensive, diverse and intricate web of culture studies, it is time to look at how culture is typically defined. As Czarniawska and Kunda (2010:181) have rightly observed, 'the precise definition of culture in organisational settings is a matter of endless (and somewhat futile) debate'. In light of this observation, I would like to clarify that this section does not aspire to compile a comprehensive list of culture definitions, nor does it attempt to present an overview of the 'futile [culture] debate'. Rather, it focuses on a selection of definitions that share the same approach to culture to the one chosen in this study. The purpose is to show the varying scope and focus of these definitions and to delineate the here adopted stance to the 'culture debate' which will inform the subsequent development of this thesis. The definitions that were chosen for this are listed below. They all come from authors whose voice have contributed significantly to the organisational culture discourse.

Table 2: Definitions of organisational culture

Culture is a system of publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time.	Pettigrew, 1979: 574
[Culture is] a set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people. The meanings are largely tacit among the members, are clearly relevant to a particular group, and are distinctive to the group.	Louis, 1985: 74
Culture refers to the knowledge members of a given group are taught to more or less share; knowledge of the sort that is said to inform, embed, shape, and account for the routine and not-so-routine activities of the members of the culture (…) Culture is not itself visible, but is made visible only through its representation.	Van Maanen, 1988: 3
Organisational culture focuses on the beliefs, values and meanings used by members of an organization to grasp how the organization's uniqueness originates, evolves, and operates. (…) the culture concept emphasizes the fundamental frameworks which people take for granted in their social and occupational activities.	Schultz, 1995:5
(…), culture does not refer to social structures and behaviour but in contrast to mental phenomena such as how individuals within a particular group think about and value the reality in similar ways and how this thinking and valuing is different from that of people in different groups (occupations, tribes, etc). Culture refers to what stands behind and guides behaviour rather than the behaviour as such.	Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008:36
In the most general sense, *culture can be viewed as a bubble (of meaning) covering the world*, a bubble that we both create and live within. Its film covers everything that we turn our eye to; it is (…) the medium of (social) life. [original emphasis]	Czarniawska-Joerges, 1991:287
(…) organizational culture is (…) a medium of social life that enables the social actors to communicate and which gives meaning to their actions, experiences and choices. Moreover, organizations are cultures (parts of culture), which means that all aspects of organizations, also the economic and social ones have a cultural meaning and can be interpreted from a cultural perspective. (…) Culture is social space, kind of constantly negotiated group identity, in which and through which we act and perceive the world (…).	Kostera, 1996:75
(…) organizational culture is defined as the tacit organizational understandings (e.g. assumptions, beliefs and values) that contextualise efforts to make meaning, including internal self-definition.	Hatch and Schultz, 2002:996
(…) organizational cultures should be seen as 'fragmented' unities in which members identify themselves as collective at some times and divided at others. (…) 'organizational culture' is a term which should be understood as involving both the everyday understandings of members and the more general features of the sector, state and society of which the organization is a part – both the 'micro' and the 'macro' if you like. Thinking about organizational culture therefore involves recognizing the inseparability of binaries – together and apart, general and unique, structures and agents, organizations and identities – in sum, organizational culture both as a constraint and as an everyday accomplishment.	Parker, 2000:1
When organizations are examined from a cultural viewpoint, attention is drawn to aspects of organizational life that historically have often been ignored or understudied, such as the stories people tell to newcomers to explain "how things are done around here", the ways in which offices are arranged and personal items are or are not displayed, jokes people tell, the working atmosphere (hushed or luxurious or dirty and noisy), the relations among people (affectionate in some areas of an office and obviously angry and perhaps competitive in another place), and so on. Cultural observers also often attend to aspects of working life that other researchers study, such as the organization's official policies, the amounts of money different employees earn, reporting relationships, and so on. A cultural observer is interested in the surfaces of these cultural manifestations because details can be informative, but he or she also seeks an in-depth understanding of the patterns of meanings that link these manifestations together, sometimes in harmony, sometimes in bitter conflicts between groups, and sometimes in webs of ambiguity, paradox, and contradiction.	Martin, 2002:3
(…) culture (…) as consisting of in-depth, subjective interpretations of a wide range of cultural manifestations (…), both ideational and material.	Martin, 2002:120

The first definition, suggested by Pettigrew (1979), sees culture as a system of meanings. This is a very common way of conceptualising culture, also evident in other culture definitions which add other culture elements or manifestations to the 'accepted meanings' mentioned by Pettigrew (1979), as will be shown below.

Louis (1985) develops Pettigrew's stand on culture, by drawing attention to the fact that the meanings are largely tacit, a point also reiterated for example by Schultz (1995). Louis further observes that culture is unique to a given group, which is a common, yet increasingly problematised notion (see e.g. Martin *et al.*, 1983).

Van Maanen (1988), on the other hand, replaced the accepted meanings from Pettigrew's (1979) definition with shared knowledge that organisation members learn to acquire. In his definition emphasis is placed on the fact that culture affects the activities of organisation members, however the organisation members' active role in shaping, changing and reinterpreting the cultural assumptions is not put to the foreground.

Similarly, the next two definitions of culture, namely the one by Schultz (1995) and that by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) draw attention to the way culture affects individuals and not to how individuals constantly enact culture. Schultz's stand on culture seems to comprise most of the issues raised in the previously quoted definitions of culture but adds the concept of fundamental frameworks within which organisational members act. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008), on the other hand, explicitly highlight that culture is to be conceptualised as mental phenomena that guide behaviours.

What is important in the definition proposed by Czarniawska-Joerges (1991) is the focus on performativity absent from the previous definitions. The author highlights that organisation members are not only affected by culture but they also actively create culture. Moreover, it is worth noting that Czarniawska-Joerges specifically points to the all-embracing nature of culture saying that the culture 'film covers everything we turn our eye to'.

Kostera (1996) takes up this definition but, following Smircich (1983), includes in the culture definition a statement about the conceptualisation of organisations as cultures. Furthermore, Kostera (1996) continues the point made by Czarniawsja-Joerges about

the prevalence of culture and includes the material aspects of organisations in the cultural definition. For Kostera, 'all aspects of organizations (…) have a cultural meaning'. What is new in her definition, though, is a reference to identity which, in a sense, conceptualises organisational culture as 'constantly negotiated group identity'. On a similar note, Parker (2000), in his definition of culture, brings to the forefront the element of group identification as a collective. He then raises another important issue in the culture definition, namely fragmentation, which is at odds with most of the here quoted culture definitions, which emphasise sharing and consensus rather than fragmentation or differentiation. He also advocates the inclusion of macro-factors into the organisational culture definition, such as the features of the sector where the organisation is located or the national culture. Lastly, what is important to note about his stand on culture, are the two last words of his definition, namely the reference to culture as 'an everyday accomplishment' which resonates with the concept of organisations as verbs.

Finally, the last definition that is quoted here comes from the work of Martin (2002), who, similarly to Kostera (1996), draws the attention to both ideational and material aspects of culture. However, unlike the latter author, she also highlights the ambiguity, paradox and contradiction that can characterise cultural understandings. Martin's definition also makes an explicit reference to the required depth that the cultural observers must engage with in their cultural interpretations.

For the purpose of the present study, the most suitable definition of culture seems to be a combination of the elements put forward by Kostera (1996) and Martin (2002). Kostera's definition is elegant and makes a clear reference to the approach to culture adopted in this study. However, in this thesis, organisational culture will be regarded as a separate concept from organisational identity, in line with the argument put forward by Hatch and Schultz (2002). The definition suggested by Kostera (1996) therefore will be adopted without its reference to organisational identity. However, it will be supplemented by points raised by Martin which mark a clear departure from the perception of culture that is characterised predominantly by harmony and consensus. As a result, the following definition of culture is used as a starting point for the cultural analysis carried out in this work:

Organizational culture is a medium of social life that enables the social actors to communicate and which gives meaning to their actions, experiences and choices. Moreover, organizations are cultures (parts of culture), which means that all aspects of organizations, also the economic and social ones have a cultural meaning and can be interpreted from a cultural perspective. Cultural manifestations are linked together by patterns of meanings that coexist in harmony, sometimes in bitter conflicts, and sometimes in webs of ambiguity, paradox, and contradiction. (based on Kostera, 1996:75 and Martin, 2002:3)

To sum up, the here adopted conceptualisation of culture treats culture as encompassing both ideational as well as its material manifestations. It also allows for the cultural messiness across internal organisational boundaries (e.g. between different subgroups) and opens analysis for conflicts and ambiguities, which co-create culture as something that is shared by a group. This stand on culture invites looking at an organisation from multiple perspectives, an approach which will be explored in more depth in the subsequent part of this thesis. However, before elaborating on the possible perspectives in studying cultures, it is important to look at another key concept that has already been referred to in this chapter when discussing Kostera (1996) and Parker's (2000) definition of culture, namely organisational identity which, as will be shown below, is 'closely related to organisational culture' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008:40).

2.3 Studying organisational culture through the lens of organisational identity

As numerous authors have already pointed out (e.g. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Fiol, 1991; Hatch and Schultz, 2000; 2002; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006), the concepts of organisational culture and organisational identity are closely interrelated. Before, however, the links between the two can be explored in some depth, the concept of organisational identity requires some attention (for a more comprehensive review see Cornelissen, 2006 or Cornelissen *et al.*, 2007).

The concept of organisational identity was first systematically introduced into organisation studies Albert and Whetten (1985, later revised in Whetten, 2006) who conceptualise organisational identity as attributes of an organisation that are central and enduring and which distinguish it from other organisations. Whetten (2006) refers to these attributes as organisational identity claims and suggests that they play the role of key referents that provide an answer to the question: Who we are as an organisation? Accordingly, identity is therefore treated as a statement of what the organisation

members regard as rudimentary and something that sets the organisation apart from others.

Determining what is central for an organisation depends on organisation members, who arbitrarily create different classification schemes pointing to different dimensions and criteria that help them answer the question who they are as an organisation. Identity therefore may comprise statements that refer to different organisational dimensions, such as ideology or management philosophy (ibid). In this respect, Albert and Whetten's (1985) conceptualisation of organisational identity comprises elements which are typically considered to be part of the definition of corporate, rather than organisational, culture (e.g. Alvesson, 2002; Anthony, 1994). Furthermore, it is also worth pointing out that the quoted authors see identity as expressed in identity claims, the importance of which seems to be emphasised in their definition more than the meanings associated with the claims. Finally, the above quoted definition views identity as a relatively stable construct. In fact, Albert and Whetten (1985) argue that stability is one of the three necessary criteria that organisational attributes must meet in order to be classified as constitutive of identity. Not all scholars, however, share the view of identity as a stable construct linked primarily to identity claims (see e.g. Chreim, 2002; Gioia and Thomas, 1996).

According to Gioia, Schultz and Corley (2000), the suggested identity stability refers to identity claims, or using Soenen and Moingeon (2002) terminology, the projected identity, rather than the meanings associated with them. Gioia and colleagues (2000) argue that organisation members provide the same answer to the question who they are as an organisation, yet by doing so they evoke different meanings at different times; identity is thus a constantly negotiated, reinterpreted, interactive and reflexive concept (ibid:76). What is of importance here, is the belief that organisation members have as to how others perceive their organisation, which is often referred to as *construed external image* (Dutton and *et al.*, 1994). If the comparison between organisation's identity and the espoused external image reveals that there are significant differences between the two, a dissonance appears which triggers self-reflection. According to Gioia and his colleagues, organisation members will try to reduce this dissonance by either revisiting the view they have of their organisation or by trying to influence the view others have of them. This can be accomplished by projecting a desired future image in the hope that

this image will with time, affect the revisited organisations identity. Similar views are expressed by Chreim (2002) who argues that organisational identity is constantly evolving precisely due to the organisation memebers' attempts to reduce the dissonance between the construed external image and identity claims, which she refers to after Soenen and Moigeon (2002) as projected identity.

While the aforementioned literature refers to issues related to organisational culture largely implicitly, the links between organisational identity and culture are arguably most explicitly addressed in the gradually developed work of Hatch and Schultz (1997; 2000; 2002). These authors suggest that organisational identity is a dynamic process linked to organisational culture and image by a series of processes. Identity, according to the authors, is tied with culture due to two processes: reflecting and expressing. Whereas, mirroring and impressing bind identity to image. In the process of *'expressing'*, identity expresses cultural understandings. This happens when aretifacts that carry symbolic meaning are used to express an organisations identity. Symbols, as illustrated by Hatch (1993) in the culture dynamics model, are embedded in the cultural understandings and are manifestations of values and beliefs of a given group. Therefore, the usage of cultural symbols in statement of the organisational self, locates identity in the wider cultural context. On the other hand, in the process of *'reflecting'*, organisational identity, in the form of organisation members' self-definition, is considered in relation to cultural understandings and values. To put it differently, '*reflecting*' ingrains identity in the sphere of culture. Identity, however, does not only draw from the organisation's cultural resources. It is also formed in relation to the information coming from the external environment, namely its image. Hatch and Schultz (2002) adopt the notion of *'mirroring'* put forward by Dutton and Dukerich (1991). The authors believe that the impressions and opinion about the organisation held by others provide the organisation members with a stimulus for self-reflection and self-examination. The final process accounting for identity dynamics pointed by Hatch and Schultz (2002) closes the loop between culture, identity and image and is referred to as *'impressing'*. *'Impressing'* comprises the expressive forms of identity which affect the perceptions of others as to what the organisation stands for. Together, the processes of 'expressing', 'reflecting', 'mirroring' and 'impressing' constitute organisation identity as an ongoing conversation between organisational culture and image (ibid.:991). In this perspective then, organisational identity and organisational culture are tightly

intertwined. Unlike some of the previously quoted authors (e.g. Albert and Whetten, 1985; Whetten, 2006), Hatch and Schultz (2002) see identity as drawing from culture. The expressions of identity, unlike the identity claims discussed before, are conceived of as symbols which epitomise the values and beliefs of the organisation members. Organisational identity is then associated with participants' sensemaking which takes place in the context of a given organisational culture (compare Harris, 1994).

Hatch and Schultz's (2000; 2002) conceptualisations of organisational identity and its links to organisational culture and image are, however, based on a theoretical model which was only recently empirically verified by Ravasi and Schultz (2006). In their study of a Danish company forced to respond more decisively to competitive threats, the messages coming from the environment triggered increased identity sensemaking. Organisation members started asking questions about how their organisation was perceived by others (its construed external image) and questions about their real identity. This, in turn, as suggested by the authors, led to the revisiting of identity claims thanks to prior reflections on the organisation's cultural practices and artifacts. Subsequently, revisited identity claims contributed to the changed projected image of the organisation. Identity claims, however, were not only integrated into the projected desired image, but were also embedded in organisational culture. These two forces, internal in the form of organisational culture and external, in the form of the projected desired image, gave sense to the revisited organisational identity and changed its understanding. As Ravasi and Schultz (2006) illustrate, organisational culture provides a space within which organisational identity is reflected upon. However, the identity-culture relationship is reciprocal (see also Hatch and Schultz, 1997; 2000; 2002). It is also organisational identity which facilitates the sensemaking process by providing a backdrop against which organisation members actions and behaviours are interpreted (compare Fiol, 1991).

The recent work of Ciuk and Kostera (2010), which is based on the data that forms the basis for this thesis, is another example of a practical application of the theoretical model by Hatch and Schultz (2002). Ciuk and Kostera (2010) introduced a modification to the proposed identity dynamics model by expanding on the notion of identity as a text or, more generally, as a narrative project (see Czarniawska, 1997). The identity dynamics processes discussed earlier in the chapter were subsequently relabelled so as

to highlight the narrative nature of identity, while leaving their meaning intact. In this way, 'expressing' was replaced by 'reciting' the story, 'reflecting' turned into 'revisiting' the story, 'mirroring' was replaced by 'reviewing' and finally 'impressing' was translated as 'reading' of the story to its audiences (see the figure below).

Figure 1: The Construction of identity as a narrative project after Ciuk and Kostera (2010), based on the identity dynamics model by Hatch and Schultz (2002)
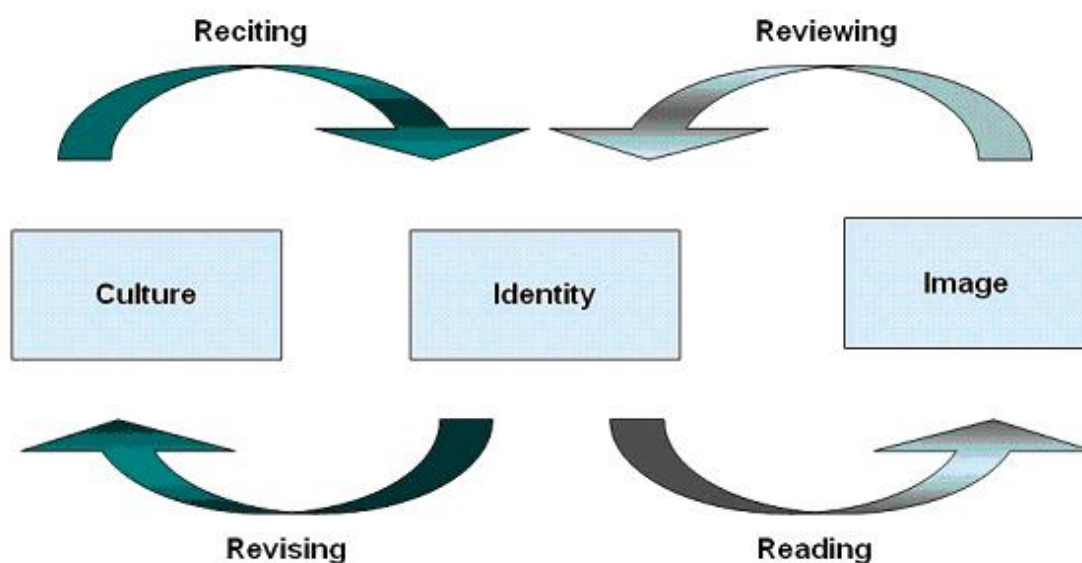
By incorporating the identity dynamics model into the narrative perspective, the authors illustrated how attempts at managing organisational identity, which ignore the cultural heritage of the organisation, can lead to serious disruptions in the narrative project. According to the quoted authors, the processes that bind culture, identity and image get distorted if organisations 'forget that they have forgotten' (Ciuk and Kostera, 2010:189) to reflect back on their past. Under these circumstances, organisational culture instead of serving as a resource for the identity self-examination, is deprived of its meaning and turns into a ghost that hunts the organisation (ibid:200). Identity is spun in a meaning void, trying to impress its audience building a façade, or to paraphrase Baudrillard (1981), a simulacrum of an image.

The discursive perspective adopted by Ciuk and Kostera (2010) opens up possibilities for multiple interpretations and meanings that pervade the organisations, perhaps more than it is suggested in the theoretical model by Hatch and Schultz (2002). As Brown and colleagues (2005:312) stated, the narratological perspective 'allows one to read polisemny back into ethnographic research'. In a similar vein, Jack and Lorbiecki

(2007:83) observe that organisation identity might indeed be treated as a conversation or a dance between organisational culture and image, as Hatch and Schultz (2002) suggest, but one that has more to do with a break-dance than a smooth waltz. As a result, some commentators argue (e.g. Brown, 2006), organisational identities are likely to be more fragmented and contested than it is typically presented. Therefore, organisations should be conceptualised as having multiple identity narratives that are constantly spun by different organisation members, overlapping, competing or contradicting one another (Brown *et al.*, 2005; Glynn, 2000).

Having expressed an interest in the complexity, dynamics and polyphony of organisational life, I will now turn to question of how one can approach the daunting task of 'reading of organisational culture' (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992).

2.4 Reading organisational culture

Joanne Martin (1992; 2002), initially in her work with Meyerson (1987) and later with other colleagues (Martin *et al.*, 2006), suggests that one can study organisations from three different perspectives which she refers to as: integration, differentiation and fragmentation. In her view, the multiple or, to use Wright's words 'multifarious' (1994), definitions of organisational culture and ways of studying it, create a very complex and confusing picture of the culture research. As Martin (2002:93) astutely observes, researchers tend to write and read work located within the confines of one perspective and 'disagree with each other vehemently'.

According to Martin (1992; 2002), most of the academic literature on culture is written from an *integration* perspective which sets out to discover organisation-wide consensus. All cultural manifestations are here thought to be consistent with one another, leaving little room for differences or ambiguities. Culture is seen as a fairly monolithic structure, where consensus and belief in shared values prevails (compare the discussion of corporate culturism earlier in this chapter). Disagreements and competing cultural interpretations are treated as an aberration that is a cause of concern. Harmony is a preferred state of affairs. A well-known example of the application of the integration perspective is the work of Schein (1985). In his view, the taken-for-grantedness of

assumptions that lay the foundations of organisational culture contributes to their asserted homogeneity. Organisation culture studies carried out from the integration perspective tend to adopt the managerial and normative stance (compare e.g. Cunliffe, 2009; Parker, 2002) and interpret divergent interpretations as deviance (see also Fitzgerald, 1988). The elite views are projected on the whole organisation and claims are made about the totality of culture which, in fact, is rarely examined. In this perspective, many voices can be easily ignored or silenced as the view obtained from such a selective treatment of organisations is partial, and such is the understanding of culture seen exclusively through the managerial lens (deRoche, 1998). In Hanzen's words (1993:16), 'If we hear (or read) only loud, articulate, respectable, or directive voices, we confine our possibilities, limit our range'. As Martin (2002) observes, studies embedded in this perspective often present a normative stance.

The *differentiation* lens, on the other hand, typically concentrates on the differences in interpretations and understandings between subcultures (see e.g. Gregory, 1983; Jermier *et al.*, 1991; Sackmann, 1992) that are often due to hierarchical differences. Conflict, ambiguity or misalignments of cultural manifestations are embraced, providing that they are located between, and not within, different subcultures. As Martin (2002:101) argues, differentiation puts to the foreground 'cultural manifestations that have inconsistent interpretations', and sees 'multiple meanings as elements of organizational culture' (Young, 1989:187). These inconsistencies often fall within the lines of subcultures, or 'microcultures' (Goodenough, 1987, cited in deRoche, 1998), which, as research has shown, can be formed along different lines (see e.g. Parker, 2000; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985).

The *fragmentation* perspective, as opposed to the two above described approaches, does not assume homogeneity, neither on the organisational nor the subcultural level. Here, a lack of consensus on the interpretations of cultural manifestations is considered to be the norm. Consistency is replaced by ambiguity as an integral part of culture. As Wicks and Grandy, (2007:351) who studied ambiguity in a tattooing collectivity suggest, the fragmentation perspective 'embellishes' ambiguity which has already been recognised as an important aspect of organisational life (see e.g. Alvesson, 2002). In the fragmentation perspective, binary oppositions and dichotomies are questioned. Instead,

paradoxes and contradictions are revealed, as for example in the work of Hatch (1997) on irony and humour in a management team.

As Martin observes (1992; 2002), researchers typically have their 'home' perspective from which they view the organisational reality. Managerially-oriented studies, which in Smircich's (1983) terms typically treat culture as a dependent variable, tend to adopt the *integration* perspective. Critical theory proponents, on the other hand, will often view organisations through the *differentiation* lens and look for the marginalised and silenced voices. Finally, the *fragmentation* perspective seems to be close to some postmodern views, where meanings are in a constant state of flux and ambiguity. According to Martin (1992; 2002), researchers have to be explicit about their home perspective, as it influences their reading of cultures. Knowing the 'home' perspective of the author helps to alert the reader to issues that might be either over or underemphasised in a given take from the field. Some researchers, according to Martin, attempt to combine different perspectives, yet they hardly ever use all three perspectives in the same research, although this might enrich their analysis. This view is shared by Morgan and Ogbonna (2008), who have adopted the three-perspective approach to studying the responses of healthcare professionals to managerially initiated changes. According to the quoted authors, a multi-perspective framework promotes complex and varied interpretations of organisational reality (ibid:60). Similar view, quite unsurprisingly, is also reiterated by other authors who have adopted Martin's framework (e.g. Eisenberg *et al.*, 1998; Harris and Ogbonna, 1998; Mathew and Ogbonna, 2009; Stevenson and Bartunek, 1996).

In terms of the practical application of Martin's (1992) framework, the quoted author recommends not only using all three perspectives to study a given organisation, but suggests that the perspectives should be used sequentially. This approach, according to Martin, will allow for different facets of the studied phenomena to be captured, as elements overlooked by one perspective, are more likely to be moved to the foreground by the application of other analytical lenses. While Martin's (1992) framework and argumentation has received considerable recognition, some concerns have also been raised by a number of researchers, e.g. Alvesson in his earlier work (1993) expressed his reservations about the need for the fragmentionation perspective as, in his view, ambiguity is contingent upon 'how closely one looks' and does not necessarily require a

separate perspective (compare his later views in Alvesson, 2002). In principle Martin (2002) seems to agree with the contestation that ambiguity is something one ought to look for as organisations, in her view, are often entangled in 'webs of ambiguity, paradox and contradiction' (ibid:3). Nonetheless, she sees value in distinguishing between the three perspectives, including ambiguity, with a view to 'respecting and retaining differences among the viewpoints' (ibid:159) and capturing the complexity of organisational reality. While Martin (2002) recognises the potential in the interplay between the different perspectives, she also acknowledges the difficulties associated with switching the perspectives. Daymon (2000), on the other hand, advocates a stronger blurring of the boundaries between the perspectives, a procedure which, in her view, enables 'a discourse between the different interpretations of the data' (ibid:133).

While Martins' (1992; 2002) work offers a valuable theoretical framework, and in the same time provides a useful analytical tool to get a 'greater' (Harris and Ogbonna, 1998:104) and 'wider range of insights' (Mathew and Ogbonna, 2009:659) than the reliance on only one perspective could offer, its application does not come without difficulties. As Martin (2002:108) acknowledges, the three discussed perspectives work like worldviews which makes it harder to adopt a perspective one is less comfortable with. Therefore, in this work, Martin's (2002) postulates will be used as a guiding principle, reminding the researcher to venture out of her 'home' perspective, which seems to lie within the 'diffrentiation' perspective, rather than an analytical framework. In this sense, the suggested 'blurring of boundaries' between the perspectives (Daymon, 2000) is taken a step further whereby insights from the study are not differentiated depending on the investigative principle they were derived from, but blur into one reading underlined by different, often confusing and mutually contradictory voices. In other words, in this thesis Martin's (1992; 2002) framework will primarily be used as a point of reference stimulating researcher's 'sensibility' (Pader, 2006) and disrupting the neat emplotment of the culture change initiative.

2.5 Studying organisational culture change

So far, I have discussed different approaches to and possible readings of organisational culture, and located the present study among the vast field of cultural research. I have also highlighted alternative ways of defining and studying organisational culture and linked it to the concept of organisational identity. The next important issue that needs addressing is the question of culture manageability which will be discussed with reference to a number of studies on planned cultural interventions.

2.5.1 Different approaches to organisational culture change

Organisational culture change has received a lot of attention from scholars as well as practitioners. The latter have been primarily interested in culture management, an issue which has raised considerable controversy among scholars, in particular in terms of the fundamental question about 'culture manageability'. Broadly speaking, one can distinguish three views among academics as to the possibility and extent to which culture can be managed. The answer to the culture manageability question depends primarily on epistemology and the accepted definition of organisational culture (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Legge, 1994; Martin, 2002; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). Operationalisations of culture, which equate culture with its manifestations, such as behaviours or the espoused values are more likely to produce findings supporting planned culture change. Ideational views of culture, on the other hand, which see culture as ingrained in patterns of meanings, problematise the culture change efforts and their outcomes. The three, above mentioned, perspectives on culture manageability can be summarised as follows: 'culture can be managed', 'culture may, under certain circumstances and to some extent, be managed', 'culture cannot be managed' and are expressed respectively by culture optimists, culture pragmatists and culture pessimists (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002b).

2.5.1.1 Culture optimists

The view that culture can be managed corresponds closely with the perception of organisational culture as a dependent variable, as described in the already quoted classification by Smircich (1983). In the variable perspective, the focus is on the manipulation and control of culture so that it meets the organisational objectives, such as increased effectiveness (e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kotter and Heskett; 1992; Wilkins and Ouchi, 1983) or assuring competitive advantage (e.g. Fiol, 1991). It is believed that the leader's inability to recognise the need to manage culture might account for organisational failure (George *et al.*, 1999). To this end, different culture change models are evoked (for overview of these see e.g. Brown, 1995) to facilitate the planned change (Ogbonna and Harris, 1998).

In a volume with the enticing title 'Gaining control of corporate culture' edited by Kilmann and colleagues (1985), for example, the readers are presented with a number of 'specific methods for changing culture'. Allen (1985) proposes four phases for bringing about cultural change. Kilmann (1985), on the other hand, puts forward five steps for 'closing culture-gaps'. What these models have in common is that they present planned change programmes as being initiated by top management, with varying participation from the staff and are symptomatic of what Hawkins (1997) labels the 'heroic school of management development'. Consequently, Alvesson (2002:44), and later Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008), refer to these culture change models as 'grand technocratic projects' and observes that they typically consist of a number of steps:

- Step 1: evaluating the situation of the organisation and determining the goals and strategic direction;
- Step 2: analysing the existing culture and sketching a desired culture;
- Step 3: analysing the gap between what exists and what is desired;
- Step 4: developing a plan for developing the culture;
- Step 5: implementing the plan;
- Step 6: evaluating the changes and new efforts to go further and/or engaging in measures to sustain the cultural change.

These n-step models are typically either invented by top management and/or by the consultants. Other organisation members are 'on the receiving end' (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006) and conceptualised as targets of the change programme and ones that tend to impair the change efforts through resistance. It is then down to managers to assure that the resistance, treated as a form of deviance (Fitzgerald, 1988), is minimised. This is usually pursued by a number of management practices, which typically include re-education (e.g. training and management development initiatives), replacement of staff (e.g. through the process of promotion and recruitment) and reorganisation (e.g. introduction of new motivation and/or appraisal systems) (Legge, 1994).

It cannot pass without emphasis that the view of culture manageability usually assumes the existence of a unified culture, and thus can be located within the integration paradigm, as identified by Martin (1992; 2002). Therefore, culture change programmes typically strive to replace one culture, which has proven to be no longer effective or in line with organisational goals, with a new, also unified, culture (Meyerson and Martin, 1987). The content of the new culture is, similarly to the change project, managerially driven and focused on sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991).

2.5.1.2 Culture realists

An alternative view of culture management is proposed by scholars who view organisations *as* cultures. Within this perspective one can distinguish between moderate and more extreme or, one might say, 'purist' views.

The first view acknowledges some possibility of culture manipulation, yet only under certain conditions and to a limited extent. Ogbonna and Harris (2002a) refer to researchers adopting this perspective as 'realists' (who are not to be confused with Martin's (1985) 'pragmatists' who believe in the 'unconditional' culture management.). Ogbonna and Harris (2002a) suggest that this middle-ground stance on the culture manageability issue offers an opportunity to close the gap between the practitioners' belief in the possibility of manipulating culture and the conviction of a majority of scholars that this endeavour cannot be accomplished. This perspective is not, though,often embraced by researchers. A fairly rare example of this middle-stance can,

however, be found among contributors to the volume on organisational culture edited by Frost and colleagues (1985). In this, Siehl (1985), for example, highlights the times of crises and transition as ones which might facilitate the culture manipulation process. These include external and internal revolutions, severe environmental changes and managerial crises. Krefting and Frost (1985), also representing the 'moderate' stance on culture management, saw a great potential in effecting organisational culture change through the usage of metaphors. The authors point to the messiness of culture due to its often subconscious origins. Therefore they urge managers to:

> 'see the existing culture as a social construction that can change and be changed. [In their view,] He or she must react, interact, and act, using symbols and imagery, to release and develop the potential of the organization' (ibid:157).

Krefting and Frost (1985) anticipate greater difficulties in efforts to change culture when an organisation is more heterogeneous, comprising numerous subcultures, since conflicts of interest might arise during these change attempts.

More recently, Alvesson (2002), building on the view of leadership as management of meaning put forward by Smircich and Morgan (1982) saw the possibility of culture change as a 'reframing of everyday life'. He shifted attention from the grand projects of culture change towards local and informal change or, as Ogbonna and Harris (2002a:47) describe, a 'continuing activity that is incorporated into everyday management action'. In this view, cultural reframing takes place on a daily basis and is led by a social actor, typically a manager or someone with informal authority, who exerts influence upon the people they interact with. Alvesson (2002) calls this type of influence 'pedagogical leadership' and links it to the renegotiation of meaning in which a person in authority (formal or informal) affects the perceptions of others. This type of culture change is defined as a long-term process rather than a short-term plan that can be achieved when all the necessary prescribed steps are followed.

2.5.1.3 Culture pessimists

Finally, the culture 'purists' (Martin, 1985), or 'the pessimists' (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002a), adopt a perspective on culture change which rules out any possibility of culture management or manipulation. This view is based on the conceptualisation of organisations as cultures. As Meek (1988) points out, culture here is seen as socially

produced and reproduced in interactions over a period of time and therefore does not lend itself to manipulation. Therefore, attempts at cultural manipulation should not be confused with naturally occurring cultural transformation, as described e.g. by Hatch (1993). Furthermore, the culture management protagonists, it is argued, tend to underplay the fact that social actors are both influenced and influence culture. Nonetheless, as Legge (1994) reminds us, the purists do not deny any managerial influence on culture. On the contrary, the symbolic role of management is acknowledged, yet the unproblematic and one-directional sensegiving, reflected in the underlying belief in the possibility of changing employees' attitudes and cognition in the desired direction, is called into question (Beech, 2000). While managers and leaders indeed have a symbolically privileged position and their voices have a great chance of being more audible and therefore heard, they do not necessarily need to be listened to (compare Pye, 2005; Smircich and Morgan, 1982).

Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1990) for example, in their research carried out in three major British supermarkets undergoing a culture change programme, identified some behavioural changes in the shop floor workers. Nonetheless, these changes were found to be primarily linked to employees' acting skills rather than a genuine change of beliefs and attitudes. The authors referred to this phenomenon as 'resigned behavioural compliance' which stemmed from fear of redundancy and sanctions. For this reason, the authors conclude that the typically reported changes in culture tend to be confined to behavioural changes rather than value modifications. As Fitzgerald (1988) observed, value modifications, and in particular value manipulation, as assumed by the culture management programmes, are exceptionally hard to achieve, since values are interrelated with one another. They exist in a hierarchy and in a complex set of relationships (ibid:10). Hence, values cannot be easily abandoned or replaced just because the corporate agenda has changed.

As illustrated by Murphy and Mackenzie Davey (2002), initiatives undertaken by top management to promote corporate values can produce ambiguity, ambivalence and indifference among staff. In their research the authors observed that employees were able to detect discrepancies between the espoused promoted values and the way they were enacted, in particular in the behaviour displayed by top management. Strong unofficial cultural norms (e.g. the blame culture) contradicted the official values and

offset their possible impact on staff. The promoted values had themselves little salience for the organisation members, since many of them were regarded as common sense and not really something that should be imposed on individuals. In addition, the inclusion of such personal values in the official organisational discourse was perceived by some as bordering on offending them. What is particularly interesting to observe here, is the fact that although breaches of the values were typically detected by the staff, they were often not interpreted as such or, if so, the importance of these breaches was of limited importance. Rather, the promoted values were considered to be generally irrelevant for organisational practice, although theoretically commendable. The attempt by top management to promote these values, on the other hand, was interpreted as yet another 'management fad' that could be largely ignored. As one can see, the organisational values evoked little emotional engagement due to their taken-for-grantedness and, paradoxically, simultaneous detachment from the organisational reality.

However, it also has to be noted that the culture change programmes implemented as value promotion initiatives can be counter-effective. As Höpfl *et al.,* (1992) suggested after analysing the change programmes at British Airways and BT, culture change programmes can stimulate debate and scepticism. The internal PR in favour of organisational values was found to focus organisation members' attention on those values and consequently facilitated the identification of any possible breaches, contradictions and discrepancies between 'text of values' and their implementation (Scheeres and Rhodes, 2006:233). Debate around organisational values then, in turn, 'initiate[s] the radical reflections by which issues of identity are confronted' (Höpfl *et al.,* 1992:35). The identity issues that are here referred to apply to both the organisation as a whole and the individuals. Thus the value promotion campaigns not only attempt to determine what the organisation stands for but also, by expecting the individuals to internalise these values and thus become 'incorporated' into the organisation (Höpfl, 1994), affect their individual identity reservoirs. As Höpfl (2005:174) argues, 'acceptance of the loss and conformance of the self in the organisation' is seen as a desirable state, which resonates with the observations of Alvesson and Willmott (2002). The manipulation of personal identity is, however, a very complex and tricky (as well as ethically dubious) endeavour. As researchers have already pointed out, socialisation into 'engineered' (Kunda, 1992) identities, 'designer' cultures (Casey, 1999; Badham *et al.,* 2003) and corporate ideologies produces 'mixed and confused responses' (Tornbull,

2001:231), since organisation members are both 'capable of obeying and disobeying (…), losing and escaping control' (Gabriel, 1999; 179).

Furthermore, as Scheeres and Rhodes (2006:233-234) suggest, corporate attempts to persuade different organisation members to be 'subsumed into the confining identity (…) within the "we" of the values' are based on highly problematic assumptions and unshaken faith in unity. According to Czarniawska and Kunda (2010), cultural engineering might in fact infantilise organisation members while trying to socialise them into the 'stable, managerially approved identity' (ibid:184).

Along similar lines, more recent research by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) pointed to another paradox in a culture change initiative. It was found that the change initiative actually reinforced the beliefs and convictions which it was designed to counteract – findings which resonate with Scheers and Rhodes (2006). The programme strengthened scepticism and reaffirmed the grounds for the lack of trust in management. It also enhanced the assumption that such initiatives were all about paper, or as Harris and Ogbonna (2002) noted 'ritual', rather than real outcomes. In other words, as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) summarised the initiative, the culture change programme had limited effects when compared with its initial objectives. However, it also produced numerous unplanned and undesirable outcomes (see also Harris and Ogbonna, 2011), an important element of which was the 'hyperculture'. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008), inspired by the concepts of hyperreality and simulacra put forward by Baudrillard (1981) define hyperculture as 'a carved-out set of positive-sounding statements about values, often decoupled from everyday-life thinking and practices.' (ibid:119). These exaggerated statements about values focus on representations of reality that become more real than the reality they were designed to epitomise. An important aspect of the formulated and promoted culture, therefore, is its aesthetic side. The values have compelling names and images and resemble manufactured goods, rather than the discovered and authentic elements of culture. The final form they take is largely determined by the expectations people have of 'corporate values'. As a consequence, the desired culture is often devised by 'specialist in the hyperculture business', as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008:122) refer to top management, the consultants and the HR people, promoted internally to the middle managers and expected to be embraced in form of a cascade by other layers in the organisation:

> '[Hyper-]Culture is like a parcel, and the supposed cultural change experts appear mainly like post office workers, seeing to it that the parcels reach to those to whom they are addressed.' (ibid:120)

Therefore, the authors compare the change programme to 'passing the baton' where different parties try to do their assigned part in the project and then pass on the responsibility, detaching themselves from any further involvement in the programme. Hyperculture might succeed in seducing some organisation members, but this success is bound to be short-lived.

From what has been said so far, organisational values in-use, as opposed to the officially espoused values (Argyris and Schőn, 1978) have been found to resist attempts at manipulation. If the values, however, seem to be embraced by the organisation members as an outcome of a culture management initiative, this can often be ascribed to 'instrumental value compliance', as reported in another study by Ogbonna and Harris (1998). The authors further found that the reported shift of values can take the form of a total *rejection, re-invention, re-interpretation* or *re-orientation*. *Rejection* is manifested in abortion of managerially promoted values. *Re-invention* takes place when the existing values continue to be in-use, yet under the disguise of the new values. *Re-interpretation*, on the other hand, is accomplished by some degree of acceptance of the new values while maintaining elements of the old ones. Finally, the *re-orientation* process refers to a situation when the new values supersede the old ones. The authors conclude that their findings illustrate a situation where the majority of employees transformed the newly promoted values (in the processes of re-invention and re-interpretation), instead of adopting them. The old values were not abandoned, an outcome which cast serious doubt on the alleged success of the culture change initiative.

In their later publication Harris and Ogbonna (2000) focused explicitly on front-line employees where they propose a typology of seven different responses to a market-oriented culture change. The first two responses: *comprehensive repudiation* and *dynamic disagreement* can be treated as subtypes of the previously discussed *rejection*, the first one standing for a withdrawal, and the latter for an exit strategy (compare Hirschman, 1970). Similarly, another identified type - *partial acquiescence* – bears a lot of resemblance with *re-interpretation* previously suggested by the authors, where some of the new values are adopted, at least, as Harris and Ogbonna (2000) caution, in principle.

As the authors observe, some front-line employees seemed to have engaged in *paying lip-service* to the new values, without changing behaviours, which, to a large extent reminds of *re-invention* from their previously discussed study and *cultural reinvention* from their later publication (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). The authors also discuss *complete behavioural compliance*, or, 'resigned behavioural compliance' as the phenomenon was referred to in one of their earlier (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990) and later (Harris and Ogbonna, 2002) publications. Interestingly, the authors also report not only some *confused responses*, but talk of *unreserved adoption*. This suggests that some employees have not only changed their behaviours, but most importantly seemed to have altered their personal attitudes in response to the newly espoused values. While the authors conclude that rejecting the possibility of culture change 'may be a simplistic and incomplete explanation of a complex network of activities' (ibid:336) at play in cultural interventions, the evidence they provide to support their arguments is not without problems itself.

The last and most crucial category of the quoted authors in terms of the culture manageability debate, *unreserved adoption*, is supported by three quotes from the field. Only one of these quotes, however, directly refers to a change of thinking about the working life of the cited participant. The reported change, however, does not refer explicitly to a change of values. The authors argue that the mentioned shift in thinking acknowledged in the quote indicates a 'total and unreserved' acceptance of the espoused changes. Perhaps their reading of the participant's narrative is close to the intended message of its author, however it seems that some more investigation into the *unreserved adoption* is called for. In the meantime, their findings can be used to argue that organisation members can respond to the officially promoted values changes in a number of ways, often subverting the script envisioned by the change architects (also compare Harris and Ogbonna, 2002). This fact, however, tends to be acknowledged only reluctantly in the managerially orientated literature where there appears to be little room left for the 'unwated truth' (Edmondson and Munchus, 2007).

Furthermore, what a lot of the prescriptive change agent and management centric literature seems to overlook is that organisational change is not merely about careful planning, implementation and sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), but also, if not

primarily, about sensemaking (Balogun, 2006). Continuing this thought, 'Change recipients are not solely passive recipients of change' (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006), but should rather be conceptualised as its active participants and co-creators. Organisational change initiatives, as recommended by the change gurus (e.g. Kotter, 1996) are typically accompanied by the official rationalising discourses propagating the change, or as Höpfl (1994) describes, the 'practised rhetoric'. These discourses then trigger intensified sensemaking among organisation participants, typically accomplished in social interactions, which, in turn, affects their attitude to the change initiative (Balogun, 2006). While the official discourses behind change projects typically 'project a golden future' (Ybema, 2004), they also tend to discredit, or as Munro (1998) put it, 'rubbish the past' in an attempt to affect a separation from the past and solicit support for the change (Badham *et al.*, 2003; Grint and Case, 2000; McCabe, 2010). Davis (1979) refers to the discourses which vilify the past as nostophobic and juxtaposes them with nostalgia usually fostered by organisation members subject to change. In this light, organisational past is seen as socially constructed, or, as Parker (2002:589) suggest – 'a cultural matter'. Consequently, organisational past can be regarded as providing organisation members with discursive resources they can draw on while 'construct[ing] the organisation on a day to day basis' (ibid:590).

As numerous authors have already pointed out (e.g. Case, 1999; Gioia *et al.*, 2002; Munro, 1998), organisational change initiatives frequently entail the redefining and rewriting of organisational past. The past, however, tends to be much more contested than the prescriptive management publications seem to suggest. Different organisation members draw on temporal resources in various, often conflicting and unpredictable, ways, while authoring their individual and collective identities (compare Brown and Humphreys, 2002; McDonald *et al.*, 2006; Watson, 2008). The rewriting of history is not only a managerial domain, as some authors seem to emphasise (see e.g. Gioia *et al.*, 2002), but an activity that different organisation members can engage in, irrespective of the managerially sponsored definition of the situation. As Brown *et al.* (2005:322) caution, 'senior manager's control over discursive space cannot be total'. Therefore, one could argue that the attempts at cultural manipulation which typically favour one line of interpretation of the past and in which a clear distinction is made between the 'old', and undesirable culture, and the 'new', managerially sponsored culture (compare Parker, 2000), are, at best, fraught with difficulties.

On a similar note, Anthony (1990) contends that the values, meanings and beliefs that managers try to impose on other members of the organisation during culture change programmes are hardly ever adopted by those targeted by such initiatives. What is more, the author suggests that the outcome of such initiatives deepens the isolation of managers who are the only ones who get seduced by the messages they produce. Consequently, the managers become 'cocooned' in a world of their own, where there is no space for opposing views that might be presented by subcultures; '[t]he only people that are enclosed by cultural management are its own managers.' (ibid:8). Finally, Anthony (1990) makes an important observation that the ambiguity of culture management tools enables the managers, the agents of change, to live their fantasy which conceals any worrying signs of failure. After all, messages that culture change programmes are trying to convey are very often fairly vague and therefore their results hard to measure. And so the myth of their success can live on. However, as Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003) observed, the embracing of organisational values is not only problematic for the shop-floor workers but equally so for middle managers who are targets of programme and at the same time are expected to act as its agents. Interestingly, this study also revealed that the difficulties with implementing the culture change programme were attributed to members of the organisation with longer tenure. These employees were referred to as the 'old guard' and perceived as resistant to change. According to Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003), these 'scapegoating' practices of the new crop of employees could be interpreted as attempts to control organisational discourse.

Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990) made another important contribution to the discussion about culture manageability. Their study of English slaughtermen points to the importance of occupational, as opposed to organisational, culture. The authors emphasise the uniqueness of the patterns of meaning that are closely related to the type of work a given group is devoted to, which can, at times, be in stark contrast to the culture promoted by management. Furthermore, it is noted that the values of the wider society leave a mark on the values embraced by occupational groups, either being mirrored in the work situation or transformed. The slaughtermen, for example, inverted some of the values of the society they were part of by celebrating the dirt connected with their work, which was a reflection of their value system and their self-perception as

embodiments of masculinity. As Ackroyd and Crowdy (1990) observe, the fact that the values of an occupational group are embedded in their work patterns and affected by societal factors rather than the espoused values of the management, makes culture management more of an illusion than a real possibility.

To conclude, the answer to the culture manageability question tends to polarise the views between practitioners and the majority of the culture scholars, as observed by Ogbonna and Harris (2002a). Interestingly it is also true for the here presented research. The assumptions on which the thesis is built are close to the culture 'purists' or 'pessimists' stance which rejects the possibility that culture can be managed. The dominant approach in the researched organisation was in line with the culture 'optimists' perspective encompassing the view that organisational culture can be managed and thus controlled. Furthermore, while in this work organisations are conceptualised as cultures, the prevailing belief from the field is that the organisation has a culture (a situation also reported by Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008), or actually suffers from a lack thereof. Consequently, the efforts observed in the field focused on building and managing an emerging culture, whereas I looked at these attempts as expressions of an evolving culture. Similarly, leadership is seen in this thesis as one of the processes of organising, while the conceptualisation of leadership encountered in the fieled presented leadership as a major driving force in the culture change process. Leadership was invoked as a value in itself and a tool for change. It shaped the imagination of the organisation members and was used as an important dimension of their organisational reality. For this reason, in the remainder of this chapter, we I will turn to the concept of leadership.

First, I will briefly present some influential academic theorising and research on the relationship between leadership and organisational culture. This brief overview will be followed by a discussion of the dominant view of leadership (both in the academic discourse and the researched organisation) as a tool for change. The unquestionable popularity of the leadership notion will be then framed as part of fantasies of leadership that are subsequently juxtaposed with the less frequently acknowledged phenomenon of toxic leadership.

2.5.2 Leadership and culture change

As was indicated in the previous section, in relation to organisational culture, leadership is often considered in terms of its potential to influence and shape a given culture. This is particularly evident in the 'culture as variable studies' (Smircich, 1983). What these studies share with the opposing perspective of 'organisations as culture', is an interest in leadership as symbolic action. Culture change protagonists typically present the symbolic potential of leaders as a great tool to manage and manipulate culture so that it is in line with the organisational and the leader's goals. The culture 'purists', on the other hand, regard leadership as symbolic action within a wider perspective of organising; a stance which highlights the dialogic nature of the meaning attached to symbols and thus attributes greater agency and attention to other organisation members, often conceptualised as followers. These social actors actively interpret the actions of a leader; they can accept, but equally reject or transform the intended meanings of messages communicated to them. Thus, leadership is not only about sensegiving in which a leader attempts to 'influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality' (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991:442). Leadership is also, if not first and foremost, about sensemaking in which organisation members are trying to make sense of their organisational reality, of which a leader is part.

Schein (1985), writing from a functional, managerially-oriented perspective, suggests that leaders embed and transmit culture through a set of mechanisms, that he refers to as 'primary embedding mechanisms', which include:

1. things leaders focus on, measure and control regularly,
2. reactions to critical incidents and crisis situations,
3. allocation of resources,
4. allocation of rewards and status,
5. conscious role modelling, teaching and coaching,
6. recruitment, selection, promotion and excommunication of staff (ibid:246).

These leader's mechanisms of 'getting the message across', as Schein referred to them, have a great symbolic potential. They signal what the leader considers to be important

and which behaviour he or she wishes to promote. These primary embedding mechanisms can be supplemented with secondary reinforcement mechanisms, providing that they are consistent with one another. Among the secondary culture-creating mechanisms, Schein (1985) locates: organisational design and structure, organisational systems and procedures, rites and rituals, design of physical space, facades and buildings, stories about important events and people, formal statements of organisational philosophy, creeds and charters (ibid:246). This view was further developed by George and colleagues (1999), who reiterated the importance of primary and secondary reinforcement mechanisms and what the leader does and how he does it, and further highlighted the need of consistency in leader's behaviour with the espoused values and the articulated vision.

While Schein's (1985) interests lie primarily with ways in which a leader can shape culture, which is not the approach adopted in this thesis, the mechanisms identified by Schein (1985/2005) merit considerable attention, albeit for different reasons than the ones suggested by the quoted author. In this work, the processes labelled as 'primary embedding mechanisms' as well as the cultural artefacts that were assembled under the 'secondary embedding mechanisms' category are important cultural elements due to their ability to affect employees sensemaking and to function as cultural symbols. Thus, to paraphrase Pfeffer (1981:47), symbols are culturally potent, only if organisation members imbue them with meaning. In this perspective, the interpretation of symbols, as well as the outcome of employees' sensemaking, is considered to be beyond a leader's control. These mechanisms will be here conceptualised not as leader's tools, but rather, as a dynamic property of a social group that negotiates their meaning.

More generally, Pfeffer (1981) points to the impact that leadership has on the beliefs and attitudes, as well as the sentiments, perceptions and commitment of the organisational members. These effects of leadership are, according to Pfeffer (1981), greater than its influence on the bottom line (see also Bryman, 1996; Fairhurst, 2005; Kotter, 1990). Pfeffer focused on management and leadership as symbolic actions that serve as means to the management of meaning (Smircich and Morgan, 1982). His attention to the symbolic and expressive level of organisational analysis emphasized management and leadership as actions crucial in creating and maintaining organisational paradigms. It involved not only labelling and sensemaking activities that make the

organisational reality sensible for its participants, but also developing a social consensus around these labels and definitions (Pfeffer, 1981:21). What matters here are the perceptions of organisation members as these form the basis for action.

Expanding on this point, Smircich and Morgan (1982) in their seminal article on leadership, suggest framing leadership as the management of meaning so as to facilitate the understanding of organising. In their view, leadership is 'realised in the process whereby one or more individuals succeeds in attempting to frame and define the reality of others.' (ibid:258, for a more comprehensive discussion of the framing literature see e.g. Fairhurst, 2005). Leadership as the management of meaning takes place when leader's actions and statements are put in the context of a concrete situation. According to the authors, the things a leader does and says capture other organisation members' attention and focus it on an extracted element of their experience. This experience is then juxtaposed with the leader's actions and subsequently interpreted. The resulting interpretations might be manifold and inconsistent with the leader's intentions.

Such conceptualisation of leadership emphasises its social nature, as well as the role of followers as integral elements of the leadership equation. This dialectic nature of leadership, however, can also be a source of tensions, as followers might reject the interpretations of events put forward by the leader. For example, in the case quoted by Smircich and Morgan (1982), the attempts of a leader to define the reality of others was counter-effective in that it produced interpretations which saw the leader as the main culprit for the organisational ailment. However, as the authors emphasise, even when the definitions of a situation are strikingly different than the ones intended by the leader, the outcome still has to do with the management of meaning, since the leader serves as the major reference point in the employees' sensemaking.

As Weick *et al.* (2005:410) noted, "organization emerges through sensemaking" since people organise to make sense of equivocal input and to "order the intrinsic flux of human action" (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002:570). As it has been illustrated, leadership plays an important part in the attempts to make sense of organisational experience since it shapes key sensemaking references and at the same time is a key referent point itself (Pye, 2005). Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that leadership attracts

significant attention not only among academics but also among practitioners who seek to use its potential and appeal.

2.5.2.1 Ambiguity of Leadership

Although academics cannot reach an agreement on a definition of leadership (for a comprehensive review see e.g. Bryman 2004 or Yukl, 2002), there seems to be an increasing consensus on the fact that leadership is actually a highly ambiguous and essentially contested concept (Grint, 2005). This ambiguity of leadership is imaginatively captured by Stogdill (1974, cited in Grint, 2005:16) who suggested that "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it". The vibrant academic discourse on leadership comprises numerous recurring and often revisited themes as to the nature, types and roles or leadership, which Wood and Case (2006) call 'refrains of leadership'.

One of the recurring 'refrains of leadership' is formed around the discussion on the role of leadership as opposed to management. Managers are often presented as rational and bureaucratic, having a practical and administrative orientation. Leaders, on the other hand, tend to be depicted as heroes with a vision, passion, courage and great deal of imagination (Meindl *et al.*, 1985; Raelin, 2004; Zaleznik, 2004). Kotter (1990), for example, sees leaders as agents of change and locates the responsibilities of managers in the domain of solving everyday problems. Leaders transform the organisational reality (Conger, 1999), managers, on the other hand, maintain stability (Barker, 2001). As observed by a number of authors (e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Knights and Willmott, 2007), leadership tends to be defined in better sounding words in comparison to management. Leadership often evokes the imagery of Messiah (Western, 2008) or a hero (Meindl *et al.*, 1985); its tasks are compared to the ones of an artist or a priest (Hatch, Kostera and Kozminski, 2004), whereas managers are associated with more down to earth images, such as the ones of a Miser (Czarniwska-Joerges and Wolff, 1991).

The ambiguity of the leadership concept, which appears to trouble a number of academics (Pye, 2005), seems to account for its success and popularity. Røvik (2002),

for example, pointed precisely to ambiguity as one of the features that characterizes highly influential ideas, such as leadership. He calls these fast spreading ideas 'superstandards'. He suggests that they all carry a promise of performance improvement, if adopted, and a threat of bankruptcy, if ignored. Further, successful concepts have well-known users who can be used as authorisation of their effectiveness. 'Superstandards' are also portrayed as lending themselves to be universally applied and have a catchy title to attract attention. They are promoted as a thing of the future and, finally, they leave some space for interpretation, which Benders and van Veen (2001) referred to as 'interpretive viability' – only a loose tie-up between the concept's label and its content. Interpretive viability not only contributes to a concept's success and facilitates its diffusion, but it also enables organisational actors to pursue their political agendas by contributing to politically charged discourses (Scarbrough and Swan, 2001), which was also reported to be the case in organisational leadership discourse (e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Pye, 2005; Sveningsson and Larsson, 2006). Thus leadership, as a highly ambiguous concept, continues its seduction among organisation members and, as a intricately complex social phenomenon, retains its appeal for organisation scholars.

2.5.2.2 Fantasies of leadership

The ubiquity of the leadership themes in the academic discourse as well as the continuing interest in leaders displayed by practitioners, management consultants and the media is well captured by the notion of the 'romance of leadership' (Meindl, *et al.*, 1985; for a recent discussion see Bligh and Schyns, 2007).

Meindl and colleagues (1985) suggested that the notion of leadership has been inculcated with mystery and imagery. Leadership is often viewed as a major force in shaping organisational events. Meindl *et al.* (1985) further found that people have a tendency to over-attribute organisational success or failure to leaders. Leaders are believed to exercise control over phenomena that are, according to the authors, beyond control. Rather than heroic actors, leaders are embodiments of a joint fantasy of control over organisational fate. Simultaneously, the 'romance of leadership' implies a

'subordination' of followership which becomes imbued with negative connotations (Uhl-Bien and Pillai, 2007).

Similarly, Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff (1991) suggest that the role of a leader, like the one of an entrepreneur and manager, will never go out of fashion. In their view, these roles should be perceived as enactments of archetypes; 'symbolic expressions of collective hopes and fears, played out ('performed') on the organizational stage' (ibid:529). The authors, adopting the definition of Krefting and Frost (1986: cited in Czarniawska-Joerges and Wolff, 1991) view 'archetypes as personalities', that is idealized, exaggerated and universally shared symbols which embody the essence of human experience. In this context, leadership is to be seen as a symbolic process. It can be perceived as successful only when it takes the form of a dramatic performance that is able to fulfill the expectations of the audience and other social actors. The role of a leader, then, due to its archetypical nature, performs important social functions, primarily in the symbolic sphere of human experience. Leaders embody our fantasies and so, to quote Bligh and Schyns (2007), 'the romance lives on'.

The fantasies of leadership also apply to individual identity work, as observed by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) and more recently by Sveningsson and Larsson (2006). These two quoted papers point to the fact that managers are heavily influenced by the grand (coming from the media and academia), as well as the organisational, discourse on leadership. Middle managers were found to embrace the vision of themselves as leaders, despite the fact that this was only loosely coupled with the everyday reality in which they displayed behaviours commonly associated with managers. This gulf between claims and actions remained, however, undetected by the managers. They were engaged in leadership in the spheres of fantasy, which positively affected their self-perceptions. Sveningsson and Larsson (2006) see this identity work (see also Watson, 2008) which is stimulated by the organisational discourse as a form of cultural-ideological control aimed at assuring employees' commitment. To paraphrase Calás and Smircich (1991), leadership is seduction not by what it says, but by how it stimulates the fantasy.

2.5.2.3 The myth of inherently good leadership and reality of toxic leaders

The romanticised imagery of leadership is also visible in the scarcity of work on its downsides. Destructive leadership is still a largely unexplored domain (Starratt and Grandy, 2010; Tepper, 2000; Tierney and Tepper, 2007), especially when compared to the overwhelming body of literature devoted to the positive sides of leadership. Some authors, such as Burns (2003), even claim that leadership is by definition inherently good and examples of what might be referred to as destructive leadership are illustrations of "ruling" and not "leading". Nonetheless, there are already some interesting findings regarding the downsides of leadership.

It has been observed that leaders do not always have the best interest of the organisation in mind and often pursue their own goals, (Kellerman, 2004; O'Connor *et al.* 1995; Einarsen *et al.*, 2007), with disastrous consequences (Conger, 1990). Depending on the adopted definition of, and approach to, leadership (for a typology see Grint, 2005), scholars have either focused on the personal features of a destructive leader, their destructive behaviours or the destructive outcomes for individuals (including the aggressors), groups and organizations.

While there seems to be some emerging agreement as to the existence of the downsides of leadership, more inconsistency arises on the conceptual and definitional level. Researchers have coined different terms to capture the negative consequences of leadership, ranging from bullies (Harvey *et al.*, 2007), abusive supervisors (Tepper, 2000), (petty) tyrants (Ashforth, 1994; Ma, Karri and Chittipeddi, 2004) to toxic leaders (Goldman, 2006; Lipman-Blumen, 2005, Pelletier, 2010). In this work, the notion of toxic and destructive leadership will be used interchangeably, as motivated by the imagery present in the tales from the field collected in the research process and will be defined along the lines proposed by Starratt and Grandy (2010:151):

> Employees' *perceptions* of the extent to which supervisors engage in hostile and non-hostile (e.g. unfriendly, intimidating, displeasing or upsetting) verbal and nonverbal behaviours – excluding physical contact – over an *extended period of time*. These behaviours may or may not be *conscious actions* by the supervisor, but whether conscious or not, the *consequences* can be far reaching *for* the employees, *social groups and organizations as a whole*. (emphasis added)

The above presented definition draws attention to four important aspects of toxic leadership. First, it is about employees perceptions, as opposed to observable facts,

which is in line with the interpretive paradigm adopted in this thesis. Secondly, it excludes one-off events but rather focuses on the long-term phenomena. Moreover, it does not assume intentionality of the abusive acts, but, as already mentioned, focuses on the receiver or target of such acts and their interpretation. The final important element in the adopted definition are the levels of analysis. This definition invites analysis of the negative consequences of destructive leadership on different levels, which follows the recommendation by Harvey *et al.* (2007), and which will be attempted later in the thesis.

2.6 Concluding remarks on the literature review

The purpose of the literature review, as highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, was to locate the current study within the relevant wider body of literature. To this end, different definitions and approaches to organisational culture have been discussed and subsequently supplemented with a review of the existing research on cultural engineering (Kunda, 1992).

The literature review has demonstrated that there is a considerable body of work authored by culture optimists (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002a) proposing numerous change models to aid managers in replacing the existing and no longer desirable culture with the new, also unified, one (Martin, 2002). The change models have been found to advocate cultural change as 'grand technocratic projects' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008), rather than the everyday reframing of reality (Alvesson, 2002; Smircich and Morgan, 1992). As a result, they have been described as focusing typically on sensegiving efforts (Dunford and Jones, 2000; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), as opposed to sensemaking (Weick, 1995), and presenting leadership as a tool and vehicle for change (e.g. Kotter, 1996).

Furthermore, the review of empirical studies has shown that culture change initiatives are often intertwined with substantive changes (e.g. Casey, 1999; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003, see also Anthony, 1994 for a theoretical discussion). They are also expected by their initiators to produce a 'domino effect' whereby increased commitment resulting from identification with the organisation and its official values is seen as

leading to increased productivity and profitability (Ogbor, 2001). These alluring promises of economic success, as articulated by the culture engineering movement (e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982 or Peters and Waterman, 1982), have been noted to be based on the assumption of culture manageability. This notion, however, has also been discussed as having been challenged by some critically orientated writers who have disputed the feasibility of culture management (e.g. Fitzgerald, 1988; Martin, 2002; Reynolds, 1986) as well as questioned its moral and ethical foundations (e.g. de Roche, 1998; Willmott, 1993).

In terms of the culture manageability question, the assumptions of this thesis have been presented as being in line with the argument put forward by Legge (1994), and later reiterated by other authors (e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Martin, 2002; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). As Legge (1994) argues, studies which conceptualise culture as linked primarily to behaviours and/ or the espoused values are more likely to find some evidence of success of cultural manipulation than research which sees culture as also being composed of ideational elements, such as patters of meaning. In this light, it is hardly surprising that studies adopting a more comprehensive understanding of culture, as embraced also in this thesis, typically highlight the unintended consequences of and 'confused responses to' planned cultural interventions (e.g. Harris and Ogbonna, 2002; 2011).

In this vein, the review of some critically oriented literature has demonstrated how the ones who might be conceived of as recipients of change (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006) and expected to be 'subsumed into the confining identity' of the corporate unity (Scheers and Rhodes, 2006:233) can become active participants and co-creators of change, a point which will be elaborated on later in the thesis. In this respect, the reviewed research by culture pessimists (Ogbonna and Harris, 2002) has not only highlighted the totalising effects of the cultural 'apparatus of ruling' (see deRoche, 1998; Willmott, 1993) but also showed how the deceptively vulnerable organisation members can create spaces of resistance (Gabriel, 1995; 1999; Mumby, 2005), for example by engaging in the officially sponsored discourses (Chreim, 2006) – a theme which will be explored in more depth in the discussion section of this thesis.

More specifically, as the review has demonstrated, cultural engineering can lead to: 'resigned behavioural compliance' (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990), ambiguity (Tornbull, 2001), ambivalence and indifference among staff (Murphy and Mackenzie Davey, 2002), scepticism (Höplf *et al.,* 1992) and cynicism (Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Kunda, 1992). What is more, the cited research has also illustrated how cultural interventions may reinforce the beliefs and convictions which they were originally designed to counteract (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; see also Cha and Edmondson, 2006), and how organisation members can re-invent and re-interpret the officially espoused values (Ogbonna and Harris, 1998).

In addition, the literature review has pointed out the importance of the issues of individual, group and organisational identity (compare Watson, 2008) which come to the foreground in times of change (see e.g. Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Parker, 2002; Reissner, 2010) as organisation members attempt to make sense of the changes and their place in them. As the literature on the topic suggests, these are best studied through the sensemaking stories participants author when reflecting upon their experiences and, more generally, the intensified 'narrative labour' (Brown *et al.*, 2009:327) in times of change.

More generally, the current study has been described as sympathising with the more critically orientated research on creating and promoting 'designer cultures' (Casey, 1999), and in particular the strand of research which fosters the 'sociological understanding of … the perspectives and experiences of those involved' in and targeted by officially sponsored cultural interventions (Badham *et al*., 2003:724). Sensitised by Martin's (1992; 2002) three perspective framework, this thesis aims to further contribute to the existing studies focused on 'un-entwining monological narratives of change' (Cairns and Beech, 2003:177) rather then providing a prescriptive, managerially-centric account of events. How this will be achieved, however, is discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapter of the thesis which is devoted in its entirety to the research methodology of the current study.

3 Methodology

As Barley (1990:220) has rightly observed, 'all research stems from and remains caught in a tangled web of practical, personal and theoretical agendas'. The purpose of this methodology chapter will therefore be to guide the reader through the 'tangled webs' of the here discussed research. The chapter starts with an outline of the research design which is followed by a discussion of the hallmarks of the research, as recommended by Yanow (2006). After presenting the data collection methods, I move on to discuss the data analysis. The limitations of the study, and ethics of the project, as well as the question of researcher reflexivity are addressed throughout the chapter rather than being regarded as separate topics.

Before a more detailed discussion of the research methodology adopted in this research project can be presented, it is worth clarifying what I mean by 'methodology', as opposed to individual research methods. I conceptualise methodology after Hatch and Yanow (2008:24) as:

> 'the philosophical presuppositions embedded in research methods – the assumptions, often unconsciously made, about 'reality status' of the subject under study and its 'know-ability'.

As Hatch and Yanow (2008) observe, the researcher's philosophical assumptions often remain unstated, which makes it harder for the readers to assess the quality of the research. Given this, I make clear that the study reported in this thesis is founded on constructivist ontology, its epistemology, on the other hand, is interpretive. What is meant by this is that reality is socially constructed and (re)produced in daily interactions among different social actors (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In this perspective, the researcher needs to look at the context-specific meanings developed by the social actors rather than attempt to formulate general principles or laws. From this standpoint, researchers are seen as carrying their own cultural baggage, marked by their personal experience and pursuing their individual agenda. Hence, authors are believed to be able to offer their own interpretation of the investigated material, rather than present an objective account of the studied reality (Martin, 2002). Hatch and Yanow (2008) illustrate this point employing the metaphor of painting. As they suggest, 'seeing is interwoven with the modes or methods used to 'see'' (idem:38). Similarly to a painter, every researcher conducts research and interprets the findings depending on their perception of the studied reality. A similar observation is made by Geertz (1993:29)

who suggests that the cultural reading proposed by researchers, regardless of how thoroughly it is conducted, is 'intrinsically incomplete'. It is this necessarily incomplete reading, however, which the readers are introduced with and based on which they form their interpretation. For this reason, it is believed that a researcher's reflexivity is crucial for both the research process and the research outcome (Hibbert *et al.*, 2008, see also Cunliffe, 2003).

In this vein, I would like to warn the reader that I tend to find myself surprisingly often looking at the studied organisational reality through the differentiation perspective, even though I make conscious efforts to embrace both the patterned similarities and ambiguity in the data, as recommended by Martin (2002). My sympathies largely lie with the less privileged members of the organisation, as it is usually the case with critical scholars (Alvesson and Willmott, 1992).

3.1 Research design

The research design of the study evolved over time and was affected by changes in the field to a much greater extent than initially anticipated. It incorporates a number of data collection methods and analytical strategies, and is inspired by a range of theoretical perspectives. In this respect, collage as a metaphor for the development of a research design in qualitative research as put forward by Denzin and Lincoln (1994), and later developed by Kincheloe (2001), seems particularly appropriate to capture the evolving and complex nature of this project.

My first encounters with the field took place well before the here described research was undertaken. Initially, I interacted with the organisation within the boundaries of a different role, namely that of a language tutor. At that time I was a postgraduate student of applied linguistics and later sociology and simultaneously worked as a Business English teacher. As a consequence, I remained in constant contact with several organisation members for approximately three years during which time I visited the company site a few times a week. Generally, the conversations with the organisation members revolved round their organisational lives which I gradually grew familiar with and became increasingly interested in. Prompted by the master's programme in sociology, the idea to carry out sociological research into the culture of the organisation started to crystallise. The idea was welcomed by the General Manager of the

organisation who at that time was conveniently a student of mine. My personal connections to this key gatekeeper were thus fundamental in enabling me to embark on what turned out to be a longitudinal qualitative research project.

Initially, working on a dissertation in sociology, I was interested in the different subcultures within the researched organisation and its two divisions, one of which gradually became the focus of attention as Aporia[2] (a pseudonym). With time, having turned into a doctoral student in sociology[3], I became more and more intrigued by the changing expatriate General Managers in the organisation and their potential impact on the culture of the organisation. As it turned out, however, the access to the organisation was much more difficult to obtain than during the first wave. Although I still remained in close contact with a few potential gatekeepers, and my students, the possibility of entering the organisation looked bleak.

At that time, the organisation was starting to undergo a difficult period of time, later in the study referred to as organisational depression. Consequently, I was advised by my gatekeepers not to approach the organisation, as the request for access was bound to be declined. Therefore, I waited a year and a half before attempting to secure access to carry out the second part of the research, this time around with an intended stronger focus on expatriate leadership in relation to organisational culture. However, the few attempts to contact the Human Resources Director produced no result for another six months. Finally, becoming increasingly pressed for time, I decided to try to open another door to the organisation and directly contacted the newly appointed General Manager. To my surprise, I was swiftly invited for a meeting.

As it turned out, the new head of the organisation was interested in the culture study I was suggesting as it coincided with his own initiative on promoting organisational values. After some negotiations and signing a confidentiality agreement, access was granted on condition that I provided the management with a report of the study, together with some recommendations. I insisted that I could not act as a consultant hired by the management, but rather as a sociologist and an independent researcher. It was agreed that I would carry out my study as I had intended and produce an interim report with

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[2] A more detailed presentation of Aporia can be found in the 'Company profile and background' chapter.
[3] I embarked on the doctoral journey in Poland at the Polish Academy of Sciences which I left after having obtained a studentship from the Business School at Oxford Brookes University.

some recommendations for action. Subsequently, I made sure that the management and the informants were clear about my role and my independence from management.

Initially, I perceived the obligation to provide recommendations as highly problematic as I wanted to carry out an ethnographic study. Ethnography is typically considered as irreconcilable with consulting (see e.g. Barley, 1990). Eventually, I concluded that obtaining access was of overriding importance for me and that I could provide recommendations formed on the basis of feedback gathered from the informants. In this way I could act as an intermediary between the management and the staff, as opposed to a consultant focused on attaining managerial objectives. In the course of the study, I was addressed as a researcher, sometimes a sociologist, or a PhD student. At times, some informants humorously referred to me as a journalist, thus hinting at the numerous scandals revealed at that time by investigative journalists in relation to pharmaceutical companies (see chapter four).

As I have already indicated, I was initially interested in carrying out my doctoral research into the experiences of local staff in being managed by changing expatriate General Managers. However, by the time I had obtained permission to re-enter the field, the organisation was no longer managed by an expatriate General Manager. This was the first big 'surprise of ethnography' (Schweder, 1997) that I experienced and, with time, gradually learnt to appreciate. I reconsidered my research question and formulated new research objectives. I was still interested in the experiences of being managed by constantly changing expatriate General Managers, but this time round the retrospective gaze was to inform the understanding of the organisational present, a perspective which Wolfram Cox and Hassard (2007) refer to as 'interpreting the past'.

When the doctoral research was undertaken, the management of the organisation were launching, with the help of consultants, a project to enhance organisational culture through the promotion of organisational values. This initiative evoked in me strong associations with the excellence literature so popular in the 1980's (e.g. Peters and Waterman, 1982; Deal and Kennedy,1982). The investigation of this initiative and its experiences among the staff appeared particularly interesting, especially in light of the turbulent organisational history of the organisation. I therefore decided to do a culturally sensitive analysis of a culture change initiative, as advocated by Wilkins and Dyer (1988). I was not only interested in how the project was carried out, but most

importantly I wanted to get an understanding of the organisation members' experiences, perceptions and attitudes towards this effort, as well as the outcomes of the programme.

The objectives of my study called for longitudinal research, which would best enable me to follow the evolution of the project in terms of its design, implementation and organisation members' experiences of it. My preferred research method was ethnography, as it enables an in-depth exploration of culture. What, however, ethnography exactly stands for is by no means unequivocal.

There are different takes on what constitutes ethnography (Krzyworzeka, 2008), further supplemented by discussions on the specific nature of organisational ethnography (see e.g. Kostera, 2007; Yanow, 2009). Ethnography is often defined as a research method, equated with doing fieldwork, whereby fieldwork is understood as participant observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Other takes on ethnography emphasise the product of fieldwork, linking ethnography with the written account from the field (Van Maanen, 1988). Finally, some researchers point to the 'anthropological frame of mind' (Czarniawska, 1992), or conceptualise ethnography as a 'way of knowing' (Yanow, 2009) or a 'way of seeing' (Wolcott, 1999), where 'ethnographic sensibility' (Pader, 2006) is what makes it distinct.

The work reported here can be referred to as ethnography mainly in the last sense, since observation was not used extensively to collect the data due to access constraints. Initially, the access that had been negotiated formally gave me permission to attend selected staff meetings and to observe a number of job interviews. The implementation of the agreement, however, came up against insurmountable difficulties. For example, despite my persistent requests, the Head of the Human Resources Department refused to allow me to participate in any of the job interviews that were held at the time of the research. Similarly, I was never invited to any of the day-to-day staff meetings and when I asked for permission, this was refused. As a result, observation and shadowing, so suitable for ethnography (Czarniawska, 2007; 2008), and which were among my most preferred methods of data collection, regrettably had to be discarded. For this reason, I decided to do as much observation as it was possible, given the organisational constraints, and incorporate a number of different research methods to ensure a rich set of data.

The research was designed as a longitudinal exploratory study based on three waves of intensive fieldwork. All together the data were gathered over the period of approximately four years, between October 2003 and January 2008. The hallmarks of the study, as defined by Yanow (2006), are summarised in the table below.

Table 3: Hallmarks of the research based on Yanow (2006)

Hallmarks of the research	Description
Access	Initially secured thanks to a gatekeeper. In the second and third waves, access in exchange for presentation of findings and recommendations.
Time	1. First wave: October 2003-January 2004 2. Second wave: December 2006– February 2007 3. Third wave: January 2008
Duration	1. First wave: Approximately three times a week, from 3-5 hours 2. Second wave: One and a half month of daily visits to the field, approximately 5 hours daily and one month of more infrequent visits, with varying duration, from 3 – 9 hours 3. Third wave: Two weeks, approximately 10 hours daily, also two weeks of informal conversations and e-mail exchanges
Space: research settings	Polish subsidiary of an American pharmaceutical company, all departments of one division where (expatriate) GMs changed approximately every two years.
Exposure	Purposive sampling of participants with varying tenure, seniority and departmental affiliation.
Silences	Not known except for one expatriate General Manager who did not respond to the invitation to the interview (after he was transferred to a different location) and two other employees who declined the invitation for interview.
Researcher's role and identity	Academic researcher, story-collector, fellow-traveller, sociologist, student, formally also a consultant (due to the obligation to provide recommendations based on the findings of the research).
Being there	Evidenced in numerous quotes from the field.

The first wave of the research lasted approximately four months and is here regarded as a preliminary study, as its objectives were fairly broad and focused on getting an understanding of the organisational culture of the two distinct divisions in the organisation, one of which became the sole focus of attention in the subsequent phases of the research. The second phase comprised three months of almost daily presence in the field. The final phase of research was spread over approximately a month of engagement with the field. The second and third waves of the research were carried out within a year's interval during which the management of the organisation engaged in promoting organisational values. The year's interval was determined by the nature of the culture change programme undertaken by the management. It was a one year project, and I was invited to observe the launch of the project and later to assist in its evaluation after it had officially been completed. More intense participation in the field between the two phases of the research would have produced different and most probably richer data, in particular in terms of the process of change, as was the case with the recent work of Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008). Nonetheless, this research, unlike Alvesson and Sveningsson's project, was to a lesser extent interested in the process of implementing the culture change than in organisation member's experiences of, and sensemaking about and around, the project.

3.2 Data collection methods

A number of data collection methods were used which included: semi-structured interviews, photo and organisational attribute collages, document analysis, and observation, each of which will be now discussed separately in more depth.

3.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews, which are sometimes described as 'the most ubiquitous of all data collection techniques' (Cassell, 2009:500), were my primary method of data gathering. Over the course of the study, I carried out eighty five interviews with purposefully selected participants. The majority of interviews lasted slightly over an hour, with the shortest interview lasting approximately half an hour, and the longest more than three hours. All were recorded and subsequently transcribed. In each wave of the research the participants were purposefully selected across the organisation to represent a polyphony of voices (Hazen, 1993). The selection was further motivated by the principle of

differentiation. The idea was to reach participants with various lengths of service in the organisation, who came from different departments and occupied different positions in the organisational hierarchy. In the second and third waves of research, my freedom to select participants was slightly compromised by the requirement of the General Manager not to contact members of staff who had already been selected to take part in the consultants' study. This restriction was imposed on me after I had started doing the fieldwork and was presented as a non-negotiable condition. The participants appointed to take part in the consultants project were randomly selected from among four categories of staff: old and new staff, whereby new staff were defined as those who had been working for the organisation for less than two years, and managerial and non-managerial staff. The selection was carried out by the General Manager's assistant who had been provided with the selection criteria by the consultants.

The process of selecting participants for my study was facilitated by the fact that I obtained a list of all staff, together with their phone numbers, positions, length of service and finally location. I insisted that my selection be kept anonymous and therefore I arranged all meetings myself and refused to share the final list of participants with anyone. At some stage, I had to, however, consult the General Manager's assistant, as her list had changed, and ask her to exclude some participants from her study because they were already included in mine. By and large, I tried to adhere to the restriction imposed on me as to the selection of research participants. Generally, I did not get the impression that it significantly affected my freedom as a researcher. In a few situations, however, it was important for me to contact some participants whom I should have excluded from the study if I was to follow the General Manager's executive decision. These few members of staff had emerged from my data as potentially very important informants. In these instances I disregarded the restriction and contacted the participants. I would always explain the situation to them and ask whether they would agree to talk to me nonetheless. In all cases, the participants agreed and I obtained valuable material for my research. In the third wave of research, I selected the participants to my study before the consultants' list was prepared. This meant that I had to make sure that my participants were not included in the other study, in line with the wish of the General Manager.

In the research design, I attempted not to consciously silence any voices. However, over the course of the study, three participants declined the invitation to take part in the research, of which one, the controversial expatriate General Manager, is considered to have affected the richness of the data. I proved unsuccessful in arranging an interview with him. Although I had exchanged some correspondence with him and offered to carry out the interview in his current country of residence, the interview never took place. After sending, on the expatriate's request, the planned interview guideline, I did not hear from him again. Although it was not my intention, it is possible that the planned interview guideline might have discouraged the former General Manager from taking part in the research project. Furthermore, two other members refused to be interviewed without giving any reason, one in the second wave of research, the other in the third. While I believe that the first refusal (of a Product Manager) was motivated by a lack of time, the second one (of an accountant) seemed to be indicative of more complex issues. As the participant's fellow colleague explained, the accountant's reluctance was likely to have been motivated by fear of exposure. In this case, the accountant's choice to remain silent can be regarded as an interesting finding in itself and as such will be discussed further in the thesis. In what follows, I will describe in more detail the different approaches to interviewing adopted at different stages of the research project.

In the first and preliminary phase of the research I carried out fifteen interviews with staff who had been with the organisation for at least two years. This selection criterion was underpinned by the belief that the participants needed enough time to develop an understanding of the organisational culture. The interviews in the first wave of the research were far more structured than the ones designed in the later stages of the project and contained a fair amount of closed questions. Consequently, they triggered shorter and less insightful, as it now seems, narrative accounts than the ones carried out in the later stages of the project. The questions asked in this phase aimed at getting a general understanding of the culture of the organisation. The interview guide was divided into six sections and covered the following areas: vision and mission of the organisation, promoted behaviours, relationships at work, communication, risk-taking and the changes that the organisation had undergone.

In the second and major wave of the research, I conducted forty-five interviews. In this phase the required length of service was reduced to six months and a new group of participants was introduced. This change was motivated by the developments in the field which had taken place between the two phases of fieldwork. By the time I undertook the second wave of research, the organisation had undergone some dramatic changes associated with the period of toxic leadership, described later in the thesis. Consequently many members of staff left the organisation, and many new ones came on board. In light of the partly retrospective focus of the second wave of research, I contacted some participants who had left the organisation during the turbulent times. Additionally, three interviews were carried out with participants who were in their notice period. Incorporation in the research of former participants, as well as members of staff who were about to leave the organisation, was part of the already described attempt to incorporate a wide array of views.

The interviews in the second wave of research were divided into three distinctive parts. The first stage of the interview was of a retrospective nature and aimed at gathering participants' views on the organisation's history and evolution over the years, as well as its formal leaders. Subsequently, the interviews would turn to the present and the changes that were taking place after the arrival of the first Polish General Manager (see chapter five). I asked the participants to tell me something about the project of promoting organisational values and their views on this undertaking. I also asked a number of questions regarding the current situation in the organsation, relationships at work and the difficulties they were facing. Finally, at the end of the interview, I would ask the participants to compose and subsequently discuss a photo collage – a method of data collection which I will discuss separately in the latter part of the methodology section.

In the last wave of the research twenty-five participants were interviewed, including a consultant involved in the culture study at Aporia. The interview with the consultant focused on the relations between the consulting company and the researched organisation. It also looked at the consultant's perspective on leadership and the promotion of organisational values. The interviews with the organisation members, on the other hand, concentrated on the changes that the organisation had undergone during

the year of my absence from the field. Similarly to the second wave, they were loosely structured.

The interviews would start with a very general question about what I had missed during my year away. Then, I would ask more focused questions about the things that had been on top of the agenda during the past year, priorities that were set, projects that were introduced, etc. Following this, the participants were asked to compose a word collage (see further below). The subsequent part of the interview then focused on the organisational values. More specifically, I asked about the participants' perceptions of, and attitudes towards, what was happening in relation to the project and its consequences. The next part of the interview was centered around the themes that emerged from the previous wave of research. Before carrying out an interview with a participant whom I had interviewed previously, I would familiarize myself with the transcript of that interview and refer to some points mentioned there. For example I would inquire whether there were any changes in the relations between old and new employees, the attitude to the past, etc. Finally, at the end of the interview I would ask the participants I had interviewed before, to look at the photo collages they had composed the previous year. I would ask them to look at their old collages of the present and future and tell me what their thoughts on them were in relation to what had changed since then.

3.2.2 Documentary analysis

The usage of multiple research methods to study a given phenomenon has long been recognised. Martin (2002), for example, has convincingly argued that a multi-method approach focuses the investigative attention on different aspects of the phenomenon under study and thus offers alternative ways of interpretation. In the here described study, data obtained in course of interviews and collages were supplemented with documentary analysis.

Documentary analysis can be defined as 'an integrated and conceptually informed method, procedure, and technique for locating, identifying, and analyzing documents for their relevance, significance, and meaning' (Altheide, 1999:236). Documentary

analysis, however, does not constitute 'a clearcut and well-organized category' (Platt, 1999:206). As a consequence, researchers have a substantial amount of freedom as to the choices they make in the application and design of documentary analysis. Therefore, instead of following a set of well-established guidelines, the researchers need to devise an approach which is viable for their research project and to present a rationale for their choices (Phillips and Di Domenico, 2009). In other words, 'the meaning and significance of all documents is informed by the research perspective and act' (Altheide, 1999:236).

Traditionally, in organisation studies, researchers are expected to focus on a small number of documents and analyse them in depth (see e.g. Silverman, 2006). However, an in-depth analysis of a single document can also be successfully combined with an analysis of multiple documents (Altheide,1999).

In social studies carried out from the constructivist perspective documents are approached as 'socially situated products' (Scott, 1990:34). This means that the investigative effort is directed towards the social construction of documents rather than their accuracy or potential bias (Silverman, 2006). As Atkinson and Coffey (2004:58) observe, researchers 'have to approach documents for what they are and what they are used to accomplish'. This has two implications. First of all, the interpretation of a given text needs to be carried out with a sensitivity to the context in which the text was produced, and not in isolation (Prior, 2003; Scott, 1990). Secondly, building on the first point, documents need to be approached as collective products that are socially constructed and produced (Prior, 2003).

Bearing the above points in mind, the adopted approach to qualitative documentary analysis bears a lot of resemblance to what Altheide (1999) refers to as Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA). The principles of this approach are summarised in the table below:

Table 4: Characteristics of qualitative documentary analysis, adopted from Altheide's (1999:247) Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA)

Characteristic	Explanation
Exploration as research goal	The exploratory nature of document analysis in line with the overall research objective
Reflexive research design	Influenced by the emergent data analysis and changes in the field
Purposeful sampling	Guided by the research question
Some prestructured categories	Analysis influenced by the emerging themes and categories obtained from other data sources (mainly interviews and collages)
Narrative data	Focus on narratives rather than numerical data
Narrative description and comments	Data summarised in form of researcher narratives
Textual data analysis	Guided by ethnographic questions
Textual data presentation	Data presented in a narrative rather than numerical form

The purpose of the qualitative documentary analysis was aligned with the overall research objectives which focused on exploration rather than the testing of some hypothesis. The documents included in the study were therefore chosen purposefully to deepen insight into the relevant phenomena. The research design was in part reflexive and sensitive to the findings of the unfolding study. 'Openness to surprises' (Vinten, 1994, cited in Ybema, 2009:201) was one of the grounding principles of my fieldwork.

The analysis of the documents, in terms of the adopted procedure, focus and depth, was guided by ethnographic questions rather than prescriptions of some more standardised approaches. As Phillips and Di Domenico (2009) have observed, qualitative textual data analysis is particularly challenging and requires creativity on the part of the researcher.

In this study the ethnographic questions underpinning the analysis of different documents (see the table below) were linked to the analysis and interpretation of data obtained through the other research methods.

Table 5: Documentary sources and the investigative questions

Type of documents	Ethnographic questions
Organisational documents	
	What is emphasised in the different appraisals?
Staff appraisal forms for 2004, 2005 and 2006	Are the official organisational values incorporated into the appraisals and if so, how? What function do the value labels serve?
Internal presentations on: - the integrated motivational and bonus system - annual appraisal system - organisational values - value awards	What is depicted as important in the organisation?
Organisational newsletter (three available issues)	
Organisational website	
Consultants reports on the culture and leadership study	What is the message sent by the consultants?
Leadership memorandum (presenting organisational definition of leadership)	How is leadership defined in the organisation and why it is defined in this given way?
Presentation for sales representatives on leadership competences and organisational values	
Results from two staff opinion surveys	What are the issues the staff focus on and how are they presented in the official report?
Protest letter from support staff issued to the GM and the HR Director	What are the issues raised by the staff? How is the protest letter constructed?
HR Director's notes from the feedback collected from Product Managers	What do the Product Managers focus on in their feedback to the HR Director?
Non-organisational documents	
Articles in the Polish press on the pharmaceutical industry in Poland which were published in two influential daily newspapers (Gazeta Wyborcza and Rzeczpospolita) and two weeklies (Polityka and Wprost) between 2003 and 2008.	How is the pharmaceutical industry depicted in the press?
Website of the consulting company involved in the culture and leadership study at Aporia	
Consultants' publications on culture and leadership in Polish specialist magazines	What is the approach to culture and leadership taken by the consultants?

More precisely, the qualitative documentary analysis played a triple function. First of all, it provided insight into phenomena that would otherwise be difficult to investigate, such as the way in which pharmaceutical companies were depicted in the press. Secondly, it extended the insights offered by other research methods, for example by illuminating the understanding of how the consultants involved in the culture study defined leadership and culture. Finally, analysis of documents, conceptualised as 'socially situated products' (Scott, 1990:34), captured another dimension of the social activities of the organisation actors – one which focused on the creation of reality in and through written texts (Prior, 2003).

3.2.3 Observation

As already mentioned, observation, the preferred tool in ethnography (Czarniawska, 2007; Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995; Van Maanen, 1988; Silverman, 2006), could not be used in this research as extensively as initially intended, primarily due to organisational constraints (compare Czarniawska, 2008). For the purpose of this research and within the imposed limitations, I used elements of direct observation in two ways[4].

First of all, as I was not permitted to attend formal meetings, I resorted to observing informal gatherings, mainly in the company kitchen and corridors. I would come to the site on purpose a couple of hours before my interviews and stay there even after I had completed them. I often ended up having lunch with the organisation members and chatting with them over coffee. Frequently, I found myself discussing some of the points covered in interviews in the kitchen, long after the interview had officially been ended. I would write down notes from these observations and discussions, but not in such a structured and disciplined manner, as is typically recommended in methodology textbooks (e.g. Silverman, 2000). When being in the field, I treated my informal interactions with the organisation members primarily as a means of establishing relationships and building trust, rather than a systematic method of data collection.

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[4] I also collected photographs of the physical spaces of the organisation, as inspired by Hatch, 1990; Kunter and Bell, 2006 and Yanow, 2003). However, these materials were regrettably not included in the analysis in light of the need to preserve the focus of this thesis.

Secondly, I carried out direct observation during two meetings which marked the beginning of the culture change programme. The first meeting was a six hour information session during which corporate values were translated into Polish and defined with a view to adjusting them to the Polish context. This session was referred to by the participants as an unofficial launch of the 'culture project'. I took part in the session, having been introduced to all members as a researcher and a consultant who was invited to the organisation to do a culture study. My role at the meeting could therefore be described, using Gill and Johnson's (1997) typology, as 'observer as participant'. The whole meeting was recorded and subsequently transcribed, with the exception of the introductory exercise which, according to the consultants leading the meeting, had to be excluded from the recording. Detailed notes, however, were taken during the whole meeting, including the introductory exercise which provided very useful material for subsequent analysis.

Similarly, direct observation was also used during another meeting where the management of the organisation, together with the employees appointed to the roles of 'value champions', presented to the rest of the employees the newly translated organisational values. Due to technical constraints, I could not record this meeting[5]. However, I took detailed notes of what was happening and what was being said. Since I was sitting among the sales representatives, I had a good opportunity to observe the audience's reaction. The sales representatives sitting next to me also shared their comments on the official presentations which I found particularly illuminating. My identity was not kept a secret. At the beginning of the meeting the General Manager introduced me as a researcher and observer. Additionally, I also explained my role to the people sitting next to me when my intense note taking, clearly perceived as strange behaviour, attracted their attention.

During both of these meetings I used open-ended, unstructured, observation, which is particularly useful when trying to 'understand and interpret cultural behaviour' (Mulhall, 2003:306). My observation was hence guided by general ethnographic questions related to my research objectives rather than fixed predefined categories. The

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[5] The meeting was held in a big conference hall with about two hundred participants and the quality of the recording would have been very poor taking into account the physical layout of that room.

ethonographic questions which guided the direct observation are summarized in a table below:

Table 6: Guiding ethnographic questions in observation

Observation	Guiding ethnographic questions
Meeting one: Translation of corporate values	• What is going on during the meeting? • How is the translation of values taking place? • What is being said about the values? By whom? Why? What is the reaction of others?
Meeting two: Formal launch of the 'culture project' during the Annual Sales Meeting	• What is going on and what is said during the meeting? • How is the 'culture project' launched? • How is the 'culture project' presented to the employees? • What is the employee's reaction to the presentations?

During both meetings my field notes had a discursive focus, in that they contained predominantly transcriptions of what was said rather than descriptions of the physical environment (Emerson *et al.*, 1995).

3.2.4 Collages[6]

Another method of data collection used in the study were photo collages. Collages are mainly associated with the visual arts where they are understood as an assemblage of various forms that put together constitute a new entity: a piece of art made of photographs, coloured paper, newspaper clippings and all sorts of other artwork. By offering freedom to an artist's expression, they are designed to jolt the audience's imagination with their dramatic and often startling appearance.

Collages have been described as highly suitable for postmodern inquiry (Vaughan, 2005) as they seek to 'represent the intersection of multiple discourses' (Brockelman, 2001:2). At present, however, collages as a research method are not a very popular tool

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[6] Some of the ideas presented in this section can be found in Ciuk (2007).

in organisational studies, as opposed to marketing research, where they have been successfully adopted from psychiatry and clinical psychology (see e.g. Ramsey, Ibbotson and McCole, 2006, Williams, 2002, Chang, 2001).

As a research method, collages are mainly used during focus group interviews (FGI) where the participants jointly create a collage out of newspaper bits or photographs and later discuss the outcome of their work. In marketing, collages help to examine the image of brands, products or companies. They are thought to help the interviewees unveil and express the subconscious area of their emotions and impressions (Branthwaite and Lunn, 1985) as they facilitate the process of imbuing objects with characteristics or meanings that originate from the desires, wishes and feelings of the research participant (Gordon and Langmaid, 1990). For this reason, projective techniques are believed to aid difficult or sensitive discussions (Maison, 2001, Boddy, 2005).

At this point, however, a distinction has to be made between projective and enabling techniques. Enabling techniques are based on elicitation; they are designed to help people talk about themselves (Will, Eadie and MacAskill, 1996) or any other contentious or sensitive topic. As Barry (1996:11) states, an elicitive approach is most suitable for inquiries focusing on 'evoking existing schemas and narratives triggering forgotten memories, finding more compelling ways to frame current understandings'. Projection, on the other hand, assumes that research participants will project their own beliefs, feelings and wishes onto other people. It is claimed that people will talk about others as if they were talking about themselves, which is the basic underlying assumption made by the researchers using projective techniques and at the same time the most contentious issue regarding this research tool. In this respect, projection as a method of data collection is criticized by some authors as involving the projection of the researcher's ideas upon the research participant and being empirically largely unsupported (Lilienfeld *et al.*, 2000).

In this research collages were used as an enabling technique rather than a projective tool, and they were regarded as a complementary research method accompanying a more traditional semi-structured interview. Since I was interested in getting insights into the experiences of various organisation members, it was important to include a research

tool which would enable the participants to talk more feely about their lived experiences, an important aspect of which are emotions. As Fineman (1993) has observed, although organizations are 'emotional arenas', in most organisational research and theory 'the emotional colours are missing' (p.14). On a similar note, Deacon (2000:1) encourages researchers to look for 'methods that encapsulate the multidimentionality of human experience', such as perceptions and feelings. Whereas, Barner (2008) makes this point even more explicit by suggesting that it is the researcher's moral responsibility to look for creative research approaches which will inform our understanding of emotions as part of organisational experiences.

The incorporation of collages as an elicitation technique in the second wave of research, as well as organisational attribute collages in the third wave, constituted an attempt to get a deeper insight into the experiences of organizing and being organized. As scholars interested in visual research methods have often remarked, interviews using visual images offer a compelling addition to more traditional research methods. Harper (2002), one of the founding editors of *Visual Sociology*, has for example observed that interviews which employ visual images do not only elicit more information, but most importantly produce a different kind of information. Images 'evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words' (ibid.:13). As a result, visual research methods, such as collages, are most suited for value-laden issues which might otherwise trigger socially desirable answers (Meyerson, 1991).

With respect to the practical application of collages in an organisational setting, a modified version of the more common approach was used here. The traditional collage method using magazine photographs (see e.g. Havlena and Holak, 1996) was considered as problematic for a number of reasons. Typically when the collage method is used, informants are asked to create a collage out of the photographs they can find in a set of magazines they are provided with. This approach to collages, however, is fairly time consuming as the participants have to go through a number of magazines and then cut out the images they find meaningful. Consequently, a lot of time is spent on a fairly mundane manual exercise. Furthermore, in this particular research project, it was considered important that different groups of participants would have the same set of photographs at their disposal to see whether there were any differences across groups in terms of the images they selected and the meanings they attached to them. Finally, after

having spent a considerable amount of time in the field during the first wave of research, I had serious grounds to believe that such a time-consuming activity would most likely discourage some of the informants. For this reason, collage as a research tool was fine-tuned to the research setting at hand. Consequently, the participants were provided with a voluminous set of pictures (eighty five images) rather than newspapers and scissors. The images were obtained from various newspapers that I had collected for different purposes over a number of years prior to the research. In this respect, not only the participants but also I, as a researcher, performed the role of a bricoleur, which, as (Barry, 1996) suggests, is typical of qualitative approaches inspired by constructivism.

The images depicted people of different ages conveying different emotions ranging from happiness to fear and anger. The people were captured in a variety of situations (both realistic and very abstract ones) along with photos of objects, sceneries and animals. At the photo selection stage, I invited a fellow researcher to serve as a reviewer of the images that I had initially chosen. My fellow researcher reviewed the pre-selected photographs and discussed his observations with me. As a result, I took out some of the photographs as they were too similar to other images, and added a few new ones. Subsequently, the reviewed photo set served as a bank of photographs from which the participants were encouraged to choose to form their collages. In this way, the collages were created by the participants, although the bank of photographs was researcher-generated.

The participants were informed that they would later be asked to explain their work and the meanings of the pictures for them. The pre-selected photographs were thus intended to stimulate narrative accounts and to trigger interpretations which 'embody philosophies, ideas, cultural beliefs and other intangible features of organizational life' (Parker, 2009). The pre-selected images were designed to constitute a stimulus for elaboration of the elements discussed in the interview, and to open avenues for new emerging themes that the interview might not have tapped into. As Pink (2001) highlights, images, be they photographs or videos, potentially have multiple identities and interpretations, and their 'ethnographic meanings' are inextricably linked to the narratives that are employed to define them. In light of this, the photographs were not considered to constitute representational data themselves.

3.2.5 Organisational attribute collages

Motivated by the same guiding principle as in the case of the photo collages, I supplemented the semi-structured interviews in the third and final wave of the research with what are referred to here as organisational attributes collages. This tool encapsulates another attempt to employ an innovative approach which would enable the participants to talk more freely about the different dimensions of their organisational experiences, as recommended by Deacon (2000) and Barner (2008).

In terms of their practical application, the organisational attributes collages were similar to the photo collages described in the previous section, except that visual images were replaced with word cards. Each informant was provided with a set of word cards and asked to choose ones that described their organisation. The participants were advised to select only the word cards that were meaningful for them and to divide them into three categories: the ones that characterise their organisation, the ones that to some extent apply to their organisation and finally the ones that do not characterise their organisation. Some cards were, however, left empty and the participants were encouraged to add own categories which in their view were missing from the researcher-generated set of potential organisational attributes. Similarly to the previously discussed collages, the pre-selected categories were treated as stimuli which were to generate further narratives (Barry, 1996). In this sense, the categories were designed to act as condensed interview questions, or prompts, rather than 'real' organisational attributes in a Durkheimian sense. In other words, the focus was on the meanings attached to the labels and the associations they triggered rather than the labels themselves.

Organisational attribute collages, as a research tool, were created based on: key emergent themes from the analysis of data coming from the second and most comprehensive wave of research (e.g. uncertainty, pressure, stress, optimism) and the key categories derived from the official documents and discourse about the promoted values and attitudes in the organisation (e.g. respect for the past, keeping promises, ambition, targets).

After dividing the terms into the three categories, the informants were asked to talk me through their word collages by explaining the meanings they attached to the chosen labels. The participants were encouraged to provide examples and possibly quote some stories which would facilitate the understanding of their narratives.

Because the collages were intended to serve as a research tool rather than to constitute data in their own right, the content of the collected word collages was analysed only in terms of the narratives they generated. Therefore, no quantitative analysis of the content of the collages (the chosen labels) was conducted. Instead, the produced narratives were analysed in the same way as the narratives obtained from traditional semi-structured interviews and the photo collages.

3.3 Data analysis

As Huberman and Miles (1994:431) have noted, qualitative studies typically 'have a peculiar life cycle' in that they typically entail simultaneous data collection and analysis. Data analysis, is then best thought of as embedded in the whole research process rather than confined to a distinctive period of time which follows the fieldwork and precedes the 'writing up'. Analysis, as I conceptualise it, primarily refers to making sense of the data (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), as opposed to a set of fixed procedures that need to be followed in the analytic endeavour. I agree with Creswell (2007:150), who suggests that qualitative data analysis is hardly 'off the shelf' and typically requires adjustments to the study at hand or, 'bending of the methodology' depending on the research setting (Miles and Huberman 1994:11).

The analysis that I undertook was primarily driven by the investigative questions that the research was designed to answer, rather than a given analytical framework. As a consequence, I used a number of strategies and tactics (see Baptiste, 2001) to make sense of the data and tell my tale of the field (Van Maanen, 1988). Figure 2 summarises the different phases of data analysis undertaken. The inner circle distinguishes between the different phases of the research, whereas the outer circle points to their outcomes. The progression between the different stages of the research was, however, not as linear as a cursory look at the figure might suggest. That is why the arrows which are placed

in the centre of the figure are used to point to different interconnections between the stages of the research. The multidirectedness of the arrows is to imply a far more messy, and therefore more realistic, image of the analysis process.

Figure 2: The data analysis process
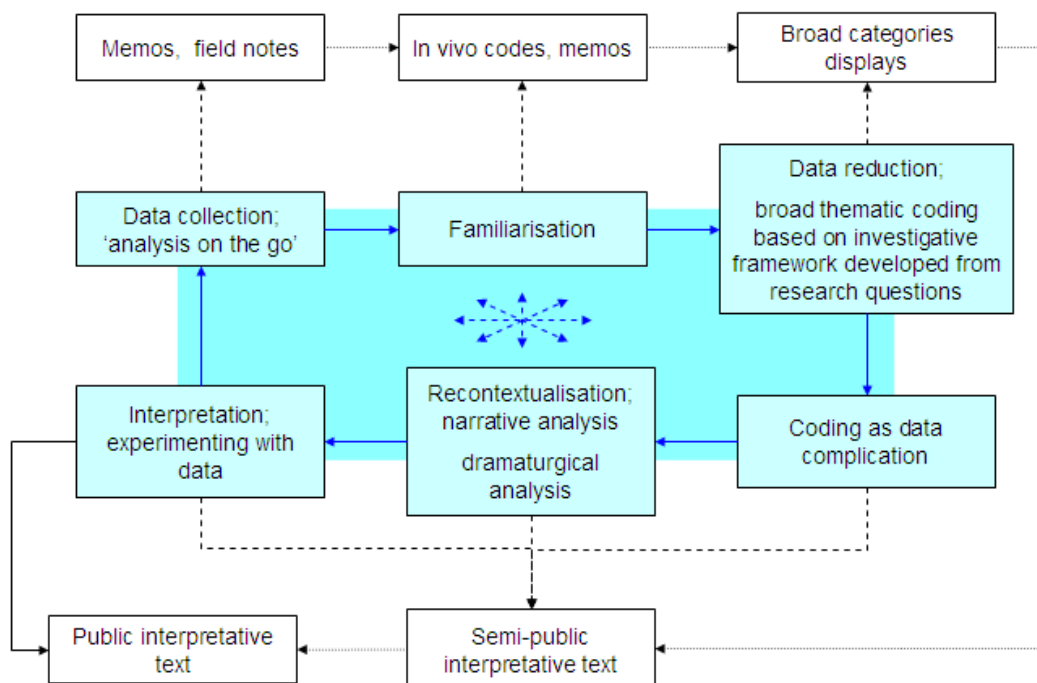
3.3.1 'Analysis on the go' and familiarisation with the data

As suggested by numerous authors (e.g. Miles and Huberman 1994; Silverman, 2000), qualitative data analysis should not be confined to the desk stage of the research project. Based on this premise, I made the first passes at analysis while gathering the data. This 'analysis on the go' meant that I would regularly read my field notes, note down my initial observations and look for the first emerging themes. Consequently, I would incorporate these themes in the subsequent interviews, seek access to additional documents or come back to some of the participants. In fact, some data collection continued after the research had officially moved to the desk analysis phase, that is after I had submitted the final report from the study to the management of the organisation.

The desk analysis phase was, as many authors point out (e.g. Kostera, 2007; Srivastava and Hopwood, 2009), very much an iterative process. I found myself going back to the

interview transcripts and other data at numerous stages of the 'writing up'. Not until I finally finished writing the thesis, did I stop going back to the data, or so I thought.

The first phase in the desk analysis resembled to a large extent a hermeneutical analysis. I read and re-read interview transcripts highlighting what appeared to be a 'significant statement' in the narratives. Moustakas (1994), cited in Creswell (2007), refers to this process as horizonalisation. I noted down my initial observations, or, as Baptiste (2001) put it, 'rudimentary connections', on the margins and elaborated on them in my research journal[7]. While reading I attempted to remain open to new emerging themes while at the same time paying special attention to the passages that referred directly to the research questions I set at the outset of the study. The particularly insightful pages would typically be summarised using the expressions taken from the transcripts, a procedure which reminds of creating in vivo codes in the way described by Strauss (1987).

3.3.2 Data reduction and data complication

After the initial familiarisation phase, which involved going through all the interview transcripts and reviewing the documentary sources, I started narrowing down the analysis. The next phase of data analysis therefore involved, to borrow Creswell's (2007) terminology, the 'winnowing' of the data. So as not to be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of data, I disaggregated the material into broad thematic categories. Working on data reduction meant that I moved from a serial to parallel classification of data (Baptiste, 2001), thereby moving from reviewing one transcript after another to selecting thematic excerpts from different transcripts. The parallel classification of data was based on an investigative framework that I developed from the research questions.

Since my objective was to do a culturally sensitive analysis of a culture change project, I knew that I would have to describe both the context of the change initiative and content and process of the culture change project and show how they were interconnected. For the purpose of my study, I primarily defined organisational context as the organisation's past, and more precisely the organisation's history as narrated in

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[7] My research journal was a separate document where I put my initial observations, or noted down ideas to include in further phases of the analysis.

the interviews.[8] In terms of the culture change initiative, I set out to investigate how people worked with such a project, what their perceptions of and attitudes to the project were and finally what outcomes the project produced. For this reason, when analysing the interview transcripts, I disaggregated the complex research question into smaller questions which produced a framework which guided my analysis.[9] Subsequently, I investigated the rationale for the project, its perception among different organisation members, its design, and implementation, and finally its outcomes.

In practice, the parallel classification of data meant that I would tag passages that addressed a given aspect of my investigative framework and move them to a separate document. Afterwards, when the data were displayed in the same document, I would review the passages looking for patterns and similarities, at the same time noting irregularities and ambiguities. When some data did not fit the emerging pattern, I would look for possible explanations for these inconsistencies, as recommended by Dey (1993). This phase of data analysis also used a form of coding. However, unlike the previous reduction phase, here coding served to open up the possibilities for interpretation. As Coffey and Atkinson observe, coding as data complication 'is not used to retrieve and to aggregate instances to a restricted number of categories; rather it is intended to expand the conceptual frameworks and dimensions for analysis' (1996:30). At this stage, I revisited the initial in vivo codes which I attached to the data during the 'familiarisation stage', adding additional layers to the analysis which were less strictly bound to the data.

Although the two above described phases of data analysis, namely data reduction through broad thematic coding and coding as data complication, were very useful in terms of devising categories and links between them, they had their downsides. The coding procedures meant that segments of data had to be removed from their original context which is often crucial in understanding why a given pattern came to being in the first place (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I attempted to counteract this shortcoming of

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[8] After having spoken to a number of participants, I also turned my attention to the wider socio-political texture in which the organisation was immersed. In this study, the latter conceptualisation of the context, however, played a less prominent role.

[9] Interestingly, Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) have developed a very similar framework which they referred to as an 'investigative model of management of cultural work' and which, in their words was to 'uncover the trajectory of a cultural change project from an empirically close reading' of the events (2007:55).

'analysis by coding' in two ways. First of all, when removing the interview excerpts from their original context, I always put the respondents name, position and wave number at the end of the quote. Not until I finished writing, did I replace the participants' names with pseudonyms. Therefore, while working on the 'splitting and sliting' of data (Dey, 1993), I was generally aware of the context from which the data were removed. I found that the second phase of data analysis, which I referred to as 'familiarisation', was very useful in this approach. Secondly, wary of the risks of the 'data chopping' strategy, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) refer to coding, I supplemented my analysis with a narrative inquiry. More precisely, I looked at the form that the collected accounts adopted. This brought me to two analytic strategies: storytelling and metaphor analysis and more generally constituted another phase of data analysis which I refer to as recontextualisation.

3.3.3 Recontextualisation

Large part of my attempts at recontextualisation can be brought down to the study of the interview transcripts in terms of their storied versions of organisational reality. As Boje (1995) has emphasized, people produce stories 'to 'enact' an account' of their past and themselves in that past. Every story is a version of reality which makes it meaningful to its creator. Stories typically do not merely recount events, but rather enrich them, imbue them with meaning and symbolism. Therefore, as Weick (1995:70) has pointed out, narratives resemble 'inventions rather than discoveries', as they involve the active reconstruction of the past, its interpretation and symbolic reconstruction. Stories open new possibilities to organisation members who can narrate their organisational reality, and thus themselves, in new ways; in stories the symbolic order can be reversed and justice restored, giving vent to emotions and desires (Driver, 2009; Gabriel, 2000). Narratives can therefore be regarded as a valuable means of gaining insight into the symbolic domains of organizations, as well as the experiences (Gabriel, 1995, 1998) and the emotions of their members (Van Buskirk and McGrath, 1992).

When analysing the data in terms of their narrative properties, I focused on different themes in stories which constituted my primary unit of analysis. However, to a lesser extent, I also looked at individual stories and classified them according to the typology

put forward by Gabriel (2000). Gabriel distinguished between comic ('protagonist as a victim or a fool'), epic ('protagonist as a hero'), tragic ('protagonist as an underserving victim') and romantic stories ('the subject as love object'). In the thesis, however, I do not always make explicit references to the classification of every story that I quote. The classification was used as an analytical tool and is only quoted when it helps to clarify the argument.

The thematic analysis of stories involved looking at the poetic tropes used by the organisational storytellers. When carrying out the analysis, I aimed at investigating how the stories were infused with meaning by the participants. Here, I also built on the work of Gabriel (2000), who suggested attention be paid to the poetic tropes which are crucial in the meaning generation process. Gabriel differentiates between six poetic tropes: attribution of motive, casual connections, blame and/or credit, unity, fixed qualities and finally emotion. In story-work, according Gabriel, the poetic tropes are used to symbolically refashion the reality. In my analysis of stories, I looked at how different organisational actors narrated the organisational past and how they emplotted the present (see Wolfram Cox and Hassard, 2007, on 'co-opting the past'). More specifically, I looked at how the narratives of the past related to the narratives of the present and the tales of the culture change project. As Boje *et al.* (1999) has observed, stories are 'infinitely intertextual', and it was this intertextuality that was of particular interest to me. When analysing stories, I therefore attempted to find links between the different stories told by individuals in their accounts, as well as wider patterns between the accounts produced by different groups of organisation members (compare Czarniawska, 2004). Investigating the data as narratives meant that I attempted not to take the words at their face value.

The second element of recontextualisation, along the above described narrative analysis, was the metaphor analysis of the gathered data. More specifically, I tried to make sense of the analysed events by investigating it through the dramaturgical metaphor.

I define the dramaturgical metaphor after Mangham and Overington 'as a general conceptual resource for understanding social interaction in organizations' (1987:4). This means that drama is not treated as a literal model of social interactions. Rather, organisations are like theatre, and not theatre. Drama serves as a heuristic device

(Cornelisson, 2004; Kärreman, 2001; Morgan, 1980) that offers insight, thereby stimulating and directing investigation. Drama as a metaphor for organisational life might not be the most heuristically prolific one, as suggested by Cornelissen (2004), due to its close domain proximity to organisations. Nonetheless, drama as a way of perceiving the organisational reality facilitates an interesting interpretation of research material (Kostera, 2007). Additionally, as often indicated, it opens possibilities of employing invaluable linguistic resources for describing organisations. In this work, drama is used both as a linguistic resource useful for description purposes, and as a source of heuristic insight for interpreting the data.

The dramaturgical metaphor typically draws attention to some important aspects of the nature of organisational reality (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004). First of all, treating organisations as theatre brings to spotlight the fact that activities carried out by organisational actors have a performative nature. This means that organisational members, while interacting with others, act. Action here indicates purposefulness and intention, as opposed to mere behaviour, which can be an unreflective response to a stimulus. As observed by Mangham and Overington:

> '(…) what occurs in organizations when it ceases to be mere behaviour (…) is a matter of performance. Performance, (..), implies what is happening is a matter of creating realities, of transforming appearances into the taken for granted'. (Mangham and Overington, 1987:102-103)

Performativity also implies expressiveness. In the theatre metaphor people are viewed as actors who assume their roles. A given role is determined by the actor and their beliefs about what the role implies and the social expectations concerning the role. People while performing roles attempt to impress their audience (either physically present or imagined), a phenomenon which for many years intrigued one of the founding fathers of the dramaturgical perspective, Erving Goffman. Goffman (1959) was predominantly interested in the expressive presentation of self in social interactions. He focused not so much on the purposeful projection of images by actors, but rather on subconscious projections. He distinguished between the impression we 'give' when we speak and over which we exercise some control and, on the other hand, on the information we 'give off' unintentionally through for example our behaviour. The audience here is given agency in terms of actively deciphering and interpreting the performed acts. It can detect inconsistencies between the 'given' and the 'given off' information and subsequently develop an alternative to the suggested, definition of the

situation. As Feldman (1995) suggests, in the dramaturgical analysis it is the meaning of a performance, both for the actors and the audience, that is at the centre of the analysis.

In organisational theatre, roles are constantly enacted, interpreted, reinterpreted and negotiated. It is worth noting that the audience is not a mere spectator; it is also actively involved in the performance (Schreyögg and Höpfl, 2004). As Kostera (2007:179) observed, the social theatre is an interactive theatre. In order for the spectacle to work the 'audience must feel engaged. The performance must be emotionally enticing so that, according to the authors, the audience can take on a 'theatrical consciousness' and suspend its disbelief in appreciation of the enacted images of reality. For this reason:

> '… the success of a performance may be measured as a function of the extent that it causes us, the audience, to apprehend relationships and emotion. It fails if it becomes only a talking shop, an instrument for propaganda, a lecture theatre or a political forum.' (Mangham and Overington, 1987:90)

Dramatism also helps understand how people create the organisational reality through the language it provides. By introducing notions such as: actors, scene, role, mystification, demystification, stage-fright, settings, script, rehearsal, presentation of self, staging of performance, enactment of characters, audience, etc. the emphasis is placed on human action and on the actors. The researcher, acting as a spectator and a critic, observes the spectacle, tries to understand its symbolism and give meaning to the situation (Mangham and Overington, 1987).

3.3.4 Experimenting with data

The search for meaning, however, is quite a tricky business in qualitative research. This is perhaps best summarised by Denzin who observed that 'fieldworkers can neither make sense of nor understand what has been learned until they sit down and write the interpretive text' (1994:504). This observation seems true also in my case. In the last phases of data analysis, I attempted to move towards interpretation. For me, this was only possible through writing different semi-public texts which I shared with my colleagues at numerous conferences. During this process, I would confront my emerging interpretations with the ideas taken from the literature and then go back to the transcripts to verify my interpretations, as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). I experienced the telling of a story from the field, or the 'lessons learned'

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985), to be a daunting task, the more so that I saw my field as abundant in plots all wanting to be told[10]. I found that I could best convey my interpretation through metaphorical means. By building and projecting a metaphor (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2008) I could best link the various elements developed in the earlier stages of the analysis. A metaphor, rather than a local theory, summarised my work.

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[10] In the writing up I found myself forced to remove a number of plots from the thesis due to space and coherence concerns. For example a large section devoted to locals' experiences of changing expatriate General Managers had to be taken out of the thesis. It has, however, been incorporated into a conference paper which will hopefully await its publication in due course.

4 Company profile and background

The purpose of this chapter is to present some background information and wider socio-political context for the here discussed case study, in line with the constructivist approach (Schütz, 1967) and calls for more context sensitive research (e.g. Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Martin, 2002).

The chapter starts with an overview of the researched organisation and its parent company, which is purposefully kept short and at times fairly general for concerns of confidentiality. Subsequently, some of the characteristics of the Polish pharmaceutical market are discussed. Finally, the wider socio-political context will be considered, in particular in terms of the noticeable increase in public interest in Poland in issues of ethics in the health care system at the time of the main phase of data collection.

4.1 Introduction to the characteristics of Aporia[11]

Aporia is a Polish subsidiary of an American pharmaceutical corporation which, for the purpose of this thesis, will be referred to as Aporia Global (ApG). As the company's website proudly announces, ApG employs over 90,000 staff worldwide and operates in more than 100 countries. It generates revenues of nearly 40 billion dollars. ApG produces both pharmaceuticals and medical products. It is an innovative company which makes substantial investments in research and development of new products.

In its official communication, the company emphasises the recognition it has received from numerous institutions. According to FORTUNE, it has consistently been listed among 'America's Most Admired Companies' for over twenty years. ApG also reiterates its values-driven approach. The information provided on the company's website, as well as in job advertisements and presentations to new employees, highlights the espoused organisational commitment to 'caring'.

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[11] The factual information provided in this chapter regarding the researched organisation as well as its mother company is necessarily fairly general, at times slightly edited and purposefully selected so as ensure its anonymity. For this reason, links to the website where some of the here presented information comes from, are not provided, contrary to the academic convention.

The company's website further informs that ApG in its commitment to the corporate values makes all its division presidents 'accountable for pushing the company's values deep into the organisation, where they can influence and guide the day-to-day decisions that are made across the company and around the world.' It also, however, acknowledges that the espoused values are not only to guide the behaviours of their staff but are also designed to contribute to a desirable image. The company's communication to its shareholders, on the other hand, primarily emphasises the company's potential to deliver 'sustainable double-digit earnings-per-share performance' (2006 Annual Report[12]).

The Polish subsidiary of ApG has a much shorter history, having been on the market since the late 90's. It is made up of two divisions that are devoted to the pharmaceutical and the diagnostic part of the business, one focusing on the sale of drugs, the other on diagnostic equipment. These divisions are principally independent from each other, having separate budgets, General Managers and functional departments. Nonetheless, they are interconnected, with one division playing the function of a 'host' and the other of a 'guest'. The 'host'-'guest' distinction is connected to the fact which division was first registered in a given country and which then provides some functional services to the other division.

In Poland the diagnostic division was registered first as a limited liability company, and therefore it become the 'host' division. As a 'host', it provided financial, IT and HR services to the other division. Recently, however, the roles have changed. As a consequence of these changes, the HR, IT and finance teams of the Polish subsidiary became parts of the pharmaceutical division and started reporting to a new General Manager. In the here described research I am going to focus on this pharmaceutical division and refer to it as Aporia. I will treat it as an independent organisation from the other division as this is the way members of the organisation perceive themselves.

Aporia employs approximately two hundred and thirty employees, of whom a majority is made up of sales staff: predominantly medical sales representatives and their mangers. Except for typical functional departments, such as sales, HR, IT, logistics and

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[12] The company's Annual Reports will not be included in the reference list due to issues of anonymity.

marketing, Aporia also has a medical department that deals with drug registration, clinical research supervision and which provides medical advice for product managers.

Since its appearance on the Polish market, Aporia has had a number of formal leaders who, with the exception of the last General Manager, have all been expatriates. In its over 10-year history in Poland, the organisation was led by four expatriate leaders. The leaders were appointed by the headquarters and stayed in the subsidiary for approximately two years and were then transferred to a different location. There was a common belief among the staff of the subsidiary that Poland was treated by the expatriate leaders as a trial period before a promotion to a bigger and more important, from the business point of view, site.

The managers came from different parts of the globe. Their experiences and cultural background were typically perceived by the Polish staff as not fitting the Polish reality. The common claim was that they were not really familiar with the characteristics of the Polish pharmaceutical market, nor did they really understand the way the Polish health care system works or how it is connected to the changes on the political scene.

During the incumbency of the last of the four expatriate leaders, dramatic changes took place in the subsidiary resulting in unprecedented, desired and undesired, staff turnover, lowered staff morale, a drop in sales and a troubled image of the company. When the leader was finally moved to a different site, a Polish General Manager took over. He undertook some initiatives aimed at boosting staff morale and first and foremost improving the performance of the subsidiary. One such initiative was a culture change programme based on promoting corporate values and leadership, which I will focus on in the subsequent parts of this thesis. Nonetheless, before I can move on to discussing this initiative and organisation members responses to this initiative, it is crucial to further sketch the wider context in which the changes took place. The context that needs to be discussed here is the one that the foreign expatriate leaders were reported to struggle with, namely the characteristics of the Polish pharmaceutical market and its interconnectedness with the Polish health care system and political developments.

4.2 Pharmaceutical market in Poland

The transformation from a state-run to a free market economy in Poland that was initiated at the beginning of the 1990's has significantly affected the Polish pharmaceutical sector. Some of the major changes include privatisation of the sector, the emergence of new Polish pharmaceutical companies and the penetration of the market by international pharmaceutical companies (Ministerstwo Gospodarki i Pracy, Ministerstwo Skarbu Panstwa, 2005)[13].

The Polish pharmaceutical companies produce, with a few exceptions, generic drugs since they do not have the financial resources at their disposal to invest profusely in researching and developing innovative medicines. The generic drugs tend to be considerably cheaper than the innovative drugs, being reported to constitute 25-80% of innovative drug prices (ibid.). Due to the big price disparity between the generic and innovative drugs, innovative companies typically face fierce price competition as soon as the patents protecting their products expire and generic drugs can be launched on the market. Aporia, as has already been stated, is an innovative company with a few flagship drugs that are approaching patent expiry. This fact is causing the organisation members considerable concern.

Patent protection is an invaluable advantage that the innovative companies have over their generic competitors, particularly when their drug is awarded a place on the reimbursement list which, as the name suggests, determines the drugs that are reimbursed by the state. This, in turn, significantly improves the products social availability. Thus, receiving a place on the reimbursement list typically increases the volume of sales, although this usually happens at the expense of the product price. The prices of the reimbursed drugs are regulated by the Minster of Health, who is advised by a body of specialists that makes recommendations about the inclusion or exclusion of drugs as well as their pricing. Once a drug obtains the reimbursement status, it usually remains on the positive list providing that the therapy for which it is used does not change or the drug does not turn out to be too expensive (European Commission, 2007). It has often been, however, pointed out that the criteria on which the inclusion/exclusion decision takes place are too vague and therefore not always in line with the EU

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[13] Ministry of Economic Affairs and Labour of Poland, Ministry of Treasury (2005)

transparency directive (e.g. Orlewska and Mierzejewski, 2003). This, in turn, invites attempts by different actors, including the pharmaceutical companies, to exert influence on the reimbursement decision. Furthermore, the Ministry of Health is believed to display a tendency to act in favour of the Polish generic companies (European Commission, 2007) at the expense of foreign producers of innovative drugs, such as Aporia.

The above mentioned Ministry of Health and events, more generally, in the political arena, significantly affect the functioning of the Polish Health Care System and by the same token the pharmaceutical market. For this reason, the general features of the Polish Health Care System and certain related political events are an important context for the here presented study and, therefore, are discussed in some detail below.

4.3 The socio-political context

Before the transition to a free market economy in 1989, the Polish Health Care System was strongly centralised and administered by the state. Since that time it has been undergoing significant changes and is often referred to as a 'system in transition' (see e.g. Kuszewski and Gericke, 2005). One of these changes took place in 1998, when the centralised state funding of hospitals was replaced with a new more decentralised system. The new Common Health Insurance Law launched 17 sickness funds that were managed by executive committees appointed by local representatives of central authorities (European Commission, 2007).

This health care reform was initiated after parliamentary elections and a change in the ruling party (from a left- to a right-wing party) and was part of its bigger reform agenda. The reform was designed to mark a departure from the direct central control of the health care system and lay the grounds for a free market in health care services (Mazur and Lukasik, 2007). It was, though, heavily criticised and fuelled an on-going debate about Polish health care. Subsequently, after the next parliamentary elections and a change in the ruling party, this time to a left-wing political option, the previously initiated changes supporting local decision-making and managing were replaced by a

new institution, the National Health Fund (Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia) that re-centralised the health care system (European Commission, 2007).

As illustrated above, changes in the Polish health care system refer not only to the system's structure or funding, but they also signify drastic shifts in its underlying principles: transitions from a state-governed system, towards self-management and then back to centralisation. What is worth highlighting is the relatively short time-spun between the shifts and its vulnerability to the changes in the political arena. In this context, the Polish health care system can be described as being characterised by high uncertainty, a factor that the pharmaceutical companies functioning in the health care business have to be prepared to learn to cope with.

The impact that the changes on the political arena can have on the pharmaceutical companies is not limited to the official regulations or laws that are introduced in the health care system. The political situation can affect the pharmaceutical companies also indirectly through the discursive activities that the politicians engage in. This was particularly visible in the case of Poland after the parliamentary elections in 2005 when a right-wing anti-communist party 'Law and Justice' ('Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc') assumed power. 'Law and Justice' devised a political agenda which included, among others, enhancing the social role of the state and promoting a moral revolution. The moral revolution was generally conceptualised as fighting with corruption and informal arrangements that were referred to as the 'PACT'. As two well-known Polish journalists put it:

> 'In the parliamentary and presidential elections in 2005 Poles chose politicians who promised them a moral revolution and the building of a new, IVth Republic of Poland[14]. (…) IV RP was definitely not a figment of imagination; its reality was verified by the force with which it affected the imagination of Poles.' (Durczok and Mucharski, 2007:5).

Indeed, the political leaders of 'Law and Justice', and in particular two brothers, of which one became Polish Prime Minister and the other the President, persistently relied in their political strategy on the rhetoric of morality, or a lack thereof, in the current socio-political situation in Poland. The rhetoric of moral restoration was accompanied

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[14] Currently Poland is officially called 'the Republic of Poland' and therefore the numerical labelling of politicians can be perceived as a rhetorical device designed to symbolically mark a change that was to take place under the new rule and the moral restoration that was promised. Poland is sometimes referred to as the III RP, a label that was used in the preamble to the Polish constitution from 1997. Similarly to the IV PR, the III RP label is also of symbolical nature. It makes a reference directly to the II RP and separates itself from the times of the socialist regime.

by intensified actions to detect scandals and/ or corrupt arrangements. As a consequence:

> 'Every month would bring another end of the world: reports were published, wardrobes were opened[15], tapes were recorded, flies were found, the coalition was either falling apart or being cemented. (…) These events marked the political and media dispute over the IVth RP, but they would all immediately disappear from the front pages leaving room for new 'shocking' facts.' (Durczok and Mucharski, 2007:7).

The interest of politicians in fighting off the 'PACT' of corruption, however it was defined, left a strong imprint on the media which became abundant with accounts of newly detected or alleged scandals and fraudulent behaviours (Kubiak, 2008). As an influential Polish political journalist observed:

> '(…) there was a need to find a culprit. There was no room for subtle considerations of the extent of the guilt, (…) the verdict was announced straight away, preferably in the limelight. Media, doctors, lawyers, everybody who the people suspect of having more and living better lives, could be the enemy. (…) They were all said to make up the PACT. The pact was supposed to be everywhere (…)' (Lis, 2007:9)

What is important here is the comment about the potential prevalence of the alleged 'PACT'. The corrupt 'PACT' could be located anywhere and the Polish health care system was an ideal place to look for acts of corruption. As research shows, the Polish health care system has for many years been viewed by Poles as one of the areas where corruption occurs most often (Kubiak, 2008). Interestingly, in 2007, two years after the election of 'Law and Justice' and the increased media interest in corruption, the health care sector went up in the 'corruption ranking' and replaced politics as the most corrupt sector in the public perception. This should, however, not come as a surprise when we look at some of the headlines from influential Polish dailies and weeklies: 'The National Health Fund takes the pharmaceutical companies to court' (Jaloszewski and Zasun, 2005), 'How is the doctor supposed not to take [bribes]' (Cichocka, 2007); 'The Healthcare. What is hidden under the doctor's coat' (Walewski, 2006); 'Medical mega scandal – 300 people are going to hear the charges' (Anon, 2007); 'How to steal from the sick' (Kania and Ferfecki, 2007); 'How to set up a doctor' (Lizut, 2006); 'Prescription for a doctor' (Anon, 2006).

In particular the last two titles and the scandals they reveal merit some attention as they refer not only to the issue of corruption in the health care system in general but more

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[15] The 'wardrobe scandal' as well as the other elements of this list refer to different scandals that were revealed by the ruling coalition.

specifically pharmaceutical companies and their activities. The two articles, which also received considerable TV coverage and were then widely cited in other media, describe the dubious practices of two Polish subsidiaries of established pharmaceutical concerns. The first article offers an account of events that took place during s training session of sales representatives of Roche Poland. During the training the representatives were expected to learn a script of how to behave when a doctor does not fulfil the promises s/he made to the sales representative in return for some financial gratification (e.g. sponsoring of a medical conference, some medical equipment or donations). The second article, 'Prescription for a doctor', further exposes another scandal, this time with another pharmaceutical concern – Schering. According to 'Newsweek', Schering offered a group of doctors who had prescribed the biggest number of their drugs a trip to Copenhagen. The trip was, in the official corporate statement, of an educational nature. Yet, according to the investigative journalists who accompanied the doctors, no training took place, but instead the voyage was abundant with entertainment and alcoholic beverages.

These two above described cases, together with other scandals that were revealed in 2006, which one of the Polish weeklies labelled as a 'corruption avalanche' and an 'avalanche of scandals' (Anon, 2007), created an atmosphere of increased suspicion towards the pharmaceutical companies and, more generally, the Polish health care system. This, as we will see in the empirical section of this thesis, also left a strong imprint on the organisation members' of Aporia, notwithstanding the fact that Aporia is an innovative company that takes pride in its ethical conduct and is also a member of an association of innovative pharmaceutical companies which has created and endorsed an ethical code of good marketing practices.

5 Organisational context

This chapter marks the beginning of the empirical section of the thesis in which the findings of the study will be presented in two parts. The current chapter explores the organisational context in which the subsequently discussed cultural intervention took place. The organisational context is here defined as organisational past, as narrated by different participants. The images of the past are then supplemented with narratives of the present, the time when the culture change project was officially launched, as well as participants' hopes for the future. The discussion of the participant's images of their evolving organisation is designed to set the scene for the subsequent analysis of the cultural intervention in the organisation.

The present chapter is divided into three subchapters, each devoted to narratives with different temporal focus. I will start by presenting the narratives of the past which are further subdivided into three distinctive time periods: Organisation's Golden Age, reign of the changing expatriate General Managers and finally the toxic leadership episode. These three time periods emerged from the analysis of the interview and organisational collages data and were gathered primarily in the second and to some extent also the first wave of data collection. It is worth noting that especially the last period in organisational history – the times associated with toxic leadership - has evoked long, emotionally and symbolically charged narratives. This is also the time which was often referred to by different participants in relation to the culture change initiative. Therefore, this thread in Aporia's history will be explored in greatest detail.

The narratives of the present cover the time period around the culture change initiative. More specifically, organisational present is associated here with the arrival of the first Polish General Manager and a large number of other new organisation members across the organisation. The narratives of the future, on the other hand, refer to participants' hopes and desires in relation to the years to come which also shed additional light on the deficiencies of the present. What follows, then, is an account of Aporia' organisational history, as experienced and narrated by its participants. It is a tale built around different interpretations of the past which, on some occasions, comprise strikingly similar images, and on other instances include considerably divergent interpretations which point to some underpinning tensions and ambiguities.

5.1 Narratives of the past

5.1.1 Organisation's Golden Age

At the time of the interviews, especially in the second and third wave of the research, there were only a handful of employees who had been working in Aporia long enough to remember the beginnings of their company. The images of the early years evoked by these participants were strikingly similar. The accounts were monophonic and undistorted by any dissonant voices. To use Martin's (2002) terminology, the 'home' perspective of the long serving staff, when referring to their organisation's beginnings, was of 'integration', where the recounted stories formed a narrative of an idyllic workplace and harmonious close-tight relations among staff. The memories were recounted with nostalgic feelings, which can be described as a 'warm and loving orientation for the past or features of the past, a tender yearning towards it' (Gabriel, 2000:174).

When reflecting on organisational beginnings, interviewees typically pointed at three main themes: togetherness, passion and professionalism. These were particularly visible when participants discussed the collages they composed to depict these early years. See two examples below:

Figure 3: Collage of Organisation's Golden Age (Natalie, internal consultant)

Figure 4: Collage of Organisation's Golden Age (Richard, marketing specialist)

The participants often talked about the old days as characterised by close ties, intimacy or 'being all one', as vividly captured in a story about the old organisational ways of

celebrating Christmas recounted by one participant, that was also mentioned by other organisation veterans. The participant recalled an old Polish tradition of sharing wafer which is generally restricted to members of the family, yet sometimes assimilated also by companies which try to foster the spirit of belonging and closeness:

> When the company consisted of forty or sixty employees everybody knew each other. (…) This was not an overwhelming amount. I remember meetings that were held at the end of the year when we would celebrate Christmas and everyone would share the wafer with everyone else. When more and more people joined the company, we dropped this tradition. (Oliver, internal consultant)

In the story, the evoked tradition can be interpreted as a token of the bonds among staff in the old times. Traditionally, you share the wafer with the people you love or at least the ones you know well and are close with, as the quoted participant reminded the researcher before he told his story. The image of family-like relations was a recurring theme throughout the narratives of the Golden Age. In the narratives of the beginning, all participants were said to know each other and be bound by passion and commitment to work rather than formal procedures and regulations:

> I remember the times when the whole company was made up of ten people. This was like one big family and we were all one. The more people come, the more private interests are carried out. (Nina, Sales Manager)

> It was a kind of family company with a homely atmosphere. It was located in a villa. We felt that we could help and trust each other. We could turn to anyone with any problem we had. The financial department was a department that helped people. Now people feel that it is trying to disturb us. (Natalie, internal consultant)

The organisation was typically portrayed as employee-friendly. In the accounts, employees were depicted as having the feeling that they actively contributed to the company's success. Commitment to work and passion were self-evident; a natural consequence of being on the payroll (as often depicted in the collages by a smiling woman showing off her biceps). Working meant making a great effort as everything had to be worked out from scratch, yet this strain was viewed as a healthy sign. Employees, in other words, talked about themselves and their early colleagues as having the internal drive to move their company forward.

The final theme that underpinned many of the nostalgic tales was the past ethos of professionalism. The early organisation participants were narrated as not only 'nice', 'friendly' and 'decent' but also as people of 'really big calibre'. They were said to be professionals, with good product knowledge and professional background:

> (…) the group of people was of a really big calibre, as it appeared later on. This can be assessed with a hindsight. Two GMs came from there, or maybe even more, I don't remember exactly. This was a strong set of people, very friendly and agreeable, and we had a seat in [a prestigious district of Warsaw which is predominantly a residential area with villas], so this was nice. (Oscar, top manager)

The participants acknowledged that the relaxed atmosphere associated with the organisation's beginnings was also partly down to the wider environment in which the organisation operated. When the Polish subsidiary was established, just after Poland's transformation, the market was more favourable for business. Aporia's products were not endangered by generic drugs, which made the work of both sales and marketing people much easier in comparison to later times (as depicted by a spinning top that stands for the good running of the business in one of the depicted collages). What is more, sales targets set by the headquarters were perceived to be more attainable. Although the workload was heavy, the stress levels were lower than in later years:

> We were all full of beans. We felt that we were building the company. We all worked together. (Natalie, internal consultant)

In short, the narratives of the early years, offered a largely idyllic image of the organisation's Golden Age, where professional employees worked eagerly and harmoniously together contributing to the organisation's success. The Golden Age, however, came to an end when the close ties between the staff gave in to the pressure of a growing and formalising organisation.

5.1.2 The reign of the changing expatriate General Managers

The Golden Age discussed above was differentiated in the narratives of organisation members from the subsequent times marked by the reign of frequently changing expatriate General Managers. It would be a daunting task, though, to separate one stage from the other, as different authors seemed to be drawing the temporal lines differently. What is more, at times the chronological coherence of the narratives was hard to comprehend, as the boundaries between the different periods seemed to be blurring, depending on the theme discussed in interviews, which is in line with Gabriel's (2000:135) observation that 'the truth of a story lies not in accuracy but in its meaning'.

The period of the expatriate reign was typically associated with constant changes and instability. The local staff who have been working with the organisation long enough to experience a few foreign leaders, frequently pointed to a pattern of expatriate service:

> It was clear that they were coming here for two years; they would learn for one year and then look for a better job for themselves during the second year. This is how we perceived it and this is how it was.' (Oscar, top manager)

The changing expatriate managers were depicted in the locals' stories as introducing changes to the organisation yet lacking local business acumen. Often, the business decisions taken by expatriates were deemed as bizarre and evidencing their lacking knowledge or/and understanding of the pharmaceutical market in Poland, the consequences of which had to be counteracted by the locals:

> Americans have their own outlook on life. Americans don't know what kind of country Poland is. They are surprised that there are no polar bears in here. Their market approach is similar. For them, all those things that were working in the States have to work in Poland, too. They don't see a different possibility. Polish mentality is totally different. Poles approach many things differently. (…) Our pharmaceutical market is totally different than in the West. Here you have to talk totally differently to people in the clinic. Here people don't let you [if you are a sales rep] through with a smile. The sales representative is on a lost position before he or she even starts talking. (…) An American, Rumanian or Scottish boss won't get that, as we've seen so far. They can't grasp the whole thing. A Polish GM stands a chance, because they know how a Pole will react, they know how the Polish Health Care System works. (Warren, administrator)

It seemed that in the local's stories, the expatriates were depicted as a necessary evil – part of a corporate reality which one had to come to terms with and do business as usual. This was possible as long as the expatriates relied on the locals to do their job and did not insist on making all decisions themselves, as seemed to be the case with the toxic leader whose tenure will be discussed in the next section of this chapter:

> [The Canadian guy] was a bit of a wimp. He came here as if he was being deported so he did this and that and then he left. He did not have any major achievements. [But] A GM should not interfere, make any stupid things, shouldn't butt their nose in, because they have their people [in the field] to do that. (Robert, sales manager)

The most memorable event, however, during this period in the organisation's history was a take-over of a small and well known on the market pharmaceutical company, a theme which featured in a number of participants' narratives. The moment of the merger and the period afterwards were typically assessed by the participants as turbulent times. This point in the history of the company was explicitly or implicitly referred to as a clash of cultures, both by the employees of the taking-over as well as the taken-over side (compare Bruono *et al.*, 1985 for a more in-depth exploration of the topic). Quite unsurprisingly, though, the meaning of the events associated with the merger was

differently interpreted by different groups of participants, with the division falling predominantly along the lines of the pre-take-over organisation membership:

> I managed to get rid of a big number of people from the [taken-over company], who did not fit here. If you are working for a company, this can't be an additional activity to your private business. The company is not obliged to give you a car. You are to go to work and generate profit. The attitude of those employees was totally different. Doctors worked in the company while being active doctors; the company was to give them things and not expect anything in return. This was a clash of two different cultures. (Robert, sales manager)

> We survived, one can say, hell on earth including such nice things as comments made during some parties that they had no trust to us because we were just garbage or something like that. So it wasn't easy. (Roy, sales manager)

As a consequence, most employees of the acquired company were either dismissed or handed in their notice. Those who decided to stay discussed their memories from the take-over, even though a number of years had passed since they officially joined Aporia. In the end, they were assimilated into the new organisation but they had not forgotten where they came from. When asked about the beginnings of their employment in the organisation they would typically ask me questions about which organisation I was referring to and whether I wanted to hear about their previous employer.

In the second and third waves of research the antagonisms between the taking over and the taken over were not as visible as they were in the first wave, which was carried out in far closer time proximity to the take-over than the subsequent phases of data collection. Yet, the take-over was a theme that some of the staff, especially from the taken-over organisation, still evoked in their narratives and collages relating to the organisation's past.

Except for the take-over, the reign of expatriate General Managers was described by participants as relatively peaceful, at least when compared to the incumbency of the last expatriate. As participants were suggesting, the times when he was running the subsidiary coincided with some changes in the Polish market. Some scandals in the pharmaceutical industry had been revealed and in turn pharmaceutical companies had to observe more strictly the new anti-corruption regulations. At the same time, Aporia's drugs started to be endangered by generic drugs and suffered a blow due to some changes to the reimbursement list which meant that some of their products were taken off the list of drugs subsidized by the government. As a consequence, fewer patients could afford to get the expensive medicine produced by the company and often decided

to look for a cheaper substitute, such as a generic drug. This change dealt a serious blow to Aporia's sales figures. Those were the first signs of the troubles that were to come.

5.1.3 The toxic leadership episode

With time, a new expatriate General Manager was appointed. His reign produced some of the most emotionally charged narratives. His incumbency was depicted by the participants as a very difficult period in the organisation's history, in terms of the internal changes that were introduced and the deteriorating performance of the Polish subsidiary.

The narratives of his reign were typically built around three main and overlapping themes: a focus on formalization, micromanagement and finally the freezing of all budgets. The stories of the toxic leadership also offered insights into the emotional aspects of employees' experiences of this turbulent period in the organisation's history. The three main themes of the toxic leadership episode will be discussed below, together with some of the most often discussed emotional responses that they triggered.

As a number of participants observed, the beginning of his reign was pretty typical for any expatriate leader who was trying to find his feet in the new organisational reality. However, the situation changed as time went by:

> The beginning [of his reign] was not that bad. At a point he was perceived as a nice, approachable and reasonable guy. Later, it turned out to be different. It's hard to say, it's as if stress had been piling up in him, as if this had been caused by the fact that the sales had been going not the way they should. There were a lot of different reasons. At some point (…) a review of all procedures and limitations started. Budgets were frozen, payments were not made. In general, sales representatives were used only for promotion. (Oliver, internal consultant)

In the narratives of the staff, the period of the toxic leadership was marked by an ostensible preoccupation with formal rules and procedures. As one participant vividly observed: 'it was a dictatorship of documents':

> I paid for it with my own health because I would sit here really long hours and come to work at weekends just to find information which in no normal company is necessary to convince your boss to do something, e.g. training for sales representatives. Very often explaining obvious things took so much time and required gathering such an amount of documents that you had to sacrifice your free time for it. (Richard, marketing specialist)

In the narratives, the expatriate General Manager was depicted as somebody who held a deeply entrenched belief that Polish people were untrustworthy. This was said to be reflected in the upsurge of new regulations and procedures which were designed to prevent possible misbehaviour on the part of the local staff:

> I personally felt controlled all the time. I felt controlled so that I would not (this is such a silly expression) steal anything. (Ann, top manager)

According to the employees' accounts, procedures surpassed other aspects of running the business. For example, new procedures were introduced which necessitated confirmation of all expenditure well in advance. A complex system of pre-approval of all spending was implemented. In order to get permission to spend any money, the staff were obliged to fill in all the necessary forms and submit ample documentation to their superiors and in the last instance to the General Manager, who was the only person who could give the final approval:

> He could demand very detailed information from people about what they were planning to do. He wanted to get this information in the form of a report. He analyzed it for a long time, so the whole process kept prolonging for months. And there was a constant demand for more detailed information. (Matt, top manager)

As a result, employees started to believe that it did not pay off to come up with new initiatives as they required too much time and effort and later normally went down the drain pipe. Step by step they lost their initiative and their will to do more than was absolutely necessary:

> Here I see a man who is sitting in his cubicle. And he could sit there and do nothing the whole day because no matter what he came up with, it would be wrong. People were creative and the two gentleman [the General Manager and his main financial controller, also an expatiate] ruined it. People were tired. Things that were happening were chucked to a bin. (…) It was an ordeal. (Earl, sales force)

The above quoted excerpt also indicates another important characteristic of the toxic leadership episode, namely a tendency of the expatriate General Manager towards micromanagement:

> He was a perfectionist. He would often get in a dead-end. When he was not sure that he would get good quality, he would do it himself. (…) When somebody let him down, he used to leave them less and less space for maneuver and later he would stop listening to them at all. (Iris, top manager)

> He treated himself as an oracle in all respects and he disregarded the opinion of specialists of whom we have so few now because many of them left. We lost these people due to lack of respect for them and for their knowledge. He did a lot of damage. (Nina, sales manager)

The participants reported feelings of helplessness and incapacitation, as they believed that they could not make any decisions and had to rely on the General Managers approval of every single move they wanted to take:

> One thing in particular irritated me a lot. I was a sales manager so I was responsible for my team, however everything, even the smallest things, depended on the General Manager, for example applications for holidays from my people. The question is why? I treated this as lack of trust in me. (Otis, sales manager)

> He was the best boss, the best product manager, the best sales manager, the best business unit manager. And he insisted on doing everything himself, he knew everything better than everybody else. He had to take all decisions himself. (…) People felt incapacitated. (Oscar, top manager)

In particular the collages triggered emotionally charged narratives. In the narratives accompanying collages, the leader was very often depicted as an octopus devouring the employees, as illustrated below:

> The octopus stands for devouring of the team; the team did not work as one. The individuals were devoured by him: different bosses were fired. Some people were fighting and defending themselves. People were stripped off all optimism. (Michel, financial manager)

Figure 5: Collage of The toxic leadership episode (Earl, sales force)

The employees were presented as stranded by the tentacles of the toxic leader, separated from each other rather than working in a team. Everyone was fighting their own battle for survival:

> It's such an all-embracing giant that coils around us and from which you can't escape because it has so many tentacles. These tentacles can always squeeze you, you just can't catch a breath. (Roy, sales manager)

> The GM had no trust in us whatsoever. He was highly suspicious of everything. He incapacitated everyone. We couldn't do anything without his approval. All, even minor, processes were blocked because he wanted to decide about everything. In the end, we couldn't have anything done because he had no time to talk to us. We was bogged down in details. (Oliver, internal consultant)

The above discussed feeling of being incapacitated often featured in the staff's narratives as linked to the General Managers decision to freeze all budgets, a decision which appeared to be binding also for the services that the organisation had already commissioned:

> We had some agreements signed with doctors. They were supposed to get money for giving presentations during conferences; these were the services that they delivered for us. We had invoices for this, we were supposed to pay the doctors. And he said that he wouldn't pay. (...) And when somebody tried to oppose he said that they could take him to court. (..) So we started to dramatically lose any relations with key opinion leaders [who could work for us and help us with our promotion] and with all doctors as well. (Zachary, internal consultant)

The decision of the expatriate General Managers was interpreted by the participants as being directly responsible for souring their relationships with clients, which in turn affected the market position of the company. Their market share took a knock, the clients of the company started to turn their backs on a business partner who was unable to cooperate with them efficiently and the employees felt unable to do anything about it. It appeared that the company lost all the credibility it had built for years in less than two years of the new policy:

> These very good relations went sour. Doctors didn't want to talk to us. One girl from the sales force told me that within two years he took to pieces what they had built over the years. (Olivia, assistant)

The worsened financial performance was also interpreted by the staff as contributing to an unprecedented voluntary and involuntary staff turnover. Dissatisfied with the sales results, the General Manager took some people out of the organisation. He dismissed many people who had not seen it coming, the consequence of which were ubiquitous uncertainty and fear. Some staff admitted that they would call each other late at night in the hope of hearing some rumours about who was going to be made redundant next:

> It was constant stress. (…) When I went to work I didn't know if I would be fired that day or not. I sometimes stood in the copy room and cried. (Lois, financial officer)

Meanwhile, a lot of employees with much experience and knowledge of the business left the company. As I was informed, approximately sixty percent of the field force

changed. At one point there was no marketing in the company as nearly all the employees had handed in their notice.

Many informants talked at length about the ubiquitous fear. When composing a collage they frequently illustrated these negative emotions with a photo of a woman that is terrified of the knives that are flying above her head. This picture as well as others (such as a tornado or a crouching tiger) was often chosen to depict terror and constant fear. It was to illustrate fear of losing a job, uncertainty and insecurity – emotions which were associated with these times in company's history by almost all interviewees. The following quote represents fairly well how employees would reflect while composing collages on these negative emotions in relation to their past work and the previous leader:

> Generally, he evoked very negative emotions. Like this picture [the knives]. This is terror, the feeling of hopelessness, inability to do anything. In the company there was this fear and I felt this fear, too. There were a lot of meetings organized and at the end of every such meeting we had to talk. I was absolutely terrified that I was to talk about the results that I was not satisfied with. I had the feeling that I couldn't do anything about it because I had no tools and no means and that I would be forced again to talk about it, that I would be forced to talk about something that was most important for the company and I had nothing to be proud of. And this was also terror that the company was heading to a beautiful disaster and that everything was about to fall apart and that we would all be fired. (Otis, sales manager)

The peril associated with those times was also often linked to the amount and pace of the changes that were introduced. In order to illuminate this state of persistent and overwhelming flux, employees normally pointed at photos of a tornado (or a spinning top). These images triggered discussion about the perceived destruction that was caused to the organisation, chaos, and again about fear.

> It's chaos, fear, hopelessness, incapacity; you can't do anything. It's hard to do anything with a tornado. (Edward, sales force)

As some informants expanded on the similarities between the tornado and their past experience, they emphasized the fact that a tornado is unpredictable, violent and very powerful, and so was, in their view, the General Manager. A tornado is no good news, but a disaster, a strike of misfortune. You never know for sure if it is going to strike you or not and when it might happen. The only thing you can do is wait and hope that you will manage to escape.

The participants would often employ military or marine metaphors to talk of their experiences of toxic leadership. They would say that they survived the 'terror' because they were not 'the main target', that they were 'incapacitated' and 'handcuffed', that the

organisation was 'a wreck' of what it used to be, that the General Manager had 'taken down some people' and that there were many who had simply 'given up the fight' and 'abandoned the sinking ship', as in the quotes below:

> This [wire entanglements] is prison, lack of freedom, inability to express your own ideas, simply prison. (Edward, sales force)

> It was a feeling of endangerment. (…) It was a constantly growing impression of leaving the sinking boat (...). We had to be careful what we said and who we said it to, what we did and how we did it, because it could always be used against you. It was constant confrontation between the employees and the management, the management and the employees, the management and the head office, us and the market, us and the auditors, etc. (Iris, top manager)

> Here the sealed slips and times of nothingness. We couldn't say anything, we couldn't do anything. And it's us perceived as criminals. (…) We constantly had to confess [our sins] to him, this was like a court. These were abnormal times and the company was abnormal as well. Everything we did could go to the shredder. We mainly dug in papers. Our worked was confined to this, because we didn't sell anything. We were producing corporate fiction on paper. (Ericka, sales manager)

When after two years of leading the widely disliked General Manager was transferred to a different location, an overwhelming majority of his staff celebrated this blissful moment. They would refer to the day when they heard the news about his leaving as one of the best days that year. It was by some celebrated with a glass of champagne. Finally, the controversial General Manager was out of sight and definitely out of heart, yet his presence was still felt in the company. His reign made a deep mark on the employees he left behind.

5.2 Narrating the present

After the controversial leader was transferred to a different country, a new General Manager took the lead. The beginnings of his incumbency were discussed at length in the second wave of the research which was conducted a few months after he had assumed his new role in Aporia and was launching the culture change initiative. The participants would typically talk about the general optimism in the organisation resulting from the change of the General Manager, the changes that have been introduced since his arrival, as well as the current problems that were still haunting the organisation. The largely unitarist interpretations of the present were, however, interspersed with voices which were more reserved in their optimism. These dissonant interpretations of the present would express concerns over the current situation in the organisation and the changes that were taking place. Different groups of organisation

members expressed such concerns over their situation and the changing organisational reality. As a result, a more differentiated and fragmented picture of Aporia emerged from the narratives.

In what follows, I will discuss the dominant interpretations of the present, which I will then complicate by introducing some of the dissonant voices into the discussion.

By and large, the majority of participants talked about the present situation with a lot of optimism, an optimism which referred to a number of areas of organisational reality: the new General Manager and often more generally, the new management team, the atmosphere at work after the departure of the former expatriate leader and finally the changes that had been introduced. I will discuss these themes in more detail below.

The new General Manager was depicted in a very favourable light, especially in comparison to his widely disliked predecessor. The fact that he was the first Polish general Manager in the organisation's history also seemed to have been an important factor for the staff:

> There's been a change for the better. As far as I know, everybody agrees with me that we finally have a decent boss. We finally deserved a decent boss. (…) He's really to-the-point. He is not a fault-finder. There's a better contact with him, he is more approachable. There are no private businesses. For the first time in fourteen years I am working with a boss that is really OK. (…) I feel like going to work. You don't go to work thinking whether you will stay there till the end of the day or not whether you will be called to the boss's office, thanked for your work or walked to the elevator and said goodbye. There were such cases in the past. (Jeremy, administrator)

> This is the best thing that could happen to us – a Polish GM- He's a young and cultured man – he's as different as chalk and cheese to what we had before. For sure it won't be easy for him because what he found was fallow land, a battlefield after a fight. Now everything has to start anew. (…) All the survivors welcomed him as salvation. (Natalie, internal consultant)

Employees, especially the ones working in the office, expressed the view that the new General Manager was trying to make their work more doable and was there to help them overcome the obstacles that hampered the business. They appreciated his personal qualities, such as decisiveness, approachability and good manners.

While the majority of participants focused in their discussions of the present on the new General Manager, others would talk more generally about their trust in the new management team, as illustrated vividly by the quotes below taken from narratives accompanying organisational collages:

Let the chap on the spring be our company that gets such springs and let the GM and the business unit manager be this spring. Thanks to them we will go high up. (Erick, marketing specialist)

This is a motorway [a photo of a bridge and a motorway that goes over the bridge]. We are driving on the motorway but already on a very solid bridge. We still don't really know where this road will take us, but we're already on a solid bridge. This is a new bridge, I associate it with the new situation in the company and mainly with its management. The bridge is solid. It's solid, strong, so while going through the bridge you look optimistically into the direction where you are heading. It's safe on a solid bridge that goes in a good direction. (Abigail, assistant)

Figure 6: Collage of Narrating the present (Abigail, assistant)

The discussed optimism referred also to the general atmosphere at work. Many interviewees confessed that they had finally stopped looking for a new job, as their working environment starting coming back to what was considered a normal state:

We stop treating our company as a prison. (Warren, administrator)

The changes taking place in Aporia were often referred to as 'a new start'. The talk of the new beginning was particularly visible in narratives accompanying collages, as the one shown below, where 'a small plant' was often used to symbolize a new beginning.

Figure 7: Collage of Narrating the present (Michelle, marketing specialist)

As the participants were suggesting, the company was preparing itself for a big leap into a better and more stable future. Some action had already been taken (e.g. reorganization in the company structure, initiatives to improve the operational functioning of all departments, a new bonus and career path system for the sales force, simplification of procedures, etc.) but a lot more was required for the company to take off and compete successfully on the market. The participants would often point to a picture of a man on a spring to talk about the initiated changed and their expected and hoped for outcomes. The spring was frequently associated with energy and the will to work, to change things and to commit oneself to work. It meant overcoming the past lethargy and incapacitation, gathering strength and ability to do one's job properly. The company was often compared to a crouching tiger, an animal that is still in the awaiting position, possibly dangerous for the others (here the competitors) but not yet actively attacking. The employees recognized the potential that was awoken by the changes, yet they did not see enough action that would strengthen their company's position on the market. What was visible at that time were preparations, cleaning up the damages after the tornado, refocusing, working out new strategies, setting new foundations.

Yet, as a number of participants noticed, the changes taking place were at times a bit clumsy. Organisation members observed that they struggled to work as one team, as not enough time had passed for the relationships to build:

> Right now we have one conductor who is trying to put his orchestra in order. Still, for the time being we are playing the same instrument, but most probably everybody does his or her thing. So we kind of have our club colours and everybody is doing their best on their part, but it's still not one work of art. We all have to adjust to each other and the GM has to introduce a way of leading his team. This is already happening but it's not that such things can happen within two or three months. It takes time for the people to learn how to cooperate with each other. (…) Everybody is trying to play a beautiful melody, but it's their individual melody. (Oscar, top manager)

The change efforts were typically seen in a positive light as they seemed to be paying off. The participants were quoting sales figures which had improved considerably after the arrival of the new management team. The improved results were then used as evidence that the negative trend that had plagued the organisation for some time might have actually been reversed and the company was finally starting to bounce back:

> [The new General Manager] poured enthusiasm into people's hearts that it is possible to achieve good results. Results confirm this (…) what he had said. (…) Now I believe one can see that the level of motivation in the team has risen due to the fact that the promises of a good result lead to a good result. (Jeff, top manager)

The promising sales results were in fact something that the management of the organisation tried to highlight in communications with staff. For example during the Annual Sales Meeting that I attended, the sales results were referred to a few times as a sign that the adopted strategy of the new management team was successful. As the General Manager highlighted during his speech:

> 'In our company we haven't had such a [good] result for a long time. This is your achievement, thank you for this. (…) 'We are expecting phenomenal results in January.' (laughter from the audience)

> 'A clear change in trend is visible, especially since August. We have achieved what we had hoped for.'

Also the offices of the General Manager and some of his direct reports were decorated with graphs presenting the optimistic sales results. The revered sales trend was to announce the success that was to come.

The tokens of success, as discussed above, were often used in interview narratives as a background against which the wider changes in the organisation had been interpreted. The present was depicted as times of intensified changes which were hoped to put the organisation back on track.

In participant's narratives, curbing the overgrown bureaucracy emerged as one of the most important tasks facing the management team. There were still many regulations

that should, in the employees' view, be simplified and preferably disposed of. Tackling the procedures was talked of as a burning problem:

> He should deal with taming the procedures (…) We have to root out the paranoia coming out of them. (Nina, sales manager)

> What I see that bothers people, because it luckily didn't disturb me too much, is the question of procedures, policies, notification which makes it difficult to establish good relations with clients. (Jeff, top manager)

However, as some participants pointed out, not everybody in the organisation was interested in reducing the importance of procedures and therefore carrying out the necessary changes might prove difficult:

> To me, this seems difficult because the whole financial department backs up these procedures, for whom the procedures are very comfortable. They don't work with people. They don't have to sell anything. They felt like a separate state. We all provide service for them and not they for us. (…) It bugs me that the accounting department just wants to cover up their asses. They won't by any means go over the agreed frame, because this means les work for them, there are fewer decisions. And every decision entails a risk that it can be bad so it's better not to take this decision. (Nina, sales manager)

> [When I came here my first observation was that Aporia] is very strong due to finances and procedures. I had the impression that the financial department made the ruling here. (Matt, top manager)

It seemed that the financial department occupied a central place in the organisation and therefore had the power to define how things should and should not be done. With a view to its function, it was reported to prefer very safe solutions that left no room for future misinterpretations and auditors' concerns. This in turn, led to frustration among other employees who were more than happy to interpret regulations in a way that would enable them to do their job faster and more effectively.

The overgrown bureaucracy was, however, only one of the areas that were subject to changes. In fact, taming red tape was designed to improve the overall performance of the organisation which seemed to be the main objective of the new management team and interestingly also a concern shared by a number of employees who had previously worried that 'the company was heading to a beautiful disaster'.

Organisational performance was to be improved due to the introduction of a new motivation system for the sales staff. As both the managers and the sales representative commented, it was an aggressive system in that bonuses for meeting the targets were very competitive. They would, however, drop sharply when the targets were not fully met. In other words, it was designed to motivate the sales force to try to fully meet their

objectives. The system was described by the management as transparent; rules were said to be laid out explicitly and straightforwardly. Apparently, there was no room for ambiguity:

> It is a very nice bonus system. (…) It makes sense. It rewards people who meet at least 100% of their target. (…) We need this, this motivates people. (Ricky, sales force)

However, the new focus on results and the strong drive for success came at a price. In particular the sales force would describe the pressure they were under as excessive. Some participants would quote examples of management practices which, in their view, exerted too much pressure on them. As I was told, at a point the management decided to make all bonuses public and to present lists of top and bottom performers to all employees, which was welcomed by some staff, and resented by others:

> Everybody works for money. I believe that everybody wants to have good results, because this means money. A couple of months ago some kind of internal competition was introduced, which did not exist before and which bothers a lot of people (…). It's juxtaposing, comparing percentage points of plan realization, it's showing the bonuses that people got. (…) Here in Poland financial matters are taboo. I just don't want anybody to know what kind of bonus I received. (…) Why should we make such things public? It's not right. (Simon, sales force)

Additionally, while conducting their marketing activities, sales representatives would constantly receive text messages informing them how much they had sold and how much more was to be done. This attempt to boost motivation was perceived as one step too much:

> We had these special marketing actions, and every day we got text messages about how many packets we had sold, which region was better, this kind of statistics all the time. I personally really dislike it. (…) I believe that competition is healthy but not such an aggressive one. (Nicole, sales force)

The collages produced by participants working in the sales department helped to convey their struggles with the demands of their job. For example when discussing the collage below, one of the participants discussed the feeling of being treated as a number generating profit rather than a person:

> We are in a line, we are on a treadmill, this is such an impersonal crowd, such an impersonal line of cars. It's anonymous, it's only meant to go ahead, together, in a line. (Roy, sales manager)

Similar views resonated in other interviews carried out with employees from the sales force:

> Here is a motive of haste, deadlines. This is pressure from all sides. It's a chase with abandon. (…) Some people can't put up with it. There's no chance of diverting from the chosen path. There's some hope but there's also this haste that the results must be met. (…) It sometimes looks like a tornado that often goes in any given direction, you don't know where exactly. (…) The pressure is merciless. (…) People are treated in a very anonymous way. That's why I have chosen the cars. This fleet goes to the field and is described based on the results. Exclusively digits.(…) People are not treated as an asset in itself, they exist in the minds of the management as potential digits. (Ian, sales manager)

> Our company has a big problem because it has been clearly stated that it has to achieve success, which is the most frustrating thing for everyone. (…) People would like to attain success, yet they are really frustrated because they might not pull it off and what happens to them next? There is a million people here. If they lose their jobs, where will they go? (Roy, sales manager)

The newly introduced system of top-bottom performers had been often pointed out as one of the main reasons for the intense pressure. The system would compare the performances of the sales staff dividing them into top, average and bottom performers, with little regard on the circumstances of the employees. In practice this meant that the bottom performers, no matter whether they met their targets or not, could never feel safe. Consequently, the system promoted competition among staff rather than cooperation.

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The sales people however, were not the only group of employees who expressed their concerns about the present. The prevailing optimism among the participants and the hopeful gazes into the future described at the beginning of the narratives of the present were not universally shared. A number of organisation members, from different department and occupaying different positions, seemed fairly anxious about Aporia's situation. In particular, they would point to the fragility of the organsiation's market position, as some of their products whose patents were to expire soon were endangered by generic drugs. To make matters worse, there were no products that could replace them. Also, as some participants observed, the recently improved performance of the organisation was based on a marketing strategy which was not sustainable in the long run. Therefore, they were generally pleased with the direction the organisation was heading, especially in light of their experiences of the toxic leadership episode, yet the feeling of haunting insecurity overcast their optimism. The fears were particularly visible when discussing organisational collages, as shown below:

Figure 9: Collage of Narrating the present (Iris, top manager)

The feeling of endangerment is still somewhere there. Here the tornado is far away and it can either go past us or suck us in. We still have poor results, we still have an internally unstable company, for which the best example is the sudden resignation of four marketers within a couple of weeks. If you do some counting, you see that there are eleven places over there and during a couple of weeks four people out of eleven left. A big problem can still crop up somewhere if we overlook something. (Iris, top manager)

> I perceive the whole situation as something very positive, but there's some anxiety as well. There's a very big pressure on delivering results. I like good results, I am not afraid of them. Yet the pressure here is so big that you get the impression that if you don't deliver, you will be kicked out. I don't feel secure in this job. I get a feeling that I am constantly monitored whether I deliver my results or not. (Ann, top manager)

Interestingly, the employees who were rather weary about the success of the organisation could be found also among the top managers. In fact it seemed that the more skeptical employees were scattered all over the organisation, regardless of the department or seniority.

The prevailing optimism of the narratives was further overshadowed by some tensions among the staff that began to surface. In particular, divisions between the new and the old staff seemed to have gained in prominence. It appeared that some of the old staff observed the new organisation members with some skepticism, who reciprocated the feelings. I will try to account for the tensions in what follows.

It seemed that the perception of the past played an important role in shaping the relations between the old and the new staff. As already mentioned, the language adopted predominantly by the new management team, but also by other new organisation members across the board, described the present in terms of a new beginning:

> I got the information that there is a new team, there is a new General Manager, (…), we are starting a new stage in the company's history. There is a big challenge but also a big opportunity, because what we do here now will be company's asset in the future. So we have a big influence on what is going on in the company and this is a very comfortable situation. (Michelle, marketing specialist)

The participants explained that the main task for the managers was to: "build a new culture", "to put things in order", "to redefine priorities", "to promote rusty corporate values", "to build a solid basis for the future", "to start everything from scratch". It seemed that the new management team together with the other organisation members was to start everything anew as though the present was a caesura between the (bad) old days and the (better) future. The over ten year long track record of the Polish subsidiary seemed to have shrunk to the latest past and its troubles. Organisational past appeared to be unofficially labeled as times when things went wrong, which did not go unnoticed by the older employees:

> What caught my eye is the fact that the newcomers, except for the GM, believe that everything that has been here before is bad and the things they are doing now are all good. And this is not true, because people come here from various firms, better and worse ones, where things are done differently but not necessarily better. (…) They are overconfident in changing everything. (Oscar, top manager)

The new management of the company typically communicated a message that the present was a new beginning and that from that moment on a brand new quality was about to be introduced. The longer serving staff, on the other hand, were more inclined to talk about restoration of the organisation, or a hoped for come-back to the times when it was at its best.

In interviews, the newcomers presented themselves as having a lot of enthusiasm and ideas about how to get the new-old company off the ground. Notably, a large number of the interviewed new managers expressed a belief that "the old company", namely the long serving employees, prevented the organisation from taking a leap into better times. Allegedly, the problems were due to the fact that the old employees were used to the all-embracing procedures and learnt that one had to comply with them instead of trying to find a way to go around them. The new top and middle management appeared to share a belief that a lot more could have been done but for the old ties that inhibited growth. One could hear talk about the "old and the new company"- the old and the new crop of employees. Although the new General Manager emphasized that he would not welcome such distinctions and declared that he himself refrained from classifying staff according to length of service, such classifications seemed popular among members of staff. It appeared that a number of the new and old organisation members were eager to set boundaries between themselves and the members of the outgroup, whereby length of service functioned as a meaningful demarcating criterion.

According to the accounts of a number of the newly employed staff, organisation members with more seniority were too set in their ways to change. They were reluctant to modify things or they had little courage and drive to challenge the existing hurdles. Allegedly, the old staff were pleased with the way things were. Even if they endorsed some new ideas, they would not drive the situation:

> The old company is still in the old times. It is slowly changing as new people come on board, because they already adopt the new mode of working, however the old company is pretty immune to changes. It used to be very comfortable to work here. They were not evaluated based on their merits. (…) The old company is very resistant to change. (Ann, top manager)

The longer serving staff, on the other hand, tended to look at the newcomers with some distance and impatience, especially when they failed to understand the organisational reality. They would emphasize that they had a better knowledge and understanding of the existing procedures and arrangements and therefore they realized that some things

could not be done whereas others required a lot more time and effort than the newcomers seemed to suggest. They expected the new members of staff to respect this and come to terms with the fact that they could not simply change everything overnight because procedures and certain ways of doing things were an inherent part of their company. If they decided to come on board, they had to learn the ropes and then try to act within the existing space. They might try to carve a bigger niche for themselves by simplifying procedures, yet not all procedures could be simplified and definitely not instantly. As a result, some of the longer serving staff pointed out to what they perceived to be the carelessness and naive optimism of the new staff:

> My new boss has a fairly light-hearted attitude to all the admin and paperwork. (…) I sometimes get the impression that he thinks that we can arrange things spontaneously but we come up against some procedures. (…) I reckon he should be more aware of all these regulations. (Emily, assistant)

> Come on, it's [Aporia]. These are procedures. If I say that a process lasts, why do they assume that they can arrange things within a week? (Norah, logistics specialist)

Furthermore, while the longer serving staff appreciated some of the changes that were being introduced, such as attempt to simplify some procedures, normalise working relationships, introduce a new motivation system, they were not always captured by the appeal of the new initiatives. They had already seen many projects and many initially enthusiastic people come and go. They had been with the company long enough to remember that some initiatives had been tried out before and were then abandoned. They had already got involved in some projects before, and then realised that their efforts did not always pay off. In their accounts, they were too clever to repeat their mistakes. For them, their scepticism was a sign of wisdom – a lesson that they had learnt from their past experience:

> Many people look at what is going on now with a lot of scepticism, especially the ones who took part in a project two years ago. That project looked very promising. People got involved; they came up with some better or worse ideas. They really invented something and we could have made use of it, we could have awoken their initiative and given them the feeling that this was their company. And damn it, all this went down the drain pipe! While people were presenting their ideas, the previous GM sat at his computer and started writing up the minutes himself. We could not tell what would come out of it. Somebody would present their ideas and the boss would translate it into his chart that nobody understood. (Iris, top manager)

Their initiative was either killed or gradually eroded with the years of service. The message coming from interviews with experienced employees was that getting too involved in new initiatives was not a wise thing to do, as summarized below:

> I stopped wondering about it. It began to tire me. Let's say that some time ago I was able to think about different conceptions, but now I don't really give a damn. I think that it doesn't pay off. Why am I to improve the system if I see that the system doesn't give me anything in return? I try

to adjust to the ways things are now. Of course when I do something I try to do it the best I can (…) But now I have no intention to stick my neck out because it doesn't get you anywhere. If I get a better offer, I will immediately quit this job. I try to do my duties, half-heartedly. (Earl, sales force)

At times, the longer serving staff would get involved in new initiatives, however these would often trigger uncertainty and doubts:

I know that this is not a standard thing in our company. I have already found out how I am supposed to arrange this and I hope that I will be able to kick it off, but I have doubts whether I manage. Of course my boss will say that if you don't try, you never know. Yet if you have been trying for a couple of years, you just can't be bothered any longer. (Ericka, sales manager)

To conclude, the tensions between the old and the new members of staff, underpinned by mutual skepticism, impatience and, as it seemed, feelings of superiority, complicated the picture of Aporia as a recovering organisation unified under the common goal to 'put the company back on track'. It might have been a period of intensified effort where 'everybody's contribution mattered', as the General Manager was said to have declared on a number of occasions. However, the employees seemed to differ in their interpretations on the role, place and value of different participants in the initiated recovery.

The picture of Aporia becomes further complicated when the narratives of the present recounted hitherto are supplemented with the voices of the staff from the support departments, in particular the accountants and the employees of the registration department.

While the sales people described above typically pointed out the excessive pressure they were under, the accountants and employees from the registration department highlighted other aspects of their experiences and painted a markedly different picture of their organisation. I will start by discussing the images of Aporia as emerging from the narratives of the accountants which will be followed by accounts of participants from the registration department.

The employees from the accounting department had a tendency to look at their company differently than other groups of employees. At times the differences were so striking that it seemed that they were talking about a different company and, to some extent, this was true. As discussed in the background chapter, the accounting department used to be part of a different division of the researched company which had its own General

Manager and a separate budget from Aporia. It used to provide services to the division it had become part of shortly before the second wave of data collection. Accounting was a department mainly populated by women who had been working there for years.

The interviewed accountants perceived their organisation through the perspective of the other subdivision of the company, where the products were of a different nature (medical equipment instead of drugs), the staff turnover was very low and employees had been working under significantly less pressure for years. As a consequence, the collages created by the accountants reflected very much a different spirit than the rest of the company. One example of such collages is placed below together with a quote explaining the way the collage was understood by its author:

Figure 10: Collage of Narrating the present (Rachel, accountant)

I associate this firm with a 60-year old affluent gentleman who has a good car, a good watch and a good fountain pen. I associate this firm with sedate people who have achieved something in their lives. (…) Me? I am aside. I can be here – such a lovely girl. The whole accounting department is aside because we have no say in the company. We get the impression that our boss does not protect us, that he doesn't represent us enough. He should fight more for our rights; he should fight for more things for us. (Rachel, accountant)

It appeared that for the accountants their organsiation, as embodied in the microcosm of their department, appeared to be a very stable place. It was largely associated with the American headquarters and its long-standing tradition. Management was perceived as

something distant, something they had no access to; and something they showed limited concern for. The accounting department seemed to be living in a world of its own, relatively unaffected by the changes going around it. For them the company was stable, it stood for tradition and prestige.

Interestingly, the company's accountants were described by other participants as a fairly homogenous group that had developed strong ties over the years. It seemed that this view resonated with the narratives of the accountants. As one participant commented:

> We have a nice and friendly atmosphere here. There are no conflicts, as in other departments, although there are eight of us [in the open space]. We always hang out together and we have never had any internal problems or problems with our bosses. There are no big friendships, but we go for meals together. We sometimes organize private trips to the theatre, we sometimes go to each others' homes.' (Rachel, financial specialist)

The internal cohesion of the group, however, stood in stark contrast to the loose ties with the rest of the organisation. In their narratives, the accountants highlighted that they felt separated from the rest of the company. As the above quoted participant bluntly summarized:

> We, as the accounting department, provide services for other departments and we are very much treated as second-class citizens. It's that we don't generate profit, whereas they work. So we don't apparently deserve anything. (…) 'It's visible that the sales people are on top of the agenda whereas we are seen as cadgers. (Rachel, financial specialist)

The accountants quoted some examples which were to give credence to their interpretation. As I was told, the accountants and other office employees were expected to spend a day working alongside a sale representative so that they could get a better idea what their work was like. While the experience of going on such double visits, as the event was referred to, was not perceived as unpleasant, the idea behind it raised more controversy. In their accountants' view, the visits were pretty one-sided as they revolved round the sales people whose work appeared to be of highest importance. Similarly, it was the sales people who had bonuses and the biggest training budget. The other organisation members, including the accountants, had to make do with much less than was offered to their colleagues. In particular, one narrative very powerfully captured the theme of inferior treatment and it referred to allocated parking.

As the accountants observed, they were among the very few who did not have company cars and a parking space which would go with it. The scarce space that was allocated to them was described as highly inconvenient and inferior in comparison to the benefits

that other organisation member enjoyed. When some problems with this space appeared, they failed to have their interests properly represented, as their superior did not really fight their corner. In their views, they were 'a (small) cog in the machine'; a department 'on the side of the organisation' 'without any say'.

In this respect, the views of the accountants bear a lot of resemblance with the narratives of another group of support staff, namely the registration department. This department also depicted itself as residing on the margins of the corporate life. In the interviews the employees talked of their experiences as feeling unappreciated and forgotten by the rest of the organisation, which was vividly summarized by one participant when discussing her collage:

Figure 11: Collage of Narrating the present (Irena, administrator)

When asked about a photograph of a man in braces that was part of the collage, the participant observed that the man in the picture was chosen because he had no head. As the participant explained, he embodied her department and its anonymity in the company:

> I have the impression that the registration department is not appreciated enough. It's this man without a head. I guess that we are seen as people who come to work to drink coffee while in fact we have more work than we can handle. We are never in the kitchen. We sit in our rooms and

most people don't know what we actually do there. They think that we gossip all the time. (…) We are not noticed. When everything is ok, you can't see the effects of our work, because if everything is fine, there are no problems. But when a problem occurs, then it is our fault. People see only our mistakes and not the things that we do right. (Irena, administrator)

The theme of feeling unnoticed and unappreciated in the organisaition was raised also by other employees from this department. According to them the strong drive for results promoted mainly top salesmen and gave other employees little chance to be noticed. Although there was a new initiative to give special awards to people who had accomplished something praiseworthy or behaved in a way that displayed corporate values, the common belief was that only employees generating real profit for the company could be made visible. Interestingly, this view was not necessarily shared by employees of other departments. As one administrator perceptively observed, the medical department, where the registration belonged, had the most impressive ego wall in the whole organisation where they displayed different awards they had received. Indeed, the wall leading to the medical department was ornamented with an impressive array of certificates and diplomas. This, however, did not interfere with the participant's perceptions of their position in the organisation which was, similarly to the accountants, interpreted as peripheral to the core of the business.[16]

In summary, Aporia's present around the times when the culture change project was introduced was interpreted by the majority of participants with a fair amount of optimism and hope. The staff seemed to appreciate the attempts of the General Manager and other top executives to empower them and to simplify the procedures that had been hampering their work for a long time. Yet the enthusiasm was accompanied by some tensions between different groups of participants based on their length of service and occupational affiliation. Furthermore, the optimism was at times overcast by fear and uncertainty over the future and said to come at a high personal price. This fear and anxiety were revealed by different participants across the organisation. The optimism seemed at times fragile and built around early signs of success. The present emerged as a time of rebuilding the troubled organisation. It was the future then that was to bring the desired security and recognition.

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[16] On a minor note, their observations also bear some relevance in terms of the physical location of their offices in the organisation's premises. While the registration department was fairly closely located to the General Manager's office, they were separated by two card swiped doors and a corridor with elevators. It seemed to me, as an observer, that the main life in the office was located on the other end of the office occupied by the sales and marketing people.

5.3 Narrating the future

The images of the desired future for Aporia that emerged from the interviews and narratives accompanying the collages were surprisingly consistent in the accounts of various participants. I will start off by highlighting the common themes which I will then complicate by pointing to the often subtle differences and ambiguities in the ways participants envisioned the days to come.

Having analysed the narratives of the future, it appeared to me that they typically focused on the elements of the present that were, in participants' views, missing in their organisation. The desired future then was associated predominantly with stability and security which were further linked to a number of other interrelated subthemes: success of the organisation, clear vision, and teamwork. I will start off by unpacking the main theme of stability and security and subsequently demonstrate how it relates to the listed distinctive sub-themes.

The previously discussed narratives of the present suggested that a large number of participants complained about the change overload and craved for some stability. It was therefore stability that frequently featured in the narratives of the future. The meanings and aspects of stability that were craved for, however, differed among the participants. Stability was frequently linked to a secure company that did not have to fight for survival anymore. Stability therefore equated with a secure market position achieved thanks to reliable and competitive products. In the collages, stability was often depicted by the image of an elephant or a fortress suggesting that the organisation would weather all storms and was there to last. Some participants, however, interpreted stability predominantly in terms of the internal operations of the organisation and the situation of its employees. The longer serving especially staff highlighted the need for continuity and the end to the incessant changes:

> The fact that I have had four General Managers and four line managers in my five years of working here is not really contributing to stability. When something crystallizes and sets in, something better or worse, but when this finds its track, it will be better than now. (Ian, sales manager)

For the longer serving staff continuity was a highly desirable and unfortunately missing feature of their organisational landscape. They seemed tired with the constant need to change, reshape and rebuild their organisation. The changes not only required

intensified effort, but were also described as psychologically draining. The employees seemed tired of sacrificing to their company more than they, in their view, should. They understood the need of corporate success. Still, they were unwilling to contribute to it at all cost. Work-life balance was something that a lot of the staff had been deprived of for quite some time:

> I understand that the company is trying to bounce back, but this is happening at our expense. The character of our work has changed significantly. (Simon, sales force)

> I see it based on my example. I leave home on Tuesday, come back on Thursday and spend two days in a hotel, I answer millions of e-mails, annually I do about 60 thousand km. I have neckache, I can't move my head (…) and I don't have time to go to the swimming pool and I don't have time to talk to my wife at home, because the first thing I do after work is to go from my car to the computer and I finish around midnight. This naturally leads to some frustrations. I understand that this is business, that something needs to be done but there are certain limits of this paranoia. We can't cross the line of paranoia that people should not deal with anything else but worship the new god Aporia and pray to it in the morning, in the evening and at night and devote the whole day to it. (Roy, Sales Manager)

Figure 12: Collage of Narrating the future (Warren, administrator)
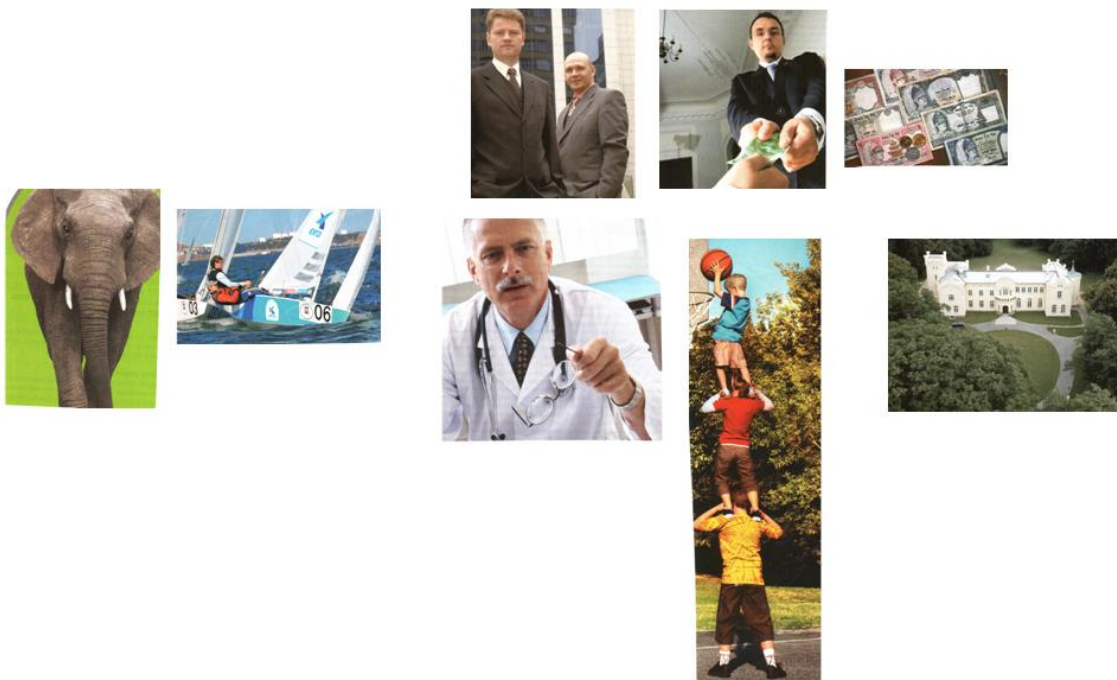
Interestingly, stability was not something that the top managers emphasized in their narratives of the future. They tended to focus more on the need to be aggressive as an organisation rather than safe and stable, which seemed to be the preference of non-executive staff.

As already indicated, the moment of the research was often perceived by the participants as a trial period for the organisation, the last chance that would determine

its future. Therefore the prevailing feeling was that the participants had to work hard to prove to the Headquarters that their subsidiary was not in a lost position:

> If only everything could be according to corporate wishes – our Headquarters. I wish we, as the Polish subsidiary, could achieve some success, so that our flag could hang in [the location of the headquarters][17]. Then it's enjoying the benefits of the success and appreciation of one's work. (J Lois, financial officer)

This typically meant increased effort from the participants: working longer hours, trying to establish new strategies and regaining customers' trust. In fact the references to the Headquarters were found to be a common theme in data obtained from a number of sources. Headquarters featured as a theme discussed in interviews and informal conversations with participants. References to the organisation's Headquarters also appeared in official addresses of the executives and the internal newsletter.

The need for stability and security was further linked to another often occurring theme in the narratives of the future, namely success. The need for success referred to the organisation as a whole, but also to the success of its employees and the subsequent feeling of accomplishment. As one participant observed when discussing her collages:

> The cups and medals symbolize met targets that we are to achieve. This is a gesture of appreciation for those who contributed to this success. (Isabel, financial specialist)

It is worth noting that, in particular, the support staff highlighted the need to be noticed and rewarded for their success. The sales staff, on the other hand, tended to highlight more the material aspects of success that they would like to enjoy.

Furthermore, the need for success of the organisation was also discussed in relation to individuals' identification with the organisation. Participants would frequently highlight that they would like to be part of an organisation that others look up to. Some members admitted that there had been moments that they were ashamed of being part of Aporia. Consequently, they wished to prove to other players in the market that the situation had changed:

> I hope that everything will be better in the future; that all the sudden moves now will pay off; that maybe everything will settle down; that we will achieve a certain desirable level and that this will work out. (Nicole, sales force)

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[17] This is a reference to the corporate tradition that a representative of a country where the subsidiary has achieved a certain level of sales can hang their flag in the organisation's Headquarters as a sign of recognition. The reference to the Polish flag and this corporate ritual was made on a few occasions by the longer serving staff. The new participants were most likely unfamiliar with this tradition, as I was cautioned.

A Mercedes is a symbol of prosperity. These are two things that I personally aspire to. I believe that there should be some standards; that the company should operate on a certain level. Little things build a positive image of the company. I would like our standards to be a bit higher than others, I would like us to stand out in the crowd. (Earl, sales force).

This gentleman who is here preparing for a jump will make a big leap and in a very elegant manner will startle the competition. (Richard, marketing specialist)

The theme of success was further linked to participants' desires for a vision. In the participant's accounts, such a vision was often seen as missing, in particular at the time of the second wave of the research. A number of participants expressed their concerns about the direction where the company was heading. Again, the lack of vision was interrelated to the feelings of anxiety over the fragile situation of Aporia in terms of its market position and internal instability:

We are seriously endangered by generic drugs, we don't really know whether we will be able to defend ourselves. In fact, nobody talks to us about the future of the organisation, how we are going to develop. Nobody presents such a vision to us. (Ericka, sales manager)

The provision of a clear vision was typically voiced in the form of expectations towards the new General Manager of the Polish subsidiary rather than the Headquarters. As it was highlighted, the General Manager was hoped to be a leader of the organisation which was typically understood as establishing and communicating a clear vision. The fantasies of leadership typically became more pronounced when participants discussed the collages of the future, as illustrated below:

Figure 13: Collage of Narrating the future (Nicole, sales force)
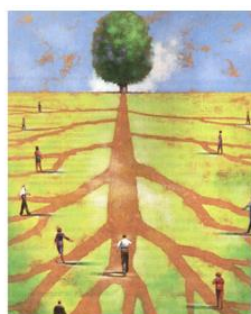
> We need leadership that is simple and clear information; persistence in what we are doing and at the same time managing everything in a harmonic way which brings things together. (Ian, Sales Manager)

Interestingly, many participants discussed the need for leadership not only in terms of the desired leader, but also followership understood as a team working towards the same objectives:

> I see here not only the conductor but rather a team that he is leading so that everyone plays as one. In music everyone has to adjust to other people and to the conductor. (Nicole, sales force)

During the second wave of research participants would often describe themselves as a group of individuals who were attempting to find common ground, but still had not managed to do so. Interestingly, it appeared that the staff saw value in a more unitaristic approach to the organisation where common goales would override the individual interests:

> For me it is important that the organisation functiones as one organism, so that everyone knows what was what and where to turn for advise. This is utopic, because it is impossible to make everyone work head to head with everybody. I wished everyone could realize that (…) if we all pull our acts together, the whole company will go places, and not only the salary of the directors or my manager; we can all benefit. (Warren, administrator)

The need for common goals was typically linked to the ability to co-operate effectively as well as the willingness of individual organisation members to go beyond their scope of duties rather than pass the buck on others:

> People are trying to set boundaries between people who really should be dealing with something and people who in theory deal with some things. (Oliver, internal consultant)

In fact, this readiness to act and make things happen was often pointed out as one of the most desirable features among the staff[18]. The top managers would also often discuss the theme of teamwork but they did so typically by referring to the English concept of 'customer service'. As they highlighted, different departments should focus more on providing the highest quality service to other departments in the organisation. According to them, strong 'Internal customer focus' was still to come.

The need for teamwork, as discussed above, was also linked to a more general discussion of relationships at work. A number of staff hoped for more amicable relationships at work, often resembling the nostalgic images of the early years when the ties among staff were said to be much stronger. The craving for better working

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[18] One of the questions encouraged the participants to discuss who they enjoyed working with and to account for their preferences. In was in this context that the importance of the will to act was highlighted.

relationships, however, was not only expressed by the longer serving staff. Also some of the new employees depicted the desirable organisational future as characterized by trust among staff. This view is well illustrated by a quote coming from a narrative built around a collage:

> I have chosen this image [a holding couple] to emphasize that we still do not have this kind of relations in the office. These are the relations between a man and a woman, most probably, but what I mean is trust to another person and a friendly atmosphere - an even friendlier atmosphere than now. (Abigail, assistant)

While the appreciation of teamwork and expectations of more friendly relationships at work were by and large voiced throughout the organisation, the sales people typically focused more on the excessive, in their view, competition that was promoted in their organisation which they would rather replace by more joint effort to achieve the desired results:

> I like this picture (…). These people are fighting with each other whereas these ones are fighting with their opponent. (Roy, sales manager)

The internal competition that was promoted among the sales force was perceived by them as leading to aggressiveness which was regrettably internally rather than externally focused. In the future they would rather work more closely together to withstand attacks from their competitors.

The collage below, together with its accompanying quote, captures nicely most of the themes discussed above in relation to the desired future of the organisaition. Aporia in the years to come then emerges as a stable organisation with confident staff, who know where they are heading and look optimistically into the future:

> This [a couple] is a picture of how we should look like in the future. This picture is full of peace. This illustrates this internal peace, these people are peaceful inside and not so aggressive. They will know what they are doing and why they are doing it, where they are and what they are craving for and they will feel this warmth inside. (Roy, internal consultant)

It seemed that this idyllic vision of Aporia, however, was still very much a fantasy – a better version of the haunted present.

5.4 Summary

Having presented a more nuanced account of Aporia's history, as narrated and experienced by different organisation members, I will now offer a more 'factual' and by necessity general summary of Aporia's evolution over the years. This simplified overview of what seem to by the key elements of the accounts is designed to set the scene for the subsequent chapter devoted in its entirety to the culture change initiative.

It appears that over the period of more than ten years of operating in Poland Aporia has changed significantly. It has gone from a small company displaying many features of a family business to a medium-sized, highly structured and procedures-led organisation. It has had a number of expatriate General Managers who stayed in the subsidiary for a

maximum of two years. Similarly, the business environment it operated in has changed a lot as well. Initially, shortly after the Polish transformation into a free market economy, the market was booming. However, with time, it has stagnated and the competition became fiercer. Some generic companies started to pose a serious threat to Aporia's business as many of its patents either expired or were about to expire. The subsidiary found itself in a difficult position trying to meet the sales targets set by the Headquarters and responding to cut-throat competition in the local market. It was increasingly harder to compete successfully with other players, who were often seen as resorting to unethical behaviour in pursuit of better sales figures (compare Makowska, 2010).

Simultaneously, the affiliate experienced major internal problems due to a clash between the former expatriate General Manager and the local employees, which led to a large voluntary and involuntary staff turnover, undermined morale and preoccupation with bureaucratic procedures which, in the locals' view, hamptered performance. This in turn, combined with a keen external competition, affected the company's performance and position in the market. The company lost its market share, its reputation and many of its valued employees. The disquieting downward trend appeared to have been reversed after a change to a local General Manager who, together with his largely newly recruited executive team, focused on improving organisational performance. Gradually the sales results started to improve and a large number of staff appeared to welcome most of the newly introduced substantive changes (e.g. new motivation system, career paths for sales staff, simplification of procedures). Most of the employees appeared to be optimistic about the future and hungry for a long awaited organisational success.

Nevertheless, the present was not free from its worries, as the financial revival was still very fragile and the pressure from the Headquarters to improve performance was bitterly felt among staff. Furthermore, some tensions between the new and the longer serving organisation members started to surface. In the meantime, many participants complained about the perceived 'change overload' and 'change fatigue' largely associated with the former expatriate managers and their fascination with the new. Stabilisation seemed to be among the most often articulated needs, at least among the longer serving staff.

It was in this context that the culture change initiative, which is the main focus of this thesis, was initiated. The efforts to do culture work in Aporia will be discussed in the following chapter and subsequently analysed with reference to the existing academic literature on the topic. As will be illustrated later in the thesis, Aporia's culture initiative was considered to be one of the means which were to allow the organisation to overcome its current troubles.

6 Culture change project

Having discussed in the previous chapter the context in which the change initiative was undertaken, I now move on to presenting the project itself. This is done by highlighting different aspects of the project together with its interpretation by different organisation members.

I will start by discussing the structure of the project, its main elements and actors. I will then move on to presenting the official rationale behind the culture intervention which will be juxtaposed with an outline of different attitudes adopted to the project by different participants. Subsequently, I will turn to the way the organisation members approached the doing of culture work which will be divided into three distinctive sections. I will start by exploring the consultants' role in the project, in particular in relation to the culture study they had undertaken in Aporia and its recommendations. Then, I move on to discuss the two main foci of culture work undertaken in Aporia - attempts at working with organisational values and leadership. The chapter ends with an attempt at evaluating the project by looking at different accounts of organisation members at its official end.

6.1 Design of the project

In Aporia, the 'culture project' was set a one-year time scale. It was often referred to as a 'culture' or 'values' project, as it was based on the promotion of corporate values. The project initiated in the Polish subsidiary and discussed in this thesis was part of a larger corporate initiative focused on the promotion and implementation of such values. As the General Manager, however, suggested, all divisions of the corporation had been given freedom as to how they would go about this task.

In the Polish subsidiary, the design and course of the project were considerably influenced by a local management consulting company which was invited to help the management with the task. Some decisions, however, about the running of the project were taken before the consultants were employed. For example each of the four values which were to be promoted was allocated a value leader, or as it was sometimes referred

to, a champion who was responsible for its promotion. The whole project was also assigned a project leader, one of the newly employed top managers, who became responsible for coordinating all activities connected with it. After a couple of months, however, the project leader handed in his notice and returned to his former employer. As a consequence, the leadership of the culture project was taken over by the General Manager himself.

What the criteria were for selecting employees to be value leaders was not clearly articulated to me. As I was told, some employees seemed suitable for the role due to the post they had. The Human Resources Director, for example, became responsible for the "care" value, whereas a newly appointed and enthusiastic, as it seemed, Product Manager was allocated to the "pioneering" value. Others appeared to be apt for the job in the eyes of the General Manager.

The official discourse employed at the meetings which I observed suggested that the value leaders were taken "from the people" and were to promote their values among their staff and in the whole company. The values leaders, however, occupied at least middle managers' positions and as such were not selected from among the sales representatives or low ranking support staff. The rationale behind the choice of 'value leaders' was presented as conveying a message to the organisation members that the project was something all employees should get involved in rather than being solely a managerial activity.

The project was often referred to by the management team as being of high importance for the organisation. For this reason, the management decided that they needed some assistance and invited consultants who would provide the necessary insight into the areas of values and culture. The consultants were referred to as having the right expertise and experience in the matters of culture which was presented as crucial in their selection process[19].
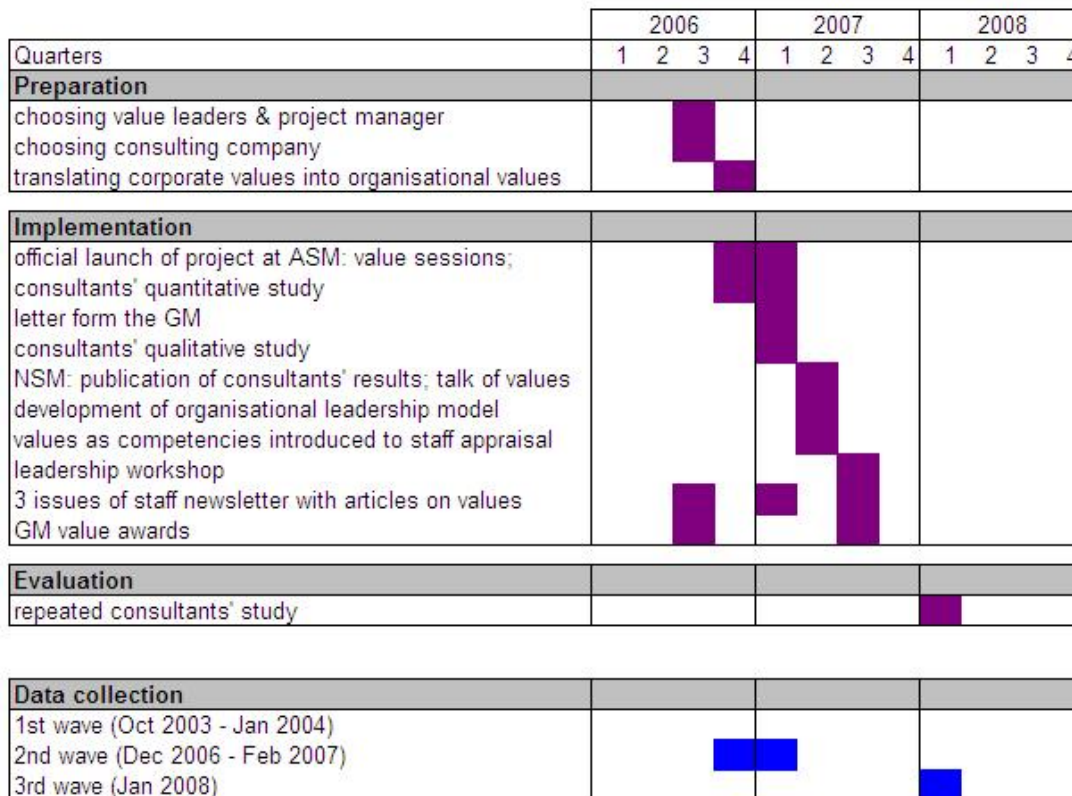
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[19] Interestingly, though, the name of the consulting company had been communicated to me before the results of the consulting pitches had been made public. It appeared that the motivation behind the choice of consultants had been more complex than the official communication suggested.

The consultants brought in their methodology for doing culture work and, based on a comparison between their work published in practitioner magazines and information on their website, it appeared that it was largely adhered to. The timelines of the 'values' project in Aporia are depicted in the figure below:

Figure 15: Aporia's 'culture project' timelines

		2006				2007				2008			
Quarters		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Preparation													
choosing value leaders & project manager				■									
choosing consulting company					■								
translating corporate values into organisational values													
Implementation													
official launch of project at ASM: value sessions;						■							
consultants' quantitative study					■								
letter form the GM						■							
consultants' qualitative study							■						
NSM: publication of consultants' results; talk of values													
development of organisational leadership model								■					
values as competencies introduced to staff appraisal													
leadership workshop													
3 issues of staff newsletter with articles on values				■		■		■					
GM value awards													
Evaluation													
repeated consultants' study										■			
Data collection													
1st wave (Oct 2003 - Jan 2004)													
2nd wave (Dec 2006 - Feb 2007)					■	■							
3rd wave (Jan 2008)										■			

The project was unofficially launched at a meeting between consultants, the value leaders and the top executives, where corporate values were translated into Polish. It was also during this meeting that the corporate values were to be turned into organisational values due to the incorporation of some Polish specification to their American definition. This meeting was referred to by the General Manager as a crucial point in the 'culture project' as it was expected to build the foundations for all further 'culture activities'. The translation of corporate values into organisational ones was to make this promotion of values different from past attempts where values from the headquarters were simply adopted in an unchanged form by the subsidiary.

The course of action was to be agreed upon after the consultants' 'diagnosis' of Aporia's culture. The idea communicated by the General Manager and advocated by the consultants was to carry out a study at the beginning of the project that would give the management some insight into the culture of the organisation and the state of its

official values. Decisions about the most appropriate course of action in terms of promoting organisational values were to be taken after the publication of the findings of the consultant's study. The same study was to be retaken after a year of intense promotional activities which was seen as enabling the consultants and the top managers to examine the effectiveness of the undertaken 'culture work'. As it was communicated to me and officially restated at the aforementioned translation meeting, the findings which form the basis of this thesis were to supplement the consultants' investigation and were treated as a potentially useful addition to the project rather than its foundation.

In the following subsections I will address separately the key elements of the values management project, as outlined in the previous methodology chapter. The analysis of the culture change initiative in Aporia begins then with an attempt to unpack the official rationale behind Aporia's 'culture project'.

6.2 Official rationale behind the project

The culture project in Aporia was officially introduced to the employees at an annual meeting and presented as a rational initiative with an ambitious array of functions to perform. However, as a more informal meeting between the consultants, the top managers and the value champions revealed, there was also a fair amount of confusion as to the way organisational values were to function, the role they were to play and how they were to make a difference to the subsidiary. Before I discuss the official rationale, I will highlight some of the ambiguities surrounding the project which were particularly visible during the values translation meeting led by the consultants.

It appeared at the beginning of the project, after the subsidiary had already committed itself to the initiative and 'value champions' had been allocated, that the managers responsible for the project were confused about how values would help them in their every-day life. They did not question the importance of the project, at least not publically, but how exactly organisational values were to work in their reality was not that clear to them, as illustrated by the following dialogue:

> (Connie, consultant): We would like to understand what these values mean but also to learn what your expectations from these values are and how you interpret them. We would therefore like to ask you: How are the values to produce results for your business? Because, as we understand from what

was said to us, an important reason for implementing these values is the fact that these values are to support you and your employees' business effectiveness. (…) The question is: how?

(Matt, top manager):	It depends which one.
(Lee, consultant):	The system of values as such.
(Matt, top manager):	If we look at those four proposed values, the second one: "achieving" directly translates into the financial results. If we understand "achieving" as attaining the planned goal that one promised before …
(Lee, consultant):	If these values did not exist, would you not be able to achieve good business results?
(Matt, top manager):	Of course, not.
(Lee, consultant):	So, which change makes the change? What will make the introduction of this value increase efficiency?
(William, top manager):	Yes, this is what we are talking about. We don't really know.

Although the managers declared that they were ready to accept that values could lead to higher efficiency, which was something that the General Manager and the consultants suggested, they could not explain how exactly they were to improve the performance of the company. Their organisation already had some corporate values. Supposedly without them the efficiency would be impossible. Nonetheless, the company was efficient. Following this logic, the values must have been working. If the values were working, how were the new (-old) values to improve the running of the company? This was a question that could not be really easily answered by the group who was to lead the project, at least not without some help. Therefore, the consultants provided some steering in the desired direction. By facilitating the discussion: asking questions, paraphrasing and adding the missing information, they appeared to have remove some of the ambiguity surrounding organisational values, as shown below:

(Lee, consultant):	Since your organisation is trying to embed these values [in your culture], since we know that we want it to lead to more effectiveness, why are values to improve it and not systems or procedures?
(Jeff, top manager):	Because attitudes result from values.
(Iris, top manager):	For example we can avoid discussions about whether we want to protect the existing portfolio and base on traditional drugs or to focus on innovative solutions. (…)
(Lee, consultant):	(…) We don't have to discuss certain things that we know *apriori*. It accelerates the decision-making process.
(William, top manager):	It accelerates the decision-making process but I don't know why. Why is it to accelerate the effectiveness of work?

(Oscar, top manager):	It is about an innovative approach.
(William, top manager):	So when we say that pioneering is a value for us, are we to launch drugs that do not generate profit for the company because they are innovative? I guess that this depends on the market analysis.
(Jeff, top manager):	This is down to an approach. (…)
(Bob, marketing specialist):	But you launch the product only when it guarantees some profit.
(William, top manager):	Yes, sure.
(Lee, consultant):	This is why we want to talk about a system of values and not about each given value separately. Together the values provide some guidelines and direction. Each value separately will have a different meaning than when looked at together with other values.

As illustrated above, the function of organisational values caused some confusion among the managers in charge of the project, especially because the focus of their organisation, namely profit generation, seemed fairly clear to all participants whereas the values did not always fit easily within this framework. The consultants, however, appeared to skilfully lead the discussions so that finally a list was drafted which enumerated the advantages connected with living by the organisational values. This list was subsequently presented to all members of the organisation by the manager in charge of the project, as summarised below:

Table 7: Official statement of the usefulness of the espoused values

Values and decisions	• Values influence the decisions and choices we make, they are to make them right and coherent. • They accelerate the decision-making process.
Values and dilemmas	• They are to facilitate the choices and to make them obvious. • Values enable us to make choices that are in line with our convictions.
Values and motivation and commitment	• Motivation and commitment stem from values. Example: There is a sick child in hospital. We need the drug. Somebody has to get the drug, go to the airport at night, convince the custom officers, etc. For the business point of view, this behaviour is irrational and groundless, but thanks to values, such as care, we do it and we know that it is right.
Values and responsibility	• Values make us more responsible for ourselves and others. • It is a safe zone for the employees; we know how to behave, e.g. because of the value pioneering we have a right to make mistakes. • Values facilitate the empowerment process – more decentralization.
Values and identification	• Stronger identification with the company – values make the company more coherent and it is easier to identify with a transparent and coherent organisation. • They enable to maintain diversity on a common ground. • They increase the social capital of an organisation – people support each other. • Values help create the mission and vision.

Values were said to serve as an internal guide helping participants to take the right decision and to do it fast. It was believed that this in turn would make the whole

company more coherent and transparent, making it easier for the employees to identify with it. It was also maintained that values created an employer that one wanted to identify with and that the values also enhanced employees' motivation and commitment. Higher commitment, in turn, was seen to potentially lead to the better performance of the whole company and thus ensure a better image and position in the market.

By and large, the organisational values were equated with commercial success and portrayed as necessary for future development:

> [One of the top managers introduced the values] very well yesterday [at a meeting with some middle managers]. (…) He said that companies that have some values grow better. He referred to corporations with values and he said that he attended some external training on values and he said that this was something that the company should enhance because organisations that support values develop well. (Michelle, marketing specialist)

More informally, the interviewed managers would sometimes point to other expected benefits of values, in particular in relation to the employees and the way values could affect a change in employees' behaviours and standards of their work:

> I guess that the [corporate] values and their promotion are to help us so that the employees are more skilled in behaviours [that show certain standards]. […] We changed the employees, improved the structure and introduced new business systems. But we can say that [the organization] is still a baby. It's only sitting now, but can't walk yet. It has only been six months [since I and other managers joined the company and started to introduce the changes]. It is going to start walking in the next six months and we still need some time before it starts running. (Ted, General Manager)

The project was approached pragmatically, with an emphasis put on the benefits the organisation might expect once successfully completed. Locally, in Poland, the project seemed particularly timely with regard to the stormy past that the subsidiary had gone through. Many employees had left the company and were replaced by new ones who came from various professional backgrounds. There were many subgroups of recruits headhunted from different companies who sometimes knew each other and were used to the way the business was run by their previous employer. Aporia was suddenly a concoction of many groups of new and old employees who had to work out a way of co-operating and co-existing in a somewhat new-old company. In this light, the culture project was sometimes depicted as enabling the management of the organisation to reach its unitaristic ideal, as discussed in the previous chapter:

> (…) there is a strong need to launch this project in Poland. This is very important for our business. The more so, because as we saw today when we introduced ourselves, there are a lot of new people here as well as people with a lot of seniority and this is a fantastic moment to introduce these changes. (Ted, General Manager)

One of our key projects for this year is corporate culture. We would like to make progress. (Ted, General Manager)

Furthermore, the corporate focus of the project on enhancing its image appeared to resonate with the local management in Poland. As the General Manager of the Polish subsidiary announced:

This is indeed a much wider project. This is part of building a new image (…) which has an influence on the perception of our company, this matters on the Stock Exchange, this matters from the marketing point of view and also affects our operations. This plays an important role in the way our company is perceived. (Ted, General Manager)

Looking at the official communication one could get the impression that implementing and enhancing corporate values was not a matter of choice. It was a prerequisite for organisational prosperity, a potential cure for the troubled image of the subsidiary and a practical way to shape employees behaviours.

The informal interpretations of the project, however, were far less encouraging than the official communication. Informal conversations with organisation members and the insights gained in interviews revealed a much more sober outlook on values and considerably different expectations of the culture project. These will be discussed in what follows.

6.3 Attitudes to the culture project at its launch

According to the interview narratives, the project of organisational values was received by the majority of the participants with what can be gathered under the general label of indifference. As participants confessed, they did not talk about the project among themselves nor did they pay special attention to it. They might have heard the presentations about the promoted values and the official rationale behind it, but they did not really appear to be convinced by the offered arguments. In some cases, the indifference was underpinned by confusion about the project, doubts, or scepticism. There were, however, also some distinctive alternative interpretations of the initiative. A few voices described the culture project as an attempt at manipulation, to which they opposed, whereas others declared some support for the initiative.

The above identified themes will be discussed in more depth below, in particular in relation to the explanation that was provided by the participants.

As suggested above, the predominant approach to the culture project in Aporia at its launch was indifference. The motives for the indifference, however, were very diverse, ranging from different priorities than the ones suggested by the project, lack of understanding of the initiative, bad experience in the past, negative associations, lack of suitability for the Polish reality, to the obvious nature of the values and finally the abstract and unclear relation to participant's work. I will now turn to each of the above listed motives to unpack the declared indifference and its many nuances.

First of all, a large number of participants suggested that in their everyday activities they were so preoccupied with other tasks and priorities that there was, in their view, no room left for musing over values. Organisational values were not something they wanted to discuss with the management. Rather, in their view, there were some more burning issues to tackle first:

> We [me and my colleagues] haven't talked about it. I think that the attitude of people who have been working here for a long time to this project is neutral, because so many bad things have happened. I know that people are waiting for pay rises. (Tiffany, marketing specialist)

Employees appeared interested in more practical and tangible projects, such as the new bonus system or additional incentives. Values appeared indifferent to them. The new management had made some promises to improve the working conditions of the staff so this was what the employees were really waiting for. They wanted to see the promises delivered, and this was their priority. Office employees, especially, seemed to have adopted the "let's wait and see" approach. The sales force working directly with doctors and pharmacies was the first to see a change in their motivation system, which was a normal course of events in Aporia. The office employees had to wait their turn and hope for a similar improvement of their situation. In the past many similar promises had been made to them, but little action followed:

> I am waiting for what matters for me, how the situation of employees in the office is going to change, if what is being said will be implemented. (Clive, sales specialist)

> There is a big number of people in different ages who say: talk to my pocket. Talk to me the language of values, however not spiritual but material ones. (Roy, Sales Manager)

It appeared that one of the biggest problems and reasons for a sceptical attitude to the values project was the fact that employees did not see and understand its relevance for

them and their jobs. Although during the official launch of the project the presentations listed reasons why values were important, most employees did not seem convinced by this enumeration:

> I don't really know what it is about, I don't know what it is for. I don't know, no one explained to me why this is being introduced and what the aim of this project is. I saw the presentations but, honestly speaking, these were only definitions and two examples. I have the impression that these people did it because they had to. I still do not see the purpose of this project. (…) I don't know how this is to help me and what is expected from me. (Isis, financial specialist)

In order to be convinced, the employees expressed a need to see how the values and the culture project could make a practical difference not only for the whole company but for them. The idea of the management was that the launch of the project would be just an introduction and a taste of what was to come later. The presentations were meant to be a starting point of a longer process. Having seen only the announcement, the employees refused to treat the whole idea too seriously. They preferred to discuss real actions and not another presentation that had little meaning for them. They worried that the presentations were little more than pretences and they defined their role as seeing through these pretences:

> When they came up with these presentations I felt like laughing. I thought: Oh, my God. What is going on? What's that? This was lacking some context. I thought: (…) Amway[20]? (Michelle, marketing specialist)

The indifference towards the project also seemed to have often been motivated by negative experience from the past. In fact, the interview narratives were abundant in examples and stories highlighting the 'lessons learnt', which cast lack of involvement and scepticism towards new initiatives as an aspect of organisational wisdom.

In particular the longer serving staff, but also staff who had experience in other multinationals, emphasized that the culture initiative seemed to be yet another project and nothing more than this. They understood that corporations, such as Aporia, had their reasons to get involved in such projects and spend significant amounts of money on them but the relevance of them, if any, can only be seen on the corporate level:

> People associate values with things like mission and vision. And my feeling is that in the past of corporations like this one the mission and vision were for the GM, for the board, whereas sales reps from the bottom did not feel it. (Oliver, internal consultant)

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[20] A direct selling American organisation which relies on network marketing and heavily emphasises its philosophy among its members. In this context, the participant was referring to associations with corporate brainwashing and propaganda, embodied for many Poles by Amway after some reports in media of its 'indoctrination' practices.

Employees who had been with the company longer or had some experience of working for other corporation kept their distance since they did not perceive this project as something new. The company had always had some sort of values; they had always been there in one form or another, more or less important depending on the current priorities of the General Manager or the headquarters. Therefore the employees saw no reason why this particular project was to be any different from the rest:

> I do not perceive this as something new (…) [Aporia] has always been presented as innovative, etc. It has always had these slogans. Maybe now all this is more explained to us, e.g. what pioneering means for us. Before we only had these slogans that: it is like that and that's it. And now it's more how we perceive it and what this might mean for the employees. This is how I perceive this but I don't see this at work. Maybe I should? (Nicole, Sales Representative)

The only thing that could make the project different from all the similar ones that the company had carried out in the past would be a real implementation, which was emphasised not only by the rank and file but also by the top managers themselves:

> This is important or even very important as long as it goes down to reality. We have already had similar things, we had different values or differently interpreted values. Now we have different ones, new, better most probably. But all this has to be reflected in everyday activities. The launch of the project is okay, but this is only the direction where we should be heading. But the other thing are the things we do and whether they are in line with these values or not. And this is what people see and what they worry about. They worry that these values might be just empty words, another programme, (…) if there is no translation into actions, this will be another empty program. (Oscar, top manager)

At times, the withdrawn approach towards the culture project was underpinned by what seemed to be a genuine worry that the pompous launch would be followed by some training sessions or a few colourful presentations and then end with silence, as the personal experience was telling some participants:

> It will be good if something stays after this. It will be a success if we still treat it as a success in two years' time. (Norah, logistic specialist)

> I think that this will be suppressed by the amount of projects and work that needs to be done, that it will disappear in the flood of other corporate ideas. (Matt, top manager)

Some employees who had conducted similar undertakings in the past did not want to get involved in the promotion of the project so as not to get disappointed by poor or no results:

> For me this is a waste of time. I really don't want to do anything else, because nothing results from it. I care too much, I worry too much and I am unable not to give a damn. (…) I am not saying that this is a bad project. I am just saying that after two years nothing of it stays. The management changes, there is no pressure from above. People change and no one cares about it any longer. (Norah, logistic specialist)

New initiatives, like the culture project, were taken with a pinch of salt as they were perceived as mere projects. Projects had their launches, as the one discussed here, and a

very quick and inevitable end. It seemed irrational to attach too much importance to something that in due course would have no importance.

Furthermore, some participants suggested that the culture project was unsuitable for the Polish reality. They discussed how Polish history and the strong propaganda that tried to brainwash people into believing that the former communist system was functioning perfectly made them highly sceptical and immune to value-charged ideologies:

> Maybe in American culture it works, but we Poles tortured during communist times with all these values so that Poland would be stronger and we all lived better lives – all these slogans are something strange, something that doesn't say anything. I am satisfied when the promotion campaign is made on time, when the folders are ready, presentations made and when this brings some results and the sales goes up. (…) This is my satisfaction and giving it some names, some slogans feels very strange. (…) This doesn't fit our mentality. (…) These are empty pompous words – four values. I don't understand it. (Zachary, internal consultant)

Initiatives like the 'culture project' reminded some of the employees of its origin. Its form and assumptions were perceived as suitable for the American context, whereas for them they appeared awkward, pompous and empty. Organisational and corporate values were associated with nice photographs and presentations – in short, the "corporate" philosophy with all its negative overtones. Therefore, the project to promote these values seemed too detached from reality, simply meaningless for an ordinary employee:

> I will be brutally honest, I don't think that this is in any way important for me right now. (…) For now, I have to meet my target, for me every quarter matters and I don't pay attention to such things now. (…) I don't know if it is down to a different culture here in Poland but I know that I have to sell well, according to the code of conduct so as not to do anything stupid (…) I don't try to find anything more than that. I am to generate profit, but in a way that doesn't embarrass the shareholders in the States. (Otis, Sales Manager)

Other participants, on the other hand, would point to the fact that the project revolved round values which, when examined more closely, were obvious for most people and therefore not particularly contested. There were too many words, too many nice labels to describe pretty basic things. As the participants observed, looking for some hidden meaning behind the officially promoted values did not make any sense; otherwise they might turn out to be grotesque:

> This sounds so silly because what is presented up there is so obvious that it should be imprinted in a given person's culture. This is not some sort of eccentricity. But if you talk so much about it, it gets depreciated. A lot is said about it but it is premature. We talk about values during such meetings but every day we talk less about them. We must show how they function in real life and put them into life and not present at meetings where we see them and treat as something that must be there and that's it. Nobody knows why we have them. Most probably because they are not incorporated into everyday life. (…) Values are something that everyone should have and follow, because they are human. (Ericka, Sales Manager)

Values as such were often thought to be an integral part of every human being; something that did not need to be and could not be promoted. You either had, believed and followed certain values in your life or you did not and no corporate project could ever change that:

> I think that all these values are an integral part of big corporations. I reckon that it's good to have some frame of reference at work and to look at things differently not only to get a salary and some kind of bonus or gratification. (….) I think that this is a bit exaggerated, let's not fool ourselves, this is characteristic for big corporations. At work all these values look differently every day. (…) The first thing is that only people who have their own code of conduct should be accepted to work. (…) And then this internal code can somehow overlap with the company's code. But I don't think that such slogans like the ones that we can see here on the walls could be some point of reference for an employee. (Simon, Sales Representative)

The only thing the company could do, was, according to the participants, to make sure that the people who were employed had from the start the values the company was promoting. No internal or external marketing could ever make employees believe in values that were remote and irrelevant for them in their individual hierarchy of values:

> (…) To my great surprise I noticed that what I marked as not important or less important is now on our standards. (…) Everybody has their own set of values and everybody is different. If they put us all under some standards, I think that people will stay there but whether they will act accordingly is a different issue. (Natalie, internal consultant)

Interestingly, some participants, including the sales representatives and some support staff, conceded that the values officially endorsed during annual sales meetings might in theory even have some appeal for them. Nonetheless, when confronted with reality, they seemed hard if not impossible to follow, as acknowledged even by one of the top managers:

> I am really convinced by all this, because I was brought up in a company that had similar values. (…) yet my observation is that this is really abstract for some people. (…) What really bugs a sales representative is that they come across such presentations of values and on the other hand they observe a totally different world when talking to their colleagues from different firms and doctors and their needs which have nothing to do with our standards that we have at work. This is the contradiction that they encounter. (Ian, Sales Manager)

The participants, especially the ones working in sales, emphasised that Polish health service and the situation of doctors who were severely, in their view, underfinanced put a great pressure on sales representatives. They discussed the expectations of their work and the insistence on delivering results. For them, organisational values were largely abstract and disconnected from their work tasks. Therefore, the focus on organisational values seemed unreasonable for them. The clash between the ideal world of values presented at meetings and their every-day activities and the environment they operated on seemed startling at times.

Arguably the most decisive stand on the promotion of organisational values was expressed by a group of staff who saw it as at attempt at manipulation. The below quoted participant summarised these concerns very accurately. Interestingly, the mentioned participant was also the one who discussed the lack of fit of the corporate and organisational values to the Polish reality due to its history of socialist propaganda:

> We are too clever to fall for such tricks. I guess that this is the most irritating thing that I perceive [the promotion of values] as ….. that is to do something with the employee. I generally perceive this as some manipulation. Let's take Natalie who deal with drug registration (…) Her job is very precisely defined. Each motion that she sends to the registration office has to have all dots on the right place, because if one word is wrong, they will reject all the documents and she won't be able to register the drug on time and we won't be able to sell this drug in Poland. So when you talk to this kind of person who has to deal with so many things and who managed this perfectly about values, she says "give me a break with this'. It seems to me that there are certain posts where there is no way but to do your job right. (Zachary, internal consultant)

It is worth noting that this participant and the one he is referring to in his quote, share a strong academic background which they often referred to in interviews. It was perhaps this background which made them more sensitive to the rhetoric of corporate discourse, or maybe, made them feel more compelled to discard similar managerial activities as part of their identity work. Regardless of the interpretation of the reasons behind the perception of the 'culture project' as manipulation, this finding adds an interesting dimension to the array of responses to the planned culture change initiative.

Not all employees, however, were as sceptical of organisational values, as the views presented so far might suggest. In fact, some participants admitted that it was crucial for the company to focus on its values because of the situation it found itself in. Especially top managers who were closely involved in running of the project, expressed some, at times, moderate enthusiasm for the project. After so many rapid changes and unrest, people needed, in their view, a direction and some guidance that would show them what was really important for the company:

> At the beginning [I had a] distrustful [attitude], honestly speaking. This means that it wasn't my dream task within my scope of duties. But I have to admit that because of (…) conversations and analysis of corporate documents I developed some kind of enthusiasm, maybe not a total one, but some commitment. So I believe that this is a very important and necessary project. (Jeff, top manager)

Some employees in non-managerial positions also referred to the project as a generally positive and welcome initiative. They still appeared to be careful in their enthusiasm so as to avoid future disappointment but, in their eyes, the project was at least not doomed

to fail from the start. When describing their attitude to the project they revealed that it was:

> Really okay but I hope that these won't be big empty words. I hope that this will mean something. It would be nice if this was implemented and I totally endorse it. (…) If they claim that they want to take care of us, I would like them to really care. (Annabelle, Sales Representative)

As the quote above, however, indicates, some of the declared support seemed to be related to an instrumental approach to values. The project might be worthwhile providing that it was to make a practical change to the employees. The discussed quote might also be interpreted as suggesting that some of the participants, as the one cited above, thought of the 'culture project' as primarily concerned with the management and their activities. It was, however, less binding for the staff. This line of interpretation finds some support in another participant's words:

> I don't know if this company really needs this project, if anybody feels such a need. I am saying this as an employee, I don't mean the management. What we need, we should have without this project. I think that what people complain about should be solved without a project. But I understand this and I have always understood this. The headquarters ask us to do it and we do it. And for the whole company this will for sure be good. As to us, I hope that we will be able to do many things under the label of this project. (Norah, logistic specialist)

As the participants observed, some things needed to be done in Aporia (procedures simplified, processes accelerated, employee-focus strengthened, etc.), yet employees doubted whether all this required such a fancy label. Projects were often associated with somebody's annual goals. The employees were afraid that the only reason for a given project was to enable a top manager to be better evaluated during his appraisal meeting and thus improve his or her curriculum vitae:

> For me this makes no sense. This is another initiative, because somebody had to write something in their annual goals. If there is nothing to do, one starts launching programmes which do not necessarily do anything. This is primarily to motivate people to work and give them a feeling that they are working in a good company, as the general image of pharmaceutical companies is bad (…) This is the promotion of an image that our company is innovative, one that wants to help people, one that cares and is great. This, however, won't change the employees' views on [the company]. (Irena, administrator)

The recurring theme in relation to the culture project was the importance of what was referred to as the 'implementation phase'. Both the managers involved in the promotion of values, as well as the staff expected to embrace the values promoted by others, highlighted the need to see how the values would work in reality. At times, this process was referred to as the 'operationalisation', or 'implementation' of values. Regardless of the label, the meaning of the message appeared to be fairly consistent – values needed to

be more than declarations and part of official presentations, they had to be abided by in the organisational everyday.

> I believe that this is a very important project, because without values this company will not go in the given direction. Here you can find values on the walls. When I came here (…) I really liked these values but they didn't work at all. The worst thing in an organisation is that values are associated with what is hanging on the wall. This is a poster of a woman holding a child which means caring and this is what it is about. Care is the relation between a mother and a child (…) but this is generally not implemented in the organisation. (Ann, top manager)

The fact that this time around the corporate values were finally translated into Polish was sometimes used to argue that the focus on values might indeed make a change:

> Nobody every bothered to translate this into Polish. What I see as an advantage of this project is that people involved in it (…) attempted to translate these values into Polish reality. (Oliver, internal consultant)

All in all, the project to promote corporate values did not have an easy start as it was not embraced by a vast majority of the staff, who, by and large, showed more scepticism and indifference than commitment.

6.4 Doing of culture work

6.4.1 Researching culture

Despite the principally sceptical and indifferent attitudes to the culture project among the staff and to a large extent also the management, the project was set in motion. As already described, the idea behind the promotion of organisational values, as officially presented, was to strengthen the culture of the organisation. This was to be done with the help of consultants who put forward their vision of how the 'culture project' was to be structured.

One of the key elements of the project, as defined by the consultants, was carrying out a study of the existing culture. According to the website of the management consultants employed by Aporia, organisational culture was defined as "a set of beliefs, opinions, convictions and values of a group of people working in a given organisation." This definition was, however, later narrowed down only to values. As the consultants explained in the translation meeting:

> 'Researching culture in organisations, we try to focus on what companies are trying to influence – systems of values.' (Ellen, consultant)

It appeared that the equation of culture with values was a convenience matter for the consultants. Values were, as they argued, easy to measure and therefore a suitable tool for the culture study. As it turned out, this narrow and pragmatic conceptualisation of culture was welcomed by the management of Aporia. As a result, the culture work was largely confined to the work with and on the officially promoted values.

The culture study was treated by the consultants as a photograph of the culture/values in the organisation, at the beginning of the project. As the consultants argued, it was to help the management decide on the next steps in the active reframing of culture:

> Through examining corporate culture we try to focus on what the companies want to have a direct influence on, namely the system of values. These systems of values are an element that constitutes the conscience that companies want to shape in the corporate culture. Corporate culture is a kind of matrix that is in each case filled with what is important for an organisation. (Lee, consultant)

Culture then, in the consultants' interpretation, was to be shaped in the desired form; it was a project to be accomplished and facilitated by professionals.

In light of the objectives of this thesis, the methodology used by the consultants in their culture study is of peripheral importance. It will therefore be discussed fairly sparingly and with an overriding aim to facilitate the understanding of the decisions management took as a result of the study.

The study carried out by the consultants consisted of three main parts: a questionnaire, a behavioural test and focus groups interviews. The questionnaire was designed to examine the officially declared values. It was carried out, together with the behavioural test, at an Annual Sales Meeting in the form of an auditory survey filled out by all present members of staff. The behavioural test was to check to what extent the employees were ready to act according to the officially declared beliefs and values in fictitious situations sketched out by the consultants. The last part of the study consisted of focus groups or, as they were referred to, assessment centres and was to show if the employees really acted according to their declarations during fictitious tasks set by the consultants (e.g. recruiting one's line manager).

The methodology of the study was labelled by both the consultants and the General Manager as a unique and innovative tool to examine both the level of declarations and

subconscious beliefs of the employees. An article published in the Polish edition of Harvard Business Review describing this method was used as a token of its reliability and a promise for the project's success. The merits of the consultants' method of studying culture were emphasised both by the management of the organisation and the consultants themselves on numerous occasions:

> I wanted to say that this is a unique method that had very positive business assessment in Poland. (Ted, General Manager)

> Our method, the so called "duo-plan" focuses on two dimensions; on two spheres of culture: on the open and hidden plan. The open plan is what we officially plan and what we say openly, whereas the hidden plan is how we act. These two plans do not always correspond with each other. (…) Our method is based on the scientific method called a triangulation approach, so looking at the same problems from many perspectives. (Lee, consultant)

The belief was that thanks to the unique method, as the consultants' approach was often referred to, a diagnosis of the organisational culture could be made. The diagnosis of the organisational culture, as the title of the consultants' report promised, would serve as a means to cultural enhancement. The subsequent section looks in more depth at the findings of the study and its recommendations.

The findings of the culture study carried out by the consultants, and its recommendations, affected to a great extent the form and content of the culture management project. The interview narratives suggest that the management of Aporia acted upon the advice given by the consultants; it formed, modified and enhanced its beliefs about the culture of their own company based on the insights offered by the study. None of the findings of the consultants' study were questioned. In fact, they were welcomed and appeared to have largely confirmed some of management's views. Similarly, the methodological soundness of the consultant's study and the resulting validity of their arguments was also not challenged. This last point seems particularly startling, as the consultants explained their highly problematic methodology to Aporia's managers involved in the project, many of whom interpret different types of data on a daily basis. I support my observation with two illustrations below.

In their presentation, the consultants admitted that they had done focus groups with 32 participants, of which seven were support staff and ten worked in the sales. It was not stated, who made up the rest of the group. The analysis, or at least presentation, of the discussions of the focus group appeared to be quantitative at times. The consultants' report, for example, stated that 65% of staff in Aporia perceived others as contributing

rather than undermining team effort. The sudden leap from the researched group towards making generalisations about the whole company was not, however, commented on by the present managers. The problematic nature of percentage points in this context did not seem to raise any concerns. Later in the presentation, the consultants observed that two support staff did not want to be promoted. These findings were then included in the conclusions of the study which stated that support staff generally did not want to be promoted and therefore the potential for growth in the organisation was to be found in the sales force. Apparently, the not so subtle disregard for quantifiers and tendency for unsupported generalisations was not something the receivers of the consultants' report were concerned about. In fact, they appeared to have suspended their disbelief.

As the subsequent interview revealed, many of the consultant's recommendations were indeed implemented and the picture of Aporia, as sketched by the consultants, appeared to have been regarded as an accurate reflection of reality. It is therefore important to look at some of the findings and conclusions from the consultants' study.

According to the consultants' report, one of the most important findings of their quantitative study, which was carried out on 188 employees (which account for 95% of staff), was that corporate values were not really important for the employees but not very controversial either. This conclusion was reached based on the fact that the organisational values were not often ranked as the least important value. 'Endurance' was an exception from this rule as it was the only value which appeared controversial – it was selected by 40% of employees as one of the least important values out of a bigger list of 15 values. The above mentioned controversy was measured by the number of employees who thought a value was among the least important ones and the employees who considered it to be among the most important ones.

Because the findings were interpreted as showing that corporate values were not important for the employees but not highly controversial either, the consultants conjectured that there was a potential to promote them. Furthermore, the results of the behavioural test revealed, according to the consultants, that employees were more often prepared to act in accordance with official values than they were willing to acknowledge when preparing the ranking of values. From this, the consultants

concluded that there was a need to promote values. Why exactly this was important, however, was not stated. Following the logic of the official argumentation for the need for values, one could assume that acting in accordance with the official values was in fact more important than a declared support of them. Nonetheless, this discrepancy never surfaced in any discussions I witnessed, or internal documents I studied.

Another important, as it was presented, finding from the study was related to leadership. Allegedly, the study had revealed a strong need to promote leadership, perhaps by it becoming the company's fifth value. According to the consultants, change could not be carried out without strong leadership or at best it would be much more difficult. For this reason, the company should enhance leadership if the management was planning to introduce some changes.

The study suggested that leadership was not a real value for the employees. This conclusion was based on a premise that employees did not mark the values associated with power (prestige, management, income, possibility of promotion) as important, which was treated as an indicator of how they valued leadership. What is more, for the consultants (who briefly referred to the work of McClelland), leadership equalled power and anyone who did not put power high in the ranking of values did not have any leadership potential. Since, according to the findings of their study, power was not valued by the employees, it was diagnosed that there was little leadership potential in the company.

Moreover, the consultants also suggested that their study had revealed that the need for power was significantly more important for the new employees than the longer serving staff. Interestingly, the difference in mean which was used to form this conclusion was 0.3., which arguably might not always be considered to be as significant as the consultants had depicted it. This difference in mean, in turn, was used by the consultants to reach two conclusions with possibly many far-reaching consequences. The consultants argued that the new staff were more suitable for leadership roles than the longer serving staff and therefore Aporia's management ought to consider new employees for possible future promotions.

In conclusion, the main message that the management received was that they were to rely more on the newcomers as they had a bigger potential to implement change and that it was important to promote both leadership and values. And in fact this was something that the management of Aporia decided to act on. The subsequent work with organisational values and leadership will be discussed in what follows.

6.4.2 Working with values

The work on organisational values, as recommended by the consultants, consisted of a number of steps. These included the translation of corporate values into Polish and thus turning them into organisational values alongside a series of other activities aimed at promoting the newly translated values and embedding them in the organisational reality, as described in more detail in the subsequent sections of the thesis.

6.4.2.1 Translating values[21]

The first step in promoting corporate values in the Polish subsidiary was an attempt, as mentioned previously, to translate them into Polish and modify, if necessary, the corporate definitions and understandings of these values. The translation and interpretation exercise was undertaken at a six hour session devoted solely to this purpose. There were fourteen attendees at the translation session: two consultants, ten managers, including the General Manager, the General Manager's assistant (who quickly left the scene) and an observer – the author of this thesis. The two participating consultants were: the owner of a fairly well-known Polish consulting company and one of his consultants – a doctor in psychology. The managers who took part in the meeting were mainly top-level managers – direct reports of the General Manager and some chosen middle-level managers who were involved in the project of promoting corporate values in the company as value leaders. A closer examination of the translation exercise revealed a number of important issues in relation to the participant's understandings and expectations of values. However, it also enabled some more rudimental questions around organisational identity to surface, as will be illustrated below.

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[21] Some of the here presented ideas were previously discussed in Ciuk (2009a; 2010a).

6.4.2.1.1 Making sense of the corporate values

The process of translating corporate values into organisational ones turned out to be a daunting task, as not only the value labels had to be translated but also the corporate definition needed to be adjusted to the local circumstances. As it quickly became clear, the Polish equivalents of the English value labels were difficult to find. Similarly, the formulation of the local meanings also proved to be very challenging.

First of all, the English value labels posed a number of difficulties. Only one out of four corporate values had a label which could be translated into Polish without a big change in meaning. The three other values, however, caused more complications. The available Polish equivalents seemed to convey different messages than the English label or covered only part of the meanings evoked by the English counterparts:

> In English, there are short words like 'caring'. (…) English is a simple language and one word can convey a lot. In Polish, we are unable to convey the meaning of these labels in one word. (Rebecca, financial specialist)

Often, when at the first glance there seemed to be a fairly close Polish equivalent, the connotations that it had in the Polish context deemed it inappropriate for the participants' purposes. For example, when the 'pioneering' value was translated literally into Polish, it was associated, according to the participants, with scouts. Similarly, another Polish equivalent triggered associations with products and molecules. Such associations were problematic for the subsidiary, as they were disconnected from the Polish reality:

> This is still a corporate perspective. We want this value to be functioning and like this it is going to be a phantom, because none of us is currently working on a new molecule. (Jeff, top manager)

What is more, it was not always clear what the English labels really stood for. For example there was some confusion whether the 'achieving' value should be understood as an approach, willingness (to work), the actual results of one's work or finally goal-orientation. Some participants opted strongly for 'goal-orientation' as, in their view, this label could be perceived as was a value as opposed to 'achieving results' which was more a description of an action. The letter idea, however, was strongly advocated by some participants, mainly by the General Manager, who personally was interested far more in actual action than in the good will, as illustrated in the dialogue below:

(Ted, General Manager):	It seems to me that it should be the achieving of goals, so reliability in the context of effectiveness.
(William, top manager):	So goal-orientation.
(Ted, General Manager):	But you can be goal-oriented and not achieve anything.

Whereas the translation of the labels focused more on the linguistic properties of the Polish equivalents, the translation of the meanings associated with those labels involved addressing more profound questions about what it was that the organisation stood for. The process of looking for an answer to this question was marked by tensions between the need to identify with the corporation that the subsidiary was part of and a contradictory urge to stay close to the local organisational level and thus differentiate oneself from the corporation. The problem, however, was that the subsidiary had no influence on the corporate values, and the process of translation was confined by the boundaries set by the Headquarters.

6.4.2.1.2 Between identity and alterity

The corporate values defined on the Headquarters' level referred to the corporation as a whole and thus the claims that the value definitions contained were seen as problematic from the perspective of a subsidiary.

First of all, the corporate values referred to some activities which the local Polish organisation had little to do with, as previously illustrated with the 'pioneering' value. 'Pioneering' on the corporate level was associated with the corporation's efforts to produce innovative drugs. The subsidiary, however, did not focus its efforts on 'new molecules', but was primarily responsible for sales. Its realisation of the 'pioneering' value therefore was contingent upon corporate success with the production of innovative drugs. Similarly, the corporation declared in its 'care' value an ambitious mission that it helped people live better and healthier lives. For the subsidiary, however, this promise could be realised mainly through the sales of drugs. Consequently, the local managers feared that such an ambitious corporate mission would remain too abstract and thus meaningless for the local staff who had little or no day-to-day contact with patients, as illustrated in the dialogue below:

(Ted, General Manager):	But this is the corporate definition that care is the main part of our job where we help people live in health.

(Ann, top manager):	Chris [referring to a manager working in the accounting department], are you aware of the fact that you are helping the patients?
(Chris, financial specialist):	I guess that maybe somehow I am helping them.
(Lee, consultant):	Somehow.

Secondly, some elements of the corporate perspective were deemed as inappropriate for the local context not only because they did not reflect the organisational reality, but because they were perceived as unsuitable for the local mentality. These problems with the translation pointed to more profound frictions between the corporate and the local discourses, which became particularly visible when the participants attempted to define the 'care' value.

At one point a remark was made that care should perhaps be also related to the organisation's shareholders. However, a suggestion that shareholders might be included in the local definition of values was booed by other members at the meeting. A reference to shareholders was deemed inappropriate and referred to as an American philosophy, a label which appeared to have some pejorative overtones for the participants:

(Oscar, top manager):	I have a remark. This hasn't been raised here yet but this is something that often comes as the first or second most important thing during corporate meetings, namely care for shareholders.
	[General booing].
(William, top manager):	This is not gripping at all.
(Ann, top manager):	Not in the Polish reality.
(Ted, General Manager):	(…) Commercialisation sounds dreadful in the Polish circumstances. (…) This is an American philosophy.
(Rebecca, financial specialist):	We are a commercial organisation so our goal is to generate profit.
(Ted, General Manager and others):	Of course.
(Ann, top manager):	The question is how?

It was obvious to everyone that the company was to make profit, especially for the shareholders, yet it was seen as unnecessary or even detrimental for the motivation of

the local staff to say so in the declaration of values. As it was summarised by the consultant:

> This [profit generation] is the goal. But this isn't very thrilling and it does not give people energy. (Lee, consultant)

The corporate values therefore had to be translated with some sensitivity to what might be perceived as suitable for the local staff.

Although, as described above, some elements of the corporate definitions were considered to be unsuitable for the local value statement, it was by no means clear to the participants what should be done with them. After all, the Polish subsidiary was part of the corporation and felt compelled to acknowledge this bond. On the other hand, the whole exercise in translation was set up so as to carve out a local version of the corporate values. These struggles between the need identify with the corporation, but at the same time stay close to the local context were perhaps most clearly visible when translating the 'pioneering' value. The fact that the corporation was an innovative company working on 'pioneering ways of treatment and products' was perhaps less visible in the Polish reality, but it was certainly nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, the ability to subscribe to the corporate success seemed quite appealing for the locals who did not always seem to be fully aware of their corporation's public profile:

(Chris, financial specialist):	Is it true that we are a leader in drugs?
(William, top manager):	Yes.
(Lee, consultant):	In terms of pioneering, can you be placed high in the 400 Polish pharmaceutical companies?
(William, top manager):	Top ten.

The translation process was, however, not only underpinned by the tensions between the corporate affiliations and the local situatedness of the subsidiary. More specifically, the translation was not only about making sense of the corporate values but, most importantly, it was about imbuing the corporate values with local meaning which would then be promoted among other organisation members.

6.4.2.1.3 Imbuing corporate values with local meanings

Although the corporate values were defined for the subsidiary, the translation enabled the local actors to move beyond the corporate meanings. What, however, was to be removed from, added to or edited in the corporate definitions was down to the local participants, or more precisely the top and selected middle managers involved in the translation process.

The corporate values were not always in line with the interests of some powerful organisation members present at the meeting, which affected the editing of the corporate definitions. The 'pioneering' value for example required some tolerance for mistakes as a natural consequence of risk-taking. Risk, however, did not seem that appealing for the General Manager of the subsidiary, as captured in the discussion below between a consultant and the managers:

(Lee, consultant):	You have to have a system of values which will (…) even reward people for the biggest mistakes they made. If you are an innovative and pioneering organisation, you have to allow for mistakes to happen.
(Jeff, top manager):	I have been with this company for only three months and when I analysed these values which the corporation imposes on us here in Poland, I see the biggest discrepancy here, in the "pioneering" value. This is a company that avoids risk.
(Ann, top manager):	Exactly, here there is no talk about such things [as risk-taking]. It's safety above all.
(Iris, top manager):	(…) But on global forums there is a very important message being communicated that our corporation as a whole avoids risk but that this has to change. This message is coming from the very top. (…) Our strategy guru says that this is one of the biggest weaknesses of this company.
(Ted, General Manager):	But this has to be calculated risk, because I personally do not want everyone to suddenly start taking risks. [laughter from other members of the meeting]. We have many different ideas, which does not mean that we have to implement them all. If we are taking a risk, it has to be controlled. (…) Nonetheless, some sort of risk is indispensable, because otherwise the organisation won't develop, it won't be "pioneering".
(Ann, top manager):	And there will be a discrepancy between the value and reality, which is something I fear the most.

As shown above, the General Manager advocated his preferred definition of the situation which accepted some 'calculated' risk, and rejected the consultant's suggestion that the organisation should 'allow for mistakes to happen'.

Similarly, the corporate values did not always refer to behaviours that the local managers wanted to promote, as for example the 'customer focus' which appeared to be one of management's priorities:

> I have a question: We have to significantly improve the customer focus. We have to put this somewhere [in our values declaration]. Where? (Ted, General Manager)

On a similar note, 'enduring' was defined so that it would promote the achieving of results rather than express pride in the track record of the corporation. While translating the corporate value label, the managers opted for a Polish word which was very close to 'persistence' in English. What was here stressed were results and effectiveness. It was said to be important for the organisation to last, however the dynamic element was also important. Mere existence in the market was considered to be insufficient. The organisation needed to be active and to adapt to the changing environment; the managers highlighted persistence in accomplishing long-term goals, as the dialogue below illustrates:

> (Ted, General Manager):   It's continuity, stability, persistence and consequence.
>
> (Ann, top manager):   And development. It can't only stand for lasting; that we exist. It has to say that we are going in the good direction.

Also the Polish definition of the 'care' value was related to performance and 'satisfying customers' business needs' through providing a professional, high-standard service'. As it was explained by the General Manager: 'if the company functions better, the customer will have a better service.'

As illustrated above, the translation process had a very pragmatic goal. It was designed to make the corporate values more suitable for the local context and thus more appealing for the local staff. The concern was therefore with how the translated values would be perceived by those for whom they were being defined.

6.4.2.1.4 Tailoring the corporate values to the local staff

The concern with the perception of the local staff was visible throughout the whole translation process. It underpinned the attempts to arrive at a Polish label which would have the 'right' connotations, as defined by the management. Labels had to sound good and be easy to remember:

(Chris, financial specialist):	I don't know if we aren't paying too much attention to the labels and too little to the definitions.
(Bob, marketing specialist):	Labels are very important.
(Iris, top manager):	A good slogan is easier to remember.

Interestingly, though, it was not always the managers who decided on the Polish value labels. In one instance, when the local managers were unable to agree on the Polish equivalent, it was the consultants who took the initiative and made an executive decision about the Polish value label:

> We have to help you reach a decision – 'achieving' [a Polish word that indicated one's ability to effectively achieve one's goals]. (Lee, consultant)

To everybody's surprise, the suggested Polish equivalent was a word that the participants did not like from the very beginning. Nonetheless, it seemed, according to the consultants, to fit their description best and so it stayed as a Polish value label that the local staff were later expected to embrace as their own.

The importance of the local staff as the ultimate judges of the translated values was manifested in the constant fear of the managers that the staff would refuse to identify with the values:

> I like the word 'innovation'. We can never separate ourselves from what we have in the organisation. We can't say that 'from tomorrow on we are creating a new organisation.' We always have some past. I get the feeling that if we say: 'novelty' [a word in Polish that when translated into English can be substituted with both 'novelty' and 'innovation'], people will say: Here: one, two, three and five examples [that this is not the case in the organisation]. We have people with different length of tenure. I want to rule out a situation that they won't buy into it, because they do not see this 'pioneering' in our activities. For me, 'innovation' is a safer word as a label. (Ann, top manager)

This managerial concern with the perceptions of the local staff, and to some extent the wider audience who were also targets of the programme of promoting values, made the balancing between the identification with and alteration from the corporation even more challenging:

(Rebecca, financial specialist):	We should be closer to the corporate definition.
(Ted, General Manager):	In my view, we should leave the beginning of the corporate definition, because this is the perspective of the whole company which we identify with as employees of an American organisation which launches new technologies, but [we also have to focus] on our [Polish] element of work.

The translation was indeed a complex performance; a peculiar break-dance of local actors trying to strike a balance between identification and differentiation on the local, yet somewhat still corporate, scene.

6.4.2.2 'Implementing' values

After the corporate values had been translated into organisational values, the new value labels together with their agreed and officially sponsored meanings could be 'implemented' into the every-day workings of the organisation. In fact, the preoccupation with 'implementation' of values was an often recurring theme in interviews and the formal meetings I observed. The managers involved in the 'culture' project, but also other interviewed staff, often juxtaposed the talk of values with what was typically described as 'living the values'. There was fear, as indicated earlier in the chapter, that the 'culture project' would share the fate of other initiatives from the past which were officially launched and soon forgotten. Therefore, there appeared to be a lot of emphasis on making sure that the values would become part of organisational reality. This aim was to be achieved thanks to two parallel initiatives. First of all, a promotion campaign was to serve the educational purpose and increase the awareness of values among staff. Secondly, values were to be connected with other processes in the organisation. These two foci in the 'culture work' will be discussed in more detail below.

As some participants observed, a lot of effort was put into communicating to the staff that the officially espoused values were to be reckoned with in Aporia. In fact, some suggested that this was in fact the whole purpose of the 'culture project':

> In my view, [the project] was largely intended to convince everyone that the values matter for the organisation. (Zachary, internal consultant)

The communication campaign included presentations during sales meetings where the values were discussed and illustrated with examples[22]. The awareness campaign was launched at the beginning of the 'culture project' where the translated values were communicated to the staff, together with their Polish specification and the official rationale behind their promotion. The four value leaders, in turn, discussed the meaning of 'their value', as established with the consultants, and provided some examples of what the values meant in practise. The examples were typically the ones discussed in the translation meeting. For example 'answering e-mails' was given as a sign of care, whereas a new marketing idea as presented a token of pioneering.

The presentations also included colourful, corporate looking, pictures to illustrate each value. The images typically featured some laboratory work, reminding of Aporia's core business, people or nature. 'Pioneering', for example, was accompanied by pictures of a microscope and some images of laboratory work. 'Achieving', similarly to 'pioneering', was visualised with the help of an image of a scientist. The science-focus was, however, supplemented with sport pictures (people climbing a very steep slope or running). In the same vein, 'care' was linked to a scientist, and additionally some other images, such as an infant or a girl cuddling a woman. Interestingly, it was this visual imagery of the espoused values that had been often quoted by the participants as associated with emptiness and propaganda, as discussed earlier in the text.

It seemed that the care that was invested in translating the corporate values into the organisational ones was not applied to the selection of the images. While in the translation process, the participants highlighted the need to focus on the local meanings of the corporate values, it seemed that the images remained still largely corporate in character. While making sense of the corporate values, the managers pointed out that associations with science, molecules and engineering were not appropriate for the subsidiary, as they reminded too much of the corporate context with which the locals could not always identify. The chosen images to accompany the values, however, largely depicted precisely what the managers tried to avoid. Interestingly, the imagery of the espoused values criticised in interviews, as illustrated above in the cited interview excerpt, kept reappearing in the 'culture project'. It appeared that despite the fears of the

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[22] Unfortunately, I was able to attend only one of these meetings and therefore relied on accounts from participants.

espoused values living their lives predominantly as artefacts, as had been the case in the past, Aporia's newly translated values shared the fate of their predecessors.

The newly translated values were further presented on the company's website and discussed in the subsequent issues of the internal magazine. The magazine, however, was published fairly infrequently and, as a consequence, only two values were discussed there during the official duration of the project. The organisational values 'care' and 'pioneering' were the ones discussed. In each case, there were two pages of text devoted to the description of the given value. Additionally, one issue of the magazine contained a two page article I had written and addressed to the employees offering a very brief overview of the findings of the second wave of my research.

The text devoted to the 'care' value, written by the head of HR, the value leader, was illustrated with a photograph of a woman cuddling a young girl. The content of the article focused on activities, both corporate and local, which were interpreted as embodying the discussed espoused value. A lot of emphasis was put on the corporation and its charitable activities, as discussed in the background chapter. Some local initiatives aimed at promoting knowledge and helping patients were also noted. Interestingly, the article also discussed 'care' as openness to employees. This section referred, among other things, to appraisals and goal setting as underpinned by care for employees:

> It is important for us that the expectations [that we set] and the system of staff appraisal are transparent. If you use the opportunities that the Performance Excellence system offers you and realise the ambitious plans, you develop your competencies every year. Thanks to setting the mutual expectations between the Line Manager and the employee, you know what is expected from you and what actions to take in order to develop in the direction where you would like to go. (Internal Magazine, November, 2007).

In the offered interpretation, control and motivation instruments, such as the annual appraisal system, were to be understood as a sign of care that the employer was demonstrating towards the employees[23].

The text devoted to another organisational value – 'Pioneering', on the other hand, did not explicitly refer to the given value. In fact, the value was only visible in the general heading of two articles: one discussing the innovations introduced to three drugs offered

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[23] A deconstruction of the quoted passage, in line of Martin, 1990, might prove really insightful had it not been for the space and focus considerations.

by Aporia and the other presenting a typology of doctors in relation to their readiness to prescribe new drugs. Again, it seems that although pioneering in the subsidiary was to be largely related to an innovative approach to work, at least one of the articles equated pioneering with products – something that the Polish subsidiary had little to do with.

Due to the above discussed fears that the promotion of the espoused values would be another 'paper project', a number of initiatives were undertaken by the top managers to embed the promoted values into organisational reality. Arguably, the most important of these initiatives were: the inclusion of the espoused values in the annual appraisal system, the establishment of GM's awards and finally inclusion of the values into the organisational definition of leadership. The first two initiatives will be discussed below, whereas the attempt to link the espoused values with leadership will be elaborated on in a separate subsection devoted in its entirety to the 'working with leadership'.

The General Manager established a quarterly financial award (commonly referred to as 'the GMs award') for four members of staff whose actions embodied one of the four espoused values. These awards were presented to me as being designed to help the employees translate the otherwise abstract notions into practise and connect them with behaviours that were promoted by the management. There were four categories, each one corresponding to one of the values. In each category there were nominations that could be put forward by all members of staff and who were finally selected by the executive managers.

The GM's awards were announced to employees at Sales Meetings. All employees could put forward a member of the organisation who they considered to be worthy of the award. The top management, then, would make a decision whom to allocate the award to. At the mentioned meeting, a few nominated employees would be presented together with a rationale for their selection. Then the person who got the award would be announced.

For the purpose of this thesis, two elements of the event are of particular interest: the projected interpretation of the nominations together with the participant's responses to these events. The official description of the nominees and their actions sheds light into attempts at imbuing participants' professional activities with cultural meanings, whereas

organisation members' responses to these efforts illuminate their sensemaking around the engineered organisational symbolism.

The descriptions of the GM awards nominees were to point out how the selected members embodied the given organisational value. At times the argued link appeared fairly convincing. However, in other instances, it was less clear how the described actions were linked to the organisational values. Furthermore, the additional information which was provided in the descriptions suggested that there were also other reasons why the given person was set as an example for other employees. Often, it was this extended explanation which opened possibilities for multiple interpretations of the nominations.

For example, an employee who was not a Pole was awarded the GM's award for 'endurance' for:

> 'persistence in achieving his goal and building relations with customers which resulted in achieving the set targets for six consecutive years (…)' (excerpt from internal magazine)

As the above quoted explanation suggests, the employee was persistent, which can be viewed as in line with the organisational value of 'endurance'. However, as it was also highlighted, his ability to achieve results was something that really mattered, which possibly offered an alternative interpretation of why the given member was to be recognised.

Similarly, some nominations and their subsequent explanations were surprising in light of their link to the official value. One Product Manager, for example, was also presented with an award for 'endurance'. As the justification suggested:

> 'She has shown a high level of professionalism. The results of her work, in all their aspects, are exceptional: 138% of realisation of the plan for [her drug]. Despite six intensively promoted generic drugs, [her drug] has staged an increase in all six parameters (…) (internal presentation, 2008).

The explanation then went on to offer graphs visualising the increase in performance that was achieved by the given employee. Interestingly, though, it was 'endurance' rather than 'achieving' that was officially read into the employee's activities. Similar dissonance between the attribution of a given value to a particular employee and the following explanation could be found in a number of other instances. The pattern of the dissonance, however, was fairly consistent. The explanations tended to highlight and

recognise the 'achieving' results and quantifiable high performance. The one deviation from this pattern concerned an Information Specialist who received an award for 'caring'. In this case it was not the measurable results that were highlighted, but the professional service he was said to provide to other organisation members.

These multiple explanations provided for the selection of particular individuals for the award were in a way mirrored in the subsequent confusion found in interviews. When asked, participants struggled to recall who got an award and what for. In fact, none of the persons I interviewed, including the managers involved in the nominations, were able to list all four rewarded organisation members together with the value they were said to embody.

Interestingly, the GM's awards were often presented as a competition and the rewarded persons as 'winners' in a given category:

> I was nominated in the 'care' category, because I help people, so this was really nice. I did not win the competition but this was nice anyway. (…) If somebody comes to me with a problem (…) I am always there for them. Even if I can't answer their call, I always call back. It was emphasized that I always call back. (Clive, sales specialist)

Furthermore, there were a number of voices which pointed to the controversies around some awards. An often quoted example was of an employee who received the GM's award for 'care', since she:

> 'was an effective leader of a number of projects (…) which were successfully implemented and which have led to a number of improvements in other people's work' (excerpt from an internal presentation)

As the participants argued, the awarded employee was not perceived as caring. Her work might have facilitated some internal process, however, this was said to be part of that given employee's job description. What was rewarded, then, was not the employee's effort or particular commitment, but standard of performance. As one participant suggested:

> 'The girl that got the award was just doing her duties. I can also get an award because I am doing my job.' (Irena, administrator)

Therefore, the allocation of the award was perceived by a group of participants as highly problematic and unjust. Further interpretations were then provided of why such a decision was taken, often linking the recognition that the given employee had received to her good relationship with the General Manager.

As was often highlighted by the top executives at the launch of the 'culture project' and during interviews, an important element of the process of 'implementing' the espoused values into the organisational everyday was seen by them as linked to the introduction of the official values into the annual appraisal system. As the official staff appraisal document read:

> 'The final appraisal [of staff's performance] is composed of competences, values, goals and tasks as well as the realisation of the developmental activities.' (Excerpt from the revisited appraisal form)

The espoused values were then presented as an element of members' performance, alongside their competencies, which was to be assessed. Employees in managerial positions were expected to perform leadership competences and demonstrate compliance with the official values, whereas staff in non-managerial positions were assessed on their core competences which were also linked to values. How exactly the link was to be accomplished, however, did not appear to be that clear, especially when looking at how the appraisals were actually filled in.

The official guidance was not particularly clear in this respect, as the official values were inserted in a PowerPoint presentation in the form of colourful blurbs into the list of competences. Having carefully studied the documentation, I was unable to come to a conclusion what the official recommendation was: whether each value was linked to a particular competence (e.g. 'pioneering' to setting vision and strategy, 'care' to diligence'), as the location of the blurbs seemed to suggest, or whether the blurbs were a mere illustration that the values should be discussed in relation to staff competences. The second interpretation appears similarly viable, as not all values were presented in the blurbs (e.g. the 'achieving' value was omitted) and some of the suggested links appeared surprising (e.g. linking 'caring' to the ability to make difficult decisions).

This ambiguous, as it appeared, guidance as to how exactly the values were to be referred to in the appraisal was mirrored in the ways different organisation members approached this task when filling in the appraisal form. Having reviewed a wide range of appraisal forms, I found numerous tactics which participants' used to address the new additional way their work was to be assessed.

Some appraisal forms did not make any references to the official values and were filled out in a way consistent with previous years. The text focused on a given employee's competences and ignored the formal requirement to refer to values. Such an approach was noted among different participants. A pattern, however, was difficult to establish. Interestingly, it was not only the staff who expressed their scepticism towards official values in interviews that made no reference to values in appraisals. In fact, some critical employees did mention values in the text. Whereas some of the managers involved in the promotion of the espoused values were not consistent in this respect, referring to values when assessing the work of some employees and refraining from doing so in other instances.

Some references to values resembled a box-ticking exercise. Values were mentioned briefly in very general statements, as illustrated below:

'Approach in compliance with organisational values'

'Presentation of organisational values exceeded expectations'

'Accepts standards and values as defined by the organisation'

On other instances, however, values featured more often in the text. At times, the value label was located after a description of an employee's performance, similarly to the guidance form presented in the official documentation, as shown below:

'[The employee] has quickly acquired knowledge of the company products' (endurance)

'[The employee] leads training sessions for sales representatives.' (care)

'[The employee] consequently exchanged poor performers who could not offer any prognosis for improvement' (care)

Frequently, the description of an employees' performance was supplemented with a reference to values arguing that there was a link between the two:

'[The employee] inspired his subordinates to use the opportunity for promotion in a new department and thus demonstrated the organisational value of 'care''

'All documents are accepted on time without any delays, according to [our company] value of 'care'.'

Finally, the most popular method of incorporating references to values in the appraisals consisted of using the value labels directly in the text. The value labels would be transformed into the required parts of speech, often adopting the form of adverbs and adjectives as required. The value labels, as placed in the text, were often graphically

separated from the text, to make their presence more visible. Capital letters were used to achieve this goal, the key words were underlined or printed in bold. Below are some examples of how this transformation was accomplished:

'She has been <u>carefully explaining</u> the details of cooperation with the German branch.'

'She has <u>persistently</u> delivered high job performance.'

'She has been settling expenses <u>with care'</u>.

'She has been doing her responsibilities <u>with persistence and care'</u>.

'Establishing and **achieving** high standards.'

Interestingly, as some of the above quoted examples illustrate, the link between the value labels and the actual description of employees' performance was often fairly tenuous and therefore, at least in my perception, amusing.

6.4.2.3 Experiencing organisational values

When asked about organisational values in interviews, the participants typically discussed a number of problems associated with the officially promoted values. The highlighted contentious issues referred to five broad themes: dissonance between the experienced organisational reality and the promoted values, discrepancies between the wider organisational discourse and a given value, breaches of the values, problems with the meanings of values, and problems with the value of values. These will be discussed separately below.

Participants very rarely provided examples of how the officially endorsed values were visible in the organisational reality. Even when stories confirming organisational values were quoted, they were typically used as an illustration of the meaning the participant's attached to the values rather than evidence of compliance. At times, stories about organisational values-in-action were told, as the one cited below, however they were usually discussed as an exception rather than a rule:

> [The General Manager] asked why we [the IT help desk] had such a small room. This was a sign that somebody cares about me and not that only I care about others. (Warren, administrator)

The narratives of breaches, dissonance, discrepancies, and inconsistencies were, in contrast, a common thread in the interviews and were typically used to justify

participants' indifferent, sceptical or cynical approach to their promotion, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Participants often highlighted that their experiences of organisational reality were at odds with the official discourse advocating the salience of values. This was particularly visible when discussing the 'pioneering' value. While the official definition stated that Aporia supported pioneering solutions and was prepared to accept balanced risks, participants often suggested that this was not their view of the organisation. They frequently talked about their perceived inability to act spontaneously due to a complex system of procedures that required a lot of paperwork and time. In fact it was the procedures that consumed a great part of the interview time. The employees would talk exhaustively about how pointless the procedures sometimes were and how they made their lives difficult. Indeed the existence of countless procedures and the insistence on compliance with the rules was seen as a major obstacle to creativity, even for departments and positions where ingeniousness was part of the job. As one of the marketing specialists who decided to leave the company due to overgrown bureaucracy observed:

> It bothers me that we are snowed under with procedures and paperwork that are unnecessary. (…) It is expected from us that we come up with some strategy, some ideas how to sell more drugs so that we meet our targets. In order to do it, we need time. We focus mainly on how to settle an event [that we organised] and how to get an approval for the upcoming events. We don't have time for creative work. (Tiffany, marketing specialist)

Similar views could be found in an opinion survey carried out by an internal consultant in the organisation which revealed that out of 138 employees who took part in the study, 85% disagreed with the statement that "Financial procedures are simple enough not to block decision-making in the organisation". It appeared that the dominant feeling was that Aporia and its policies was far more interested in security than in taking risks. As many participants admitted in interviews, they were afraid of making mistakes and they did not feel encouraged to actively look for new solutions regardless of what the official declaration stipulated, as vividly captured in a story told by one of the support staff:

> We had to clean up the warehouse and we couldn't throw anything away because no one wanted to be responsible for what we could get rid of. (Melanie, assistant)

Another problem with some the officially promoted values was that they were at odds with the rest of the organisational discourse. The organisational value 'endurance' was arguably the most visible example of this discrepancy.

The "enduring" value officially stood for respect for the past and history of the organisation and, in the Polish specification, it talked of pride in tradition. The problem, however, was that the Polish subsidiary had recently undergone a turbulent period linked to the incumbency of the last expatriate General Manager. The official discourse cultivated by the new management team, as discussed in the previous chapter, highlighted the need for building a new beginning rather than continuity. Enduring somehow did not fit within this wider discourse. As one participant observed:

> One thing caught my eye (…) The new people who came here, except for the General Manager, believe that everything that had been here was bad, and that everything that they are doing now is good. And this is not always true. (…) These are overall changes and I am not sure that they are always for the better. They are overconfident in the changes. (…) Now we simply have a new company. Something strange has happened here, maybe it is even a good thing that we don't have a connection between what we had in the past and what we have now. This link is very weak. (Oscar, top manager)

There appeared to be little pride in the past. Consequently, the "enduring" value was hard to relate to. As one employee summarised his standpoint:

> These values evoke negative emotions in me. They are strange, they do not fit our mentality. (…) Enduring? I have been working here for five years and I don't particularly want to change my job. For me, the word "endurance' is precisely the fact that I have been here for five years, that I close every campaign with endurance (…). One can say that I keep doing the same thing but it doesn't bore me. (Zachary, internal consultant)

If enduring was considered to be important by some participants, this was rather in relation to achieving one's goals. It resembled persistence that had "future" rather than "past" as its main reference.

The official values, however, were not only seen as detached from organisational reality or at odds with the official discourse, as discussed above, they were often reported to be visibly violated. The quoted violations often referred to instances when the top managers breached the value they were officially advocating. One of the most ostensible breaches of organisational values were quoted in relation to the 'care' value.

In fact, the 'care' value appeared to be the most problematic of all the values and was often used to illustrate management's hypocrisy, or at best the unreliability of some of the directors. One of the often cited examples was connected with the Head of the HR Department who, as the value leader, officially promoted the salience of 'care' in Aporia. During an Annual Sales Meeting, the above mentioned Director stated that:

> This is a fantastic value. The basis for our work is great respect for other people. (..) We want to build a valuable company. (…) We care about how we are acting. (…) this is listening and responding to questions, to e-mails. (Iris, top manager, field notes from an ASM)

The problem was that the Director herself had had a history of not following the rules she publicly advocated. This was an observation made by a number of participants and one which resonates also with my personal experience of having my e-mails disregarded by this given participant for months. As one interviewee observed:

> For me HR has not existed for at least two years. This department is totally disconnected from the people. Before, when there were some people working there like [a name of one of a very popular HR manager who was made redundant while being on maternity leave], one could see the human side of it, now it does not exist any longer. The HR director is stepping out and telling us to respond to e-mails (…) to launch this new culture. I have sent her over 40 mails and haven't received a reply to any of them. (Earl, Sales Representative)

The seriousness of this incident becomes more evident when one takes into account the fact that it was precisely the above mentioned Head of Human Resources Department that was appointed as the 'care' value leader. The common perception of the department, as it emerged from the interviews, was that it was purely performing administrative functions and manifested very little in the way of soft skills that many participants were looking for. Therefore the talks by HR about caring were used by a number of participants as signs of hypocrisy:

> HR is a department that disappoints everybody, because it does not know people, e.g. its head has been working here for two or three years and knows only a few characteristic people. The former head [name] knew people from the sales force. She knew their names, faces. For sure this is a skill that not everyone has. This is called a human touch which is not visible here. For example the [current head of the HR department] had a lecture about care and everybody was laughing their heads off when she talked about responding to e-mails. (…) These are such little things, this is not strategically important but this is culture. One person is not able to change everything at once. She successfully got rid of people who knew the sales people. The HR girls used to be the ones people confided in, to whom people would come with personal, professional or company problems, whether to change a job or not. Now these are not the people you would go to. You just don't know them. (Nina, Sales Manager)

According to the employees, members of the management, with some very striking examples, could not serve as an embodiment of the values they were advocating:

> I still believe that the individual development of people is not taken into consideration. (…) I personally have no impression whatsoever that the company wants to invest in me, that it wants to develop me. Maybe it's my fault, maybe I should get interested and say that in a year's time I want to be in this place but I don't know what kind of possibilities I have. (…) I would like the company to focus not only on the sales but also on individual employees and give them a chance to develop. (Emily, assistant)

Interestingly, top managers involved in promoting organisational values also provided examples of the values being breached. Again, the 'care' value was used a lot as a useful example:

> I have twice had a situation that a colleague's mother died. And I asked HR what we could do for this man, whether we could send some flowers or condolences. It's about the gesture that the company knows about it and cares about this person. I had a problem with executing these condolences because you have to write a motion for cost approval, who was to write it. It was: you write it. (Ann, top manager)

> People who are leaving [the company] are not treated very well. I think that everything should have the right form: coming to and leaving the company. (…)I say that we want to buy a present for the person who is leaving because they are still working with us. (…) And HR says that we have no funds for it. (Ann, top manger)

The interpretation of the breaches that were provided in this case, however, usually cantered around the breaching individual rather that the organisation as a whole.

The official values did not only appear to be breached, but at times were seen as posing more basic difficulties. As a number of participants indicated, the meaning of the values appeared problematic. Again, care was used as an illustration:

> Precisely "care" [as a value] is off-putting for me. What am I to do with those Product Managers? How am I to care about them? For Christ sake! Are they kids or something that they need care? I know that they don't know anything about their product. They need six months to learn what illnesses their drugs cure. Later, if they are a bit more hard-working they might know a bit more. [I know] that if I don't give them the whole information, they won't know it. I don't perceive it as care. What am I to care about? About [the name of the drug]? It's just a drug. It's obvious that if we don't have slides with a clever narration, the sales representatives won't go and deliver presentations. If they don't deliver presentations, there will be no sales results and we are going to have a sour atmosphere in the office and it can be detrimental for everybody. So this is a sense of duty for the work you do. (Zachary, internal consultant)

The meanings of the values might have been defined for the organisation members by the managers and the consultants involved in the translation process, but this did not lead to a uniform interpretation of the values among staff. On the contrary, the participants appeared to focus on selected aspects of the official definition while disregarding others. To use again the example of the contested value 'care', its official definition focused on four aspects of caring: care for the patients, clients, employees and finally the company itself. The employees, however, tended to discuss care in terms of the (usually) missing care of the organisation and the management for them:

> The "care' value – great. But for me care would be a subsidy towards my studies which I was promised and which I haven't received for no apparent reason. I trusted the company although I did not receive any confirmation and the company messed it up. (Irena, administrator)

The official definition might have promoted one line of interpretation of the meaning of values, this line, however, was often contested by the participants.

Finally, the status of values appeared to be problematic. While some values were perceived as only being paid lip service to, as described above with the example of the 'endurance' and 'pioneering' values, others resembled more an imperative than a value. For example 'achieving' was fairly widely recognised as management's priority, especially by the sales force, as discussed in the context chapter. However, it was not necessarily seen as a value in itself. Achieving results was largely perceived as important due to the rewards and punishments linked to performance rather then because 'achieving' was perceived as inherently valuable. Commitment, on the other hand, or willingness to work, appeared to enjoy the status of a value more than the officially embraced 'achieving'.

'Achieving' as a value appeared to be problematic for a number of employees. However, when linked to financial performance, there was no doubt that this was seen as a priority, as well captured by the following quote:

> All companies have only one goal – profit, for sure on the commercial market. No commercial company has any other goals. I personally believe that there is only one commercial goal. This is how it is. It is not true that there are other goals. (William, top manager)

6.4.3 Working with leadership

Interestingly, findings of the consultants' culture study resulted in a list of recommendations that were largely related not to values but rather to leadership and, strikingly, closely reflected the consulting company's mission, as outlined on website: to 'Promote leadership attitudes as a practical tool to achieving success in professional and private life of every employee.'

Consequently, cultural issues seemed to have been outweighed by the diagnosed acute need to invest profusely in building leadership potential and competencies in the organisation.

The consultants' conclusion that the state of leadership in the organisation was poor resulted in an increased interest in the issue of leadership. Leadership became a focus of attention, the subject of training sessions and a topic of a newly created Forum and Academy of Leadership. These initiatives were to raise the employees' awareness of leadership and serve as a learning platform where ideas could be easily exchanged. In the General Manager's view:

> The Leadership Academy is not mere training. No, the Academy of Leadership is training for sales representatives but one that has the form of a workshop. (…) With time this is going to be more of a seminar, so an exchange of ideas rather than a typical training or workshop. (Ted, General Manager)

Following the consultants' advice, leadership was elevated into the fifth corporate value – it was something the employees were to cherish, promote, and disseminate.

After it had been diagnosed by the consultants that the state of leadership in the organisation was poor, many attempts were made to first of all define what leadership meant for the management and secondly, to promote the defined leadership model. However, although the management kept emphasising that the key to success in promoting leadership was a clear definition of the term, it is fairly difficult to say with certainty what the management meant when they referred to leadership. Having analyzed the internal materials that talked of leadership, I believe that there were three parallel official leadership definitions in the organisation.

The first definition consisted of the six leadership competences integrated into the company's annual performance assessment system, as defined by the US headquarters. This competency approach to leadership was adopted well before the culture – leadership study was carried out. These leadership competences were, however, used to evaluate only top executives, so very few employees knew about them. After the study, these competences remained unchanged and they functioned simultaneously with other operationalisations of leadership.

Secondly, a new approach to leadership was initiated by the consultants. In order to promote leadership in the subsidiary, the management decided to come up with a different definition of leadership that would reflect their goals better. With the help of external consultants, the General Manager put forward a definition of leadership that comprised both leadership competences and corporate values. As a result a leadership

model was created that included: professional leadership competences, moral values and the power dimension. This type of leadership was called n-level leadership and it was said to be a form of leadership that lived up to the expectations of the modern changing economy. As it was described in the organisation's memorandum after the first Leadership Forum:

> What kind of leaders should effective managers be, managers who have the competences to carry out short and long term goals of the company in a rapidly changing and highly competitive environment? N-level Leaders meet all these requirements! These are leaders who have and combine three dimensions: strong moral values that let them weather even the toughest moments, strong professional competences allowing them to lead people and organizations and a high level of energy, ambition and self-motivation - the power dimension.
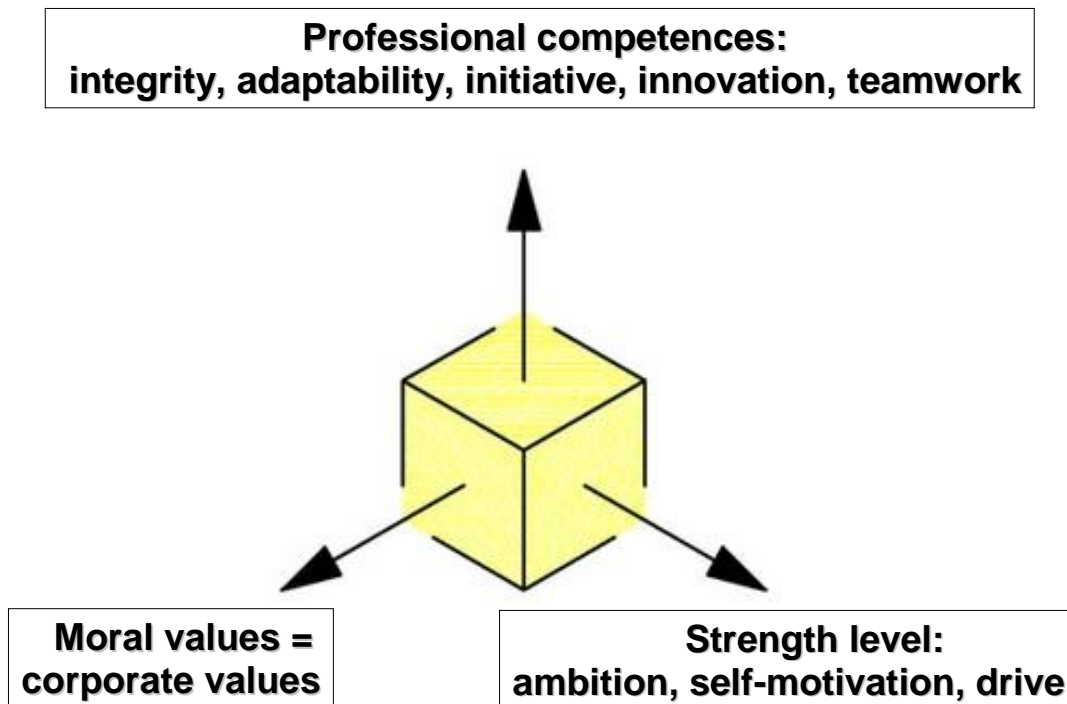
The document later explained what these particular dimensions meant. As a result, a two-page leadership definition was created. The definition included a detailed description of 20 features and an even more comprehensive list of 24 behaviours that characterized a leader, as summarized below:

Table 8: List of leadership features and behaviours as defined by the management of the organisation

Features	Behaviours	Other

1. strong moral values:
  ▪ achieving
  ▪ pioneering
  ▪ care
  ▪ endurance
2. ability to adapt to the changing environment
3. ability to lead teams
4. ability to manage the necessary change
5. ability to put forward the best solutions to clients
6. ability to set and build company's strategy and vision
7. ability to ability to inspire people
8. ability to develop people
9. ability to set ambitious goals
10. ability to stimulate people to carry out ambitious goals
11. good professional background
12. knows how to make tough business and personal decisions
13. has and uses/ is guided by their internal moral code
14. can communicate openly and effectively
15. is hard-working
16. has work-life balance
17. is aware of his/ her higher ability to lead
18. has a lot of energy and enthusiasm
19. is ambitious
20. is self-motivated
	1. works effectively
	2. effectively manages the team
	3. achieves company's goals
	4. puts the good of the company and the team first
	5. completes all projects
	6. observes ethical standards, law and other regulations
	7. shows respect for the rights of all employees, their features and individual plans looking for win-win solutions
	8. cares about the company
	9. respects company's history and tradition
	10. suggests evolutionary changes
	11. assures continuity and adaptation to the new business environment
	12. assure commitment of others
	13. builds organisational structures in a skilful manner
	14 builds business processes
	15. builds a healthy work environment for the whole personnel
	16. assures the best conditions for the development of self-motivation and creativity of all employees.
	17. constantly learns
	18. uses the newest solutions and knowledge to implement ideas
	19. influences subordinates, colleagues, supervisors and clients
	20. observes their individual work hygiene
	21. builds the company
	22. builds client service
	23. brings about client's satisfaction
	24. leads to company's prime
		1. is not tied to a position but implies a managerial role as managers can turn into leaders
		2. effectiveness is an imperative
		3. judged by results and the way they were achieved

This leadership model was presented to managers at a forum devoted to leadership that was part of a leadership awareness and development project. It was also later presented to sales representatives as the (only) corporate definition of leadership, yet, as it seems, some of its contents were modified, as illustrated below:

Professional competences:
integrity, adaptability, initiative, innovation, teamwork

Moral values =
corporate values

Strength level:
ambition, self-motivation, drive

Leadership was again defined as having three dimensions: competences, power and moral values. Power and moral values were defined in the same way as before, yet the competences seemed to have changed. A separate workshop was organized around each competency that was related to the every-day problems of a sales representative. Thus leadership competences were embedded in a work context directing the employees to behave in line with the organisation's policy.

6.5 Looking back at the project

So far, the culture change project in Aporia, has been described in terms of its design, rationale and implementation. While the chapter also looked at the initial attitudes to the project at its start, it has not discussed how participants' views changed over time in terms of the overall evaluation of the change initiative. This will be attempted in what follows.

The executives involved in the initiative seemed to be content with the outcomes of the project. The values appealed to the management team, they seemed natural, self-evident and therefore highly applicable:

> These values are nice. I like them and I believe that culture should be based on values. Achieving is what we want. "Enduring" is obvious, it's that we are persistently pursuing our goals. It's natural. They are so universal that you can apply them to everything. "Care". - we have to grapple with it a bit more. (Ann, top manager)

The senior mangers appeared to be very engaged in the project, they talked a lot about the values, and, as they had been translated and defined by themselves, it was easy for them to be embedded in their discourse:

> Back then the values were some sort of slogans, yet another project. I remember that these values sounded artificially in our mouths. We identified with these values but we put other values first. I guess that we have tamed these labels. I hope that not only in terms of getting used to corporate propaganda, we'll see. Some people sometimes use these words as some sort of hook for others. (Iris, top manager)

Yet, as the above quoted manager noted, the values started to perform another function. They were not only to serve as a guideline and an internal compass that "makes the choices easier and more self-evident", as was stated at the beginning of the project, but they were also used instrumentally as the final argument in discussions when trying to argue one's case. Along the same lines, the functionality of values was directly linked to increasing staff motivation and focusing them on delivering good results, which was in line with the initial thinking behind the project:

> This was an awareness and development project for the whole organisation. (…) This is connected to passion and commitment so that people want to improve the organisation, care for its well-being. We want the well-being of the company (…) to translate into the well-being of the employee. This is what we talked about the whole year. This is how we should understand it and this is how it is. We want people to believe in it. It is hard for the employee to be well off if the organisation is not. (Ted, general Manager)

The project and the management's expectations towards it were directly associated with tangible improvement. As I was told by the General Manager during one of our meetings:

> "I would be glad if next year the managers marked that they were two points higher on the self-assessment leadership scale." (Ted, General Manager, excerpt from field notes)

The bottom-line remained the same: bettering the organisation, improving results, in a nutshell "achieving".

The employees' evaluations of the project were less uniform than the management's. They also overlapped to a great extent with the initial attitudes they expressed when the

project was being launched. By and large, the project did not evoke strong feelings, neither before or after its completion. What was visible was that a large group of the respondents talked about the project as an initiative somewhat independent from its effects. As a project, the promotion of values was noticed. As one of the employees put it succinctly when asked about her perception of the project:

> There are four values and a winner was nominated in all of them. (Lois, financial specialist)

The project of promoting corporate values was, as the above presented quote illustrates, something that was going on in the organisation that did not necessarily have anything to do with the employees themselves. At times it seemed that it was treated as an initiative for the management that kept them busy while the real life went on:

> By and large, [the idea for the project was] good. Generally, I prefer some things to be a show than to be really happening. (Irena, administrator)

Such reservations were especially evident among employees less engaged in the initiative, such as employees in non-managerial positions like the sales representatives, as the quote below explains:

> For us [sales representatives] this is not something tangible. Maybe if you are in the office, you can feel it more on a day-to-day basis. And we, basing only on quarterly meetings, can't say much about it. (…) Most probably these values are not very well chosen. Neither I nor other people identify with them. (Nicole, Sales Representative)

Whereas some employees seemed bothered by the fact that the project seemed so distant from their work, others evaluated it from the organisational level and believed that as such it was a positive thing. They thought that it was good for an organisation to have such things as values which, while not necessarily having much to do with everyday life, at least were indicators of higher standards in the organisation:

> My perception is very positive. This sets a direction for the whole organisation, it sets some standards. I guess that it's good to have such initiatives. (Sandy, financial specialist)

In this sense values were part of the large picture, they resided on the corporate level and it was simply "good to have them" for whatever reason:

> These are universal values. I guess that for every civilised person they are also personal values. It hasn't had any big impact on me. I have neither positive nor negative attitude to it. I guess that we can continue something like this. This is a characteristic for companies such like ours, but I doubt that this has any big impact on the lives of its employees. (Simon, marketing specialist)

> I prefer not to talk about these values and training sessions. (…) I have had these values in me since I was born. Now they were only defined for me, but I know what they mean and I know what to do with them. If somebody needs training, I think that they benefited from what was said there. For me, it was nothing revealing. (…) We have these values, but for me these are empty words. (Natalie, internal consultant)

The attitudes towards the management's initiative were often diverse. There seemed to be no agreement as to whether it actually worked, but there was some emerging consensus that it did not do any harm either. The values were there, they were part of the corporate reality, "it was good to have them" and the show had to go on just as it did before the project was launched.

7 Looking beyond the culture change project

While the previous chapter took a closer look at the 'culture change initiative' and the doing of 'culture work', the present chapter takes a more inclusive perspective and focuses on the wider narratives of change as authored by different groups of participants. This is in line with the existing literature on the topic (e.g. Casey, 1999; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003 and Anthony, 1994) which often depicts attempts at cultural manipulation as difficult to distinguish from more substantive changes. Also in case of Aporia, participants' narratives of the culture change project were abundant in references to wider changes in the organisation and its surrounding official discourses. Therefore this chapter will attempt to look beyond the culture initiative to shed further light into participants' experiences of their changing reality.

The narratives of change, as collected at the official end of the 'culture initiative', offered different interpretations of the past events. However, due to space considerations, only two of the most distinctive narratives will be discussed here in more detail. When juxtaposed, they offer strikingly divergent interpretations of Aporia's evolution over the year; one narrative depicts Aporia as a story of success, whereas the other recounts a story of exclusion. Both of these narratives will be presented in what follows.

7.1 Aporia as a success story

A picture of Aporia as a success story quickly started to emerge in interview narratives. In fact, the first and intentionally very general interview question around what had changed during my absence in the organisation typically triggered some form of a success story, as illustrated below:

> I believe that a lot has changed at work in many different domains. You can't but notice the change in financial results of the company. For the first time in many years the company has met its target. Also, the culture of the organisation has changed as the people are more open, happy and joyful. (Michel, financial manager)

The stories often revealed pride with the results, contentment with the reversed negative sales trend and satisfaction with the new management team:

> In terms of financial results we are, I believe, one of the fastest growing company in the market. (…) We were in a deep crisis but we climbed out of it. We made up for the losses very nicely and at the same time a boost was given to the sales, which says a lot about the people running this company, especially the General Manager. (Ann, top manager)

Evidence in the form of statistical data illustrating the commercial success of the organisation were provided with visible satisfaction and joy. Pin boards in management's offices were decorated with graphs showing a sharp increase in sales and newspaper articles commenting on the recent commercial revival.

It appeared that a lot of employees were reassured that the threat of the organisation going down, strongly felt the previous year, had been successfully dispelled. The management's decisions and actions were largely perceived as coherent and leading the company in the desirable direction:

> I associate this company with optimism, because our work translates into tangible results. The graph showing our results is always going up, so we are generally optimistic. (Fiona, administration manager)

Quite unsurprisingly, the management also referred to the commercial success of the organisation with pride and used it strategically at meetings to boost staff motivation:

> These good results also give people food for thought about how it is and how it used to be. (Ted, top manager)

Success and the met targets were often used by employees as a token that the management team was on the right track. When the promises to reward good performance were fulfilled, the initial scepticism of the sales force started to give in:

> We made it and it was a huge relief. (…) At first we overcame the magic barrier of 50 million dollars, and this was a symbolic thing. Our flag was put up in the headquarters. (…) And a lot of people didn't' believe in this famous California trip[24]. And there were some voices saying that the management was bound to come up with something which would prevent people from going there. (Iris , top manager)

Employees, in particular the sales force saw how the new motivation system worked and that their efforts would translate into bonuses. Money provided an incentive to work, as summarised by a sales manager:

> I get the impression that there are positive changes in terms of people's motivation. (…) First of all, the motivation system really motivates. Secondly, a lot is being said about the values (…) And except for the talks, there are concrete examples that people get awards for these values when they stand out from the crowd. (Otis, sales manager)

Nonetheless, the bonuses came at a price. The pace of work was described as even more challenging than the previous year:

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[24] An incentive trip which will be discussed in more depth in the later parts of this chapter.

Everything is happening too fast. I don't know when this year has passed. (Edward, sales force)

As evident in the quote above, the heavy workload did not, however, prevent the employees from being satisfied with the changes. They appreciated the financial rewards they were getting and observed internal stabilisation of the organisation:

> For me, a person who has seen this company undergo many changes, the last year was really special in a positive sense. I noticed internal stability. (…) The past year has proven that the company has faced the difficult situation head –on and is going in the right direction. (…) There are no extreme decisions, there are no extreme behaviours. (Emily, assistant)

The present, which was now often referred to as a "normal working environment", seemed especially appealing when compared to the recent stormy past. 'Normality' was often used as an illustration of the positive changes that the organisation had undergone, which is well captured in the following interview excerpt:

(Oscar, top manager)	It's much easier to work, because there is this positive climate. People see that certain things work out and this drives everything forward.
(Interviewer)	What were the important events that I missed?
(Oscar, top manager)	I guess that the time of such important events has already gone. And this is good because such important events don't necessarily mean anything good. Here we are moving towards normal organic work rather than such spectacular events.

In particular employees with longer service in the organisation appreciated the shift towards 'normal organic work'.

Markedly, the emplotment of Aporia as a success story often coincided with the personal success of the interviewees. Six out of twenty-five interviewees had been promoted over the year, which in all the cases correlated with a positive attitude towards the changes and increased job satisfaction, as visible in the quote below:

| (Interviewer) | What did I miss during the past year? |
| (Ricky, sales force) | We met our goal, which is a very important thing. (…) It is also very important for me that I was promoted. |

In fact, personal success was listed, among organisational outcomes, as one of the major changes that had happened over the past year.

The positive attitudes towards the changes were particularly visible in organisational attribute collages and the narratives accompanying them, which will be illustrated based on the example of a sales representative's view of Aporia.

The quoted participant approached the changes in the organisation, as a number of her colleagues, with enthusiasm and satisfaction. The attributes that are placed in the central circle of the collage were considered by the informant to be present in the organisation. The middle circle, on the other hand, comprised organisational attributes that either lacked consistency (were partly or only sometimes characteristic of Aporia) or represented the aspiration sphere of the organisation. Finally, the peripheral circle was made up of attributes that were classified by the participant as not (or no longer) characteristic of their organisation, as shown below:

Figure 17: Organisational attributes collage: Natalie, sales force
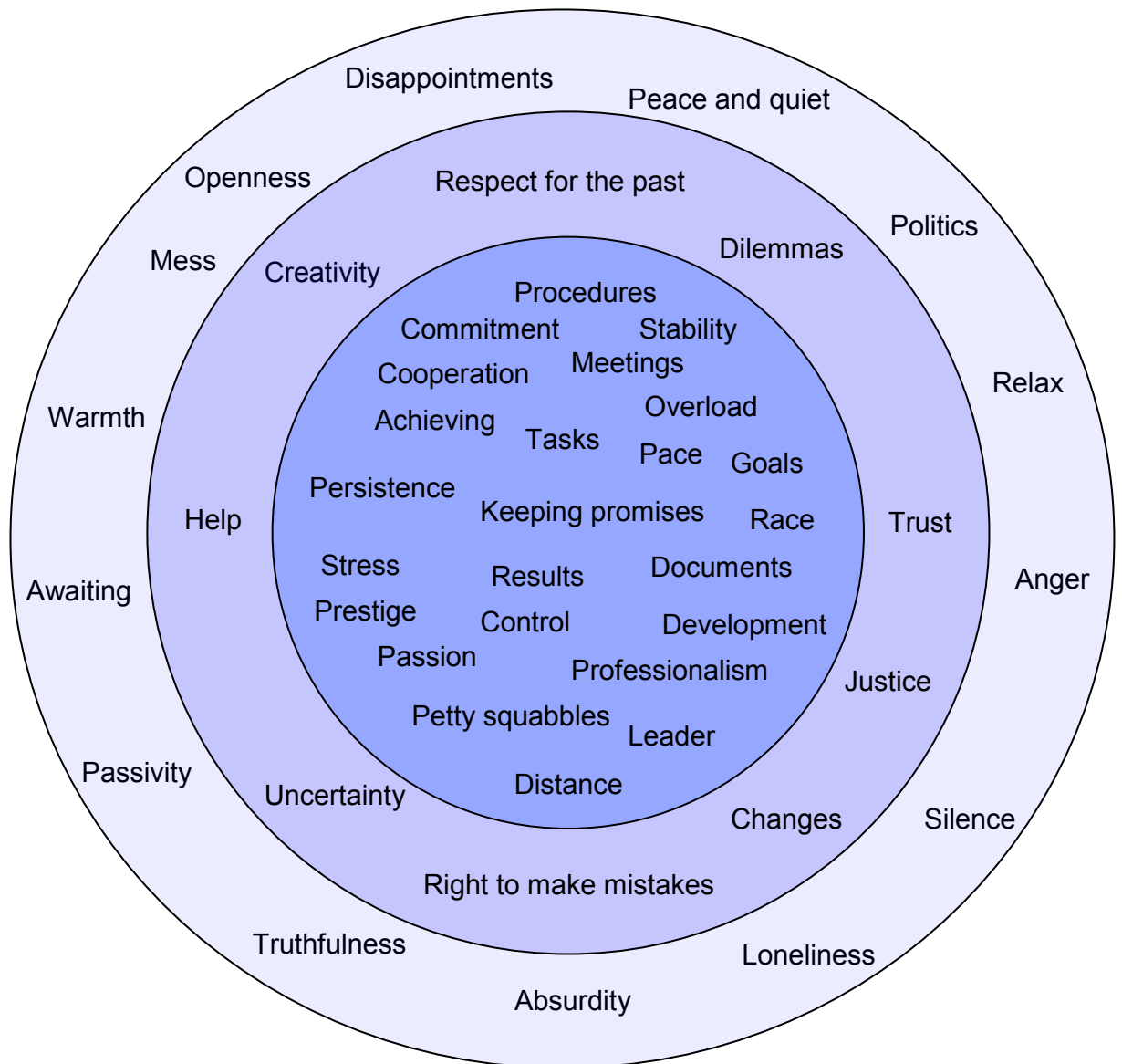
The collage depicts Aporia as being characterised by a number of attributes, most notably: staff commitment, strong focus on results and procedures and internal and external competition (here referred to as petty squabbles).

The quoted employee, similarly to other participants satisfied with the changes, talked about their passion, engagement and cooperation. Interestingly, these were all elements largely missing in the preceding wave of research, with the exception of the nostalgic takes on the organisational Golden Age:

> Despite the fact that there is this big pressure, there is passion as well. When I see that people are committed and everything is working well, things are looking up. Everybody is motivated by something else. Some are here only because of the money, which is good because we have some good bonuses, and quite substantial ones, too. (Otis, sales manager)

However, the participants also highlighted the personal costs of the success:

> There are a lot of people who are really satisfied, but there are a lot of successes that came at a high price: effort, tiredness and private life. This is such an energetic drain that we complain about more and more often. This is a long tiredness syndrome. We run on flat batteries and I think that this shows. Once in a while we hear the recurring theme: How long can we go on at such a high pace? (Iris, top manager)

Interestingly, performance-induced stress was present also among the members of the executive management team:

> By and large, there isn't any stability. I am aware of the fact that I have to deliver, otherwise there are others [who can do the job]. In short, we don't play soft ball. But it's not that you will be given the chop if you don't deliver. In my previous company there was some stability. We were goal-oriented but there was some stability, too. People didn't leave the company. We would work there [for years]. We don't have it here. There is this constant stir [in this organisation], uncertainty. The certainty is as to what happens if you don't deliver... (Ann, top manager)

The organisation was still largely associated with bureaucracy, paperwork and procedures, as in the preceding wave. Nonetheless, the procedures started to be treated as integral elements of the organisation that were not to make the employees lives difficult but to protect them:

> The perception of the procedures has changed. People don't treat them as an impediment to business. Some people appreciate the importance of procedures in an organisation that operates at the intersection of business and the health service. I suspect that this is largely a consequence of what is happening or what was happening in Poland[25] and not the company's actions. The witch hunt in the health service resulted in people feeling endangered. (Michel, financial manager)

Internal competition and an uncompromising focus on results contributed to the fact that neither openness nor warmth were thought to be a characteristic attribute of the

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[25] Compare the background chapter.

organisation. Although care was one of the four strongly promoted and emphasised corporate values, warmth, which can be associated with care, was dismissed by a majority of employees. In fact, the mere idea of warmth in the context of organisational life seemed highly contested, as illustrated by the quotes below:

> Warmth? For me this expression does not fit the work environment at all. I would place it outside these [organisational] brackets. (Otis, sales manager)

> Warmth? It's interesting what warmth means and whether I see it in our organisation. (…) A lot is being said about a clever work-life balance and I learnt to relax at weekends. (…) I associate warmth with something outside work (…) Warmth at work is something negative for me. (…) Warmth paralyses; when I am warm, I lie down and sleep and this is a kind of stagnation. So if you define warmth like this, I link it to my home and personal life. (Ian, sales manager)

The company might be promoting the care value but there appeared to be little doubt that it was to be understood in more general terms than interpersonal relations. The organisation was first and foremost concerned with its targets, none of which had anything to do with 'warmth', as revealed by the General Manger when composing a collage:

> There is no warmth in the organisation because everything is goal-oriented. I don't know if you can say that a company is warm if it is in general very loosely associated with patience. This is a sales-marketing organisation, so you either like it and do it successfully, or you have to change your job. (…) Security…. There is security here for good employees, it is not really safe for the worse performing ones. (Ted, top manager)

The collages composed by employees satisfied with the changes typically pointed to commitment and passion as features characterising their organisation. In the same vein, they indicated that frustration was not an attribute of Aporia. Nonetheless, some of them, in particular informants in managerial positions, were aware of the fact that there were some sub-groups in the organisation that might indeed feel frustrated. As observed by one of the top managers:

> There is this exclusion syndrome, just as in Poland during the transformation[26]. There was a group of people that achieved success and the people who did not make it thought that it was some sort of conspiracy. We try to explain the criteria. (…) Sometimes two people try to get a promotion, but only one can get it (…) there are some people with the new spirit (…) but there are also some people who have been with the company for a really long time and they see what is going on around and they are not part of it.] (Iris, top manager)

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[26] The transformation that the participant referred to is the transformation that was initiated in the 1989 with the fall of the communist regime in Poland which meant the introduction of free market economy. As a result of the political and economic changes, many people who were able to adapt to the changes achieved impressive economic success, but many others simply could not find their feet in the new reality, they are often referred to as 'the winners and the losers of the transformation', as discussed by Jarosz (2005).

Frustration was, therefore, typically presented as being an outcome of the actions, decisions and inadequate attitude of the frustrated ones. If they were unable to benefit from the changes, allegedly it was due to their inability to adapt to the changing environment or a failure to take matters in their own hands:

> I get the impression that there is still some frustration among the people who have been working here for a long time. Maybe it's a sign of burnout or it's due to the fact that they are used to certain things and there have been too many changes for them. They might not be able to make sense of the new situation, they have problems with adaptation, with finding their place. Simultaneously, these are people who do not fight for themselves. For example I noticed that there are some people who believe that they should have been promoted a long time ago. When I was promoted (…), a lot of people had problems with coming to terms with it. These were people who have been working here for a long time and were counting on a promotion. I saw how they treated me. In the same time these are people who don't do anything to get more, to fight for themselves. (…) This company has changed and they can't cope with it. (Fiona, administration manager)

Not all the employees, however, shared this above described enthusiasm. The perception of the changes the organisation had undergone were markedly different when talking to the group that, in the success narratives, were described as 'unable to adapt' and keep up with the changes. Their stories and understandings of how the organisation had evolved pointed to considerably different directions and depicted Aporia as a story of exclusion.

7.2 Aporia as a story of exclusion

The counter narrative to Aporia as a success story was created by a group of employees who felt that their role in the organisation was undervalued by the new management team. The group consisted of two major sub-groups of employees: the longer serving staff and employees from the "support" departments. These subgroups were not mutually exclusive, as many of the support staff had been working for Aporia for many years. Both of these groups appeared disappointed with their situation and at some points expressed their dissatisfaction to the management team. Not all longer serving staff, however, expressed their discontentment with the changes. Some longer serving participants, especially the ones higher up in the hierarchy or the recently promoted participants, expressed their contentment with the new direction in which the organisation was heading. Additionally, many of the participants who expressed their concerns about the changes in Aporia in fact supported some of the initiatives. As will

be shown in what follows, the stories of exclusion were primarily linked to the changes in the symbolic role of the quoted participants.

Interestingly, the (dis-)satisfaction line corresponded very closely with the line drawn by the management dividing employees into different bonus groups. The classification was interpreted as an indicator of a group's importance in the organisation and as such served as a powerful symbol of internal hierarchy. It was common knowledge that the commercial group was placed at the centre of management's attention due to its proximity to money. Commercial support was also thought to be important as its work could affect the financial performance of the company. Support, on the other hand, was the furthest away from money generation, consequently its status was accordingly lower:

> For me, the balance is tipped towards the commercial part of the business, because the organisation lives thanks to these business people. This has nothing to do with who is better or worse, because the support functions are simply support functions. (Ted, General Manager)

Employees classified as 'support' staff tended to be far less enthusiastic about the changes than the commercial or commercial support group. Here, the first interview question which triggered success stories among their colleagues, as described above, did not trigger long utterances. The comments were far more succinct, either pointing to the improved working conditions or admitting that not much had changed over the year, as illustrated by the following interview excerpt:

| (Interviewer) | What have I missed [since the last time we met]? |
| (Irena, administrator) | I have no idea. Everything is as it was back then. We have similar shortcomings, similar mess, and successes[27] are also similar. |

It seemed that the commercial success of the whole company was not something the employees identified strongly with. There was no ostensible pride visible, no listing of achievements, no discussion of impressive financial figures that could indicate the scale of the transformation.

The differences in the experiences of the changes among this group and the one presented earlier in the chapter become particularly visible when discussing the narratives accompanying organisational attribute collages. Below is a collage composed by a young, well-paid accountant who had been working for Aporia for less than two

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[27] The success that the participant mentioned and explained later in the interview was associated with her department and not the general performance of the whole company.

years. The collage that he composed, and in particular the narrative that he built around the collage, capture very well the main themes of the stories of exclusion:

Figure 18: Organisational attributes collage, Troy, accountant
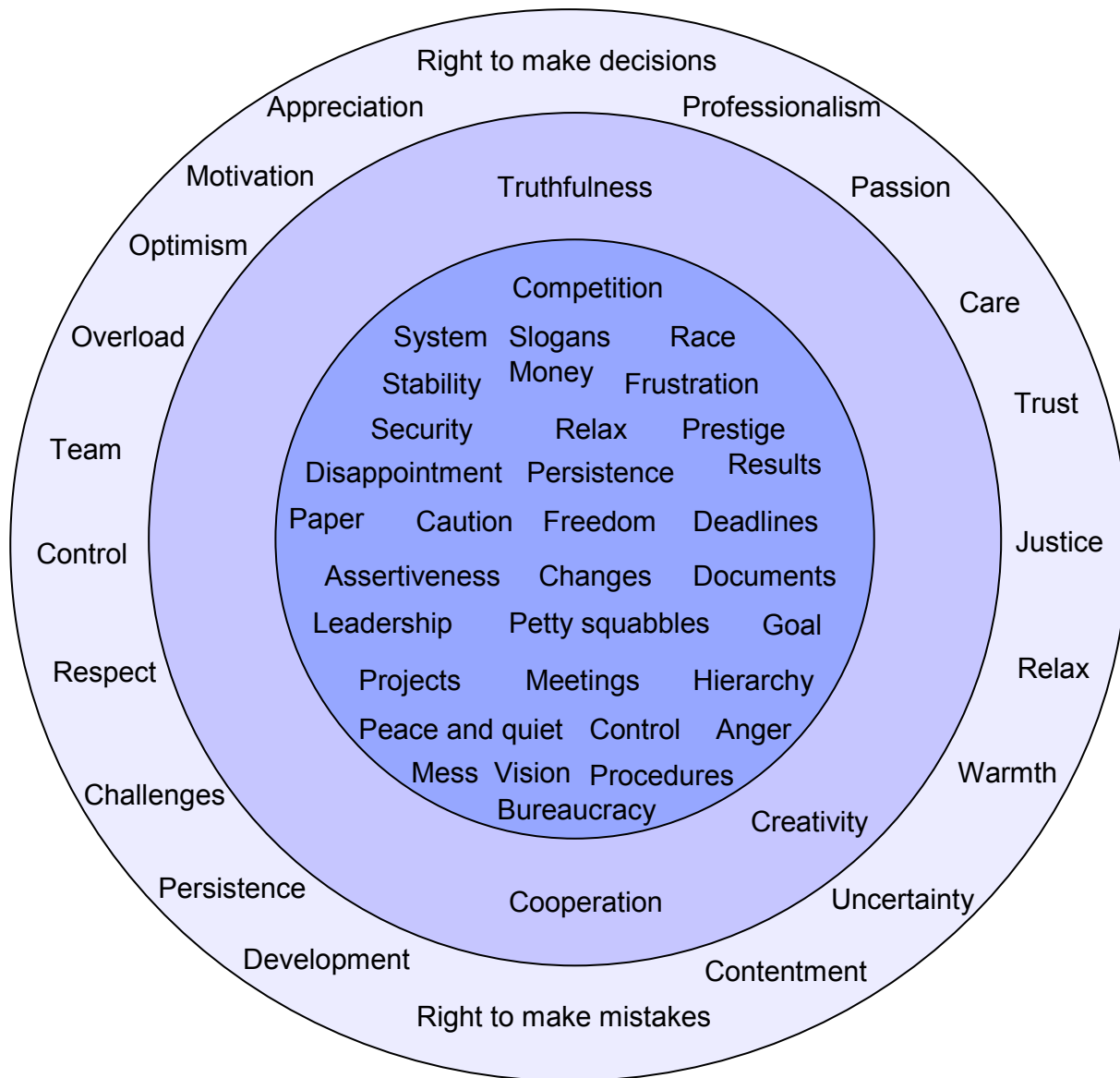
The organisation seen from the perspective of the young accountant was largely presented using strikingly different attributes from the ones which featured in the stories of success. While some of the central features of Aporia, such as complex procedures, here referred to as bureaucracy, and the focus on results were still present, there was not

mention of commitment, satisfaction or passion any more. Instead, more negative emotions, such as frustration, disappointment or anger, populated the collage.

When asked about passion, the response was very succinct and informative:

> Passion? There is no such thing. Here the only thing that matters is sales, money and that's all. (Troy, accountant)

This dissatisfaction and bitterness were largely associated with the way the staff from the support department perceived their place in the organisation. As another employee coming from a different support department summarised her views on how the role of her department was perceived in the organisation:

> We are divided into better and worse [groups], (…)
>
> We aren't present here at all. (…)
>
> We are in this organisation on a side track. We live next to this company. We are on this island from which there is this little bridge [to the mainland]. (Natalie, internal consultant)

The perceived separation between the 'mainland' where the majority of the organisation was located and the small island inhabited by the support staff contributed to the feelings of exclusion and bitterness. The low position of some departments in the unofficial organisation of hierarchy was mainly attributed to management's failure to understand the nature and relevance for business these departments had:

> A person from marketing has a possibility to do their own PR. They just do a project and then deliver a presentation [thus making themselves visible]. Some departments, due to the nature of their work, don't have a possibility to present themselves so they are classified [as less important]. (Julia, analyst)

The divisions in the organisation were thought to be at odds with the official discourse that talked of the organisation as a whole. While introducing the corporate values, the management kept emphasising that everybody was important in order for the organisation to succeed:

> [The organisation is like a racing car. Everyone is needed and then the person who is driving the car will achieve a great result. This success consists of many people's efforts. This is what was said. (Warren, administrator)

Some of the support staff initially believed that their contribution to the organisation's success would be appreciated. However, when the company met its target and achieved very good results, the promised reward was given only to sales people and the members of the management team, which fuelled dissatisfaction among the rest of the staff left behind. In their understanding:

> It seems to me that our president is trying to show us at all costs how things really look like. (...) I get the impression that he is proving to us that we are not needed here (...) If it wasn't necessary, we wouldn't be working here. (...) I guess that this person is mainly focused on the sales results. If there is a success (…) this will be only due to the sales people. So the support departments, such as accounting don't matter. (...) We do have some impact, maybe not as big as the sales people, but we are working hard, so that all the cogs in the machine work. (Troy, accountant)

The event that was here referred to was a trip to California. Initially, a promise was made that if the targets were met, an incentive trip to California would be organised for the whole company. Later, the status of the trip was changed into a national sales meeting (NSM). In the eyes of the management team, this was not a problem because allegedly it was clear from the beginning that not everyone would go, yet the employees from the support team interpreted the initial message differently. When it became clear to them that the trip would materialise and that not everyone was invited, bitterness spread:

> Everybody understood that there was going to be an incentive trip to California. The more so that it was announced during a meeting where the bonus system was explained to the support departments, so to people who are not going. […] It is important that this was announced as a reward for the company. And everybody commented that this was going to be an incentive trip like in [the really old times] when everybody was invited. (…) I really don't need this kind of trip right now. But the fact that we are not classified to go there is unfair. (...) (Irena, administrator)

While others were receiving motivational messages, as the one shown below, the support staff made an attempt to be noticed and heard by issuing a protest letter to the General Manager:

Figure 19: Motivational MMS: 'The ship to California has already arrived'

> As employees of the support departments we would like to express our great bitterness over not including all employees in the incentive/ NSM meeting in California. In our understanding, the commercial success that our company enjoyed in 2007 is an outcome of all employee's work. As

a company, we are one team that supports each other and is governed by four main values: CARE, ENDURNACE, PIONEERING AND ACHIEVING. In order for the organisation to work efficiently[28], it needs all its parts to perform and the success is an outcome of **joint** effort. (…) We trust that [Aporia] as a pioneering company that cares for all its employees will reward their endurance and achievements. (Protest letter to the General Manager of Aporia, 2008)[29]

In the letter that was signed by approximately thirty employees, including three that were invited to the trip, the support staff made references to the official organisational discourse in which corporate values and an emphasis on joint effort were an integral part. The protest did not make the management change their mind. The only thing it achieved was a repetition of the motivation system that spelled out who was entitled to what kind of benefits, separating again the three bonus groups and leaving the support staff at least as bitter as they were before. For some, this event served as a basis and for others as an illustration of the emerging belief that employees were not equally treated in the company. Allegedly, there were better and worse employees. Even a special word was coined to depict the underprivileged group; they would sometimes describe themselves as "underemployees", which was a reference to Nietzsche's infamous "Untermenschen" category. The line that was marking off the more important from the less important employees overlapped with the organisation's bonus classification, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. As some participants argued:

> In theory, these are not better or worse groups, but in fact this [support group]is the lowest group because for example we are not going to California, and I think that this is not fair. (Irena, administrator)

Management's attempt to convince employees that their work was appreciated and that it paid to be committed appeared to have backfired with some of the staff. What was meant to work as an incentive, put off a group of employees and enhanced their conviction that the official talk was to be interpreted along different lines.

Whereas some employees quoted the "California incident" to show how successful the company was, others referred to it to depict the lack of justice and transparency in the organisation as well as management's inability to keep their promises and to acknowledge the value of some groups of employees. California became a symbol of success and prestige for some, and unfair treatment for others. The two subjective truths: the one of the management team who did not seem to share the concerns of the support staff and the other of the dissatisfied employees drove the two parties even

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[28] Emphasis added.
[29] Original emphasis.

further apart, making the (dis)satisfaction or inclusion/ exclusion division more prominent than the departmental affinities. Although the sales results were improving, the feeling of 'living together apart' was still very much present in the organisation, especially on its margins.

Another thread in the counter-narrative to Aporia as a success story was authored by the longer serving employees. Similarly to the support staff, many of the longer serving staff expressed their disappointment with the perceived lack of respect for them despite the official declarations and the promotions of the 'endurance' value. One of the most often quoted examples that was used to illustrate this perceived lack of respect was a seemingly small incident with parking space allocation, as one participant recounted:

> There was this really disagreeable situation with parking space allocation. Of course, we have a rank of grades [which show which employee is higher in rank]. Naturally, the most luxurious parking is the underground parking, the less luxurious one – the 2d parking – is the parking in front of the building, the third place are the parking spaces scattered in the parking lot close to our building and the places number 4 are the bushes close to the junction (...) The key to the allocation of these spaces suddenly became a real mystery. No criterion, such as the grade or tenure could explain it. (...) and it was not a lottery either. (Zachary, internal consultant)

What this lack of clarity in parking space allocation effected was a protest of one of the longest serving employees who felt that important principles had been violated. As a result of the protest, the spaces were allocated once again, this time taking into account employee length of service and grade. Nonetheless, a feeling of injustice remained.

The importance of the past for the longer serving staff and the refusal to depreciate the meaning of long service is well captured by another story quoted below:

> There was a situation once when we came to a big meeting in a beautiful castle. Everything was great till we reached our room and everybody found a little box on their pillow with a letter. In the box there was this little emblem [corporate logo]. It seems like a nice gesture, don't you think? But for many years this emblem symbolized something and I don't know if it still does. It was given to employees who had worked with the company for five years. These signs were made of gold. For ten years, you would get the same emblem but with a little diamond. […] They used to give such signs. If you came to meetings with this sign you felt that you were a senior employee. You felt appreciated. […] Precisely there, at that meeting [in the castle], someone said: "I don't know some people, they are all coming with the corporate logo on their lapels, so they must have been working here for some time and I should know them." And then I told him: "No, they have given this emblem to everyone." He took the emblem off and put it to his pocket. (Warren, administrator)

As the story suggests, the new management team, or at least one of its members, offered a new interpretation to what used to be an important and prestigious symbol of long service. As the narrator highlighted, the attempt to enable all organisation members to wear a company logo which was previously reserved for the longer serving staff was

seen as depreciating the role of organisation's veterans. As a result of the managerial gesture, the sign stood for nothing more than what it was - a company logo. In this light, the reaction of older employee could be interpreted as a sign of contestation of the changes, a separation from the new order where the past was to be cherished in private.

Interestingly, the perceived lack of respect for the past noted by the longer serving staff was also acknowledged by the new organisation members:

> Respect for the past? I don't think so. We talk a little about it but generally, we don't look back much. So this is neither respect nor lack of respect. (Iris, top manager)

> We are leaving the past behind. Respect for the past means that we are looking positively at something, e.g. at what happened in the company. But I'd rather remember about these negative things only in the context of not repeating the same mistakes. (…) The past is meaningless[30] and I don't have respect for something that was negative. (Ian, Sales Manager)

The two narratives described in this chapter present stingingly different perspectives and experiences of the changes that Aporia has undergone. They revealed competing interpretations of management's actions and participant's attempts to find and negotiate their place in the new organisational order. One narrative evoked the image of Aporia as a story of success, whereby the commercial achievements of the organisation featured as a prevailing theme. The organisation was depicted as on a good track to a full recovery from its turbulent past which was to be erased from memory. The present, on the other hand, was narrated as a much healthier working environment, populated by highly committed and enthusiastic staff who enjoyed their personal successes together with their employer. The discussed counter narrative, by contrast, emplotted the changes as fraught with injustice and broken promises. The aforementioned discussions of commercial success were replaced by accounts of increasing frustration and disappointment with being pushed to organisational margins.

The discursive struggles accompanying the change initiative, as presented in the two contrasting narratives, will be discussed more closely drawing on the existing literature on the topic in the following chapter of this thesis together with the other themes of Aporia's change project.

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[30] The direct translation of the word is: asexual.

8 Discussion: Climbing out of organisational depression: the tale of the culture change project

Drawing on existing extant research, the discussion offers a reading of the findings presented in the previous chapters of the thesis. The structure of the discussion is inspired by a theatrical play and introduces a Prologue, three Acts and an Epilogue to tell a tale of the culture change project. The five distinguished parts of the play recount different, yet closely interlinked, aspects of the change initiative and are aligned with the investigative framework discussed in the methodology chapter.

The tale starts with a Prologue which sets the scene for the culture change project by focusing on the traumatic times in the organisation's history that preceded the change initiative. The tale of organisational depression, which largely draws on organisational identity literature, is then used as a crucial aspect of the organisational past against which the following events associated with the change initiative are discussed. In line with the interpretive paradigm adopted in this thesis (Burrell and Morgan, 1979), the analysis of the past refers to an exploration of a storied version of the past, or what Brown *et al.* (2008: 1046) referred to as 'a collective shared memory that has been talked into existence'. In this sense, the shared, and at times contested narratives of the past are inextricably connected to the present (in this narrative overlapping with the culture change initiative) and the organisation members' individual and group identity work (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003 and Watson, 2008).

Building on the existing body of work on cultural engineering, the three subsequent Acts unravel complimentary aspects of the change initiative. Act I focuses on the discursive struggles (compare: Fleming and Spicer, 2008; Hardy and Philips, 1999) over the cultural change. Special attention is here paid to the discourses of temporality (Ybema, 2010) - the meaning and the role of organisational past, present and future – as used by different organisational actors when authoring their collective identities in times of organisational change (Brown, 2006). In this sense, Act I is indebted to the previous work on organisational storytelling (especially the contributions of Gabriel, 1995; 1998; 2000), and more specifically, the existing research on organisational nostalgia (e.g. Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Davis, 1970; Gabriel, 1993; Ylijoki, 2005) and postalgia

(Ybema, 2004; 2010). Act II, on the other hand, attends to the process of working with the change, especially in terms of organisational members' relatedness to the officially endorsed values and the newly introduced focus on leadership. By doing so, Act II engages with the critical literature on cultural engineering and leadership discourse, as presented earlier in the thesis. Finally, building on the earlier work on cultural interventions, Act III turns to the meanings and experiences of the change project as narrated by the organisational participants. The discussion of the change initiative is concluded in the Epilogue with a metaphorical reading of the events which highlights the performative-expressive aspect of the initiative (see Goffman, 1959; Mangham and Overingtion, 1987), as well as its wider implications.

8.1 Prologue: Organisational depression[31]

Taking seriously Wilkins and Dyer's (1988) long standing call to consider organisational history when studying cultural change, the discussion of Aporia's culture change project starts with a retrospective analysis. The culture change initiative described in this thesis was undertaken in a very specific organisational context which is here regarded as crucial for the understanding of the way organisational actors worked with, perceived and responded to the 'culture project' (see Wolfram Cox and Hassard, 2007). The almost two-year turbulent period in organisation's history which preceded the 'culture project' set the scene for the subsequent events in two ways. First of all, it was a time of a number of substantive and cultural changes of the type commonly associated with organisational decline (e.g. Cameron *et al.*, 1987) which the 'culture project' was partly designed to reverse. Secondly, the turbulent past fuelled powerful nostrophobic (Davis, 1979) and postalgic discourses (Ybema, 2004), which accompanied the change effort.

In this light, Aporia' change initiative differs considerably from the culture change projects typically described in the academic literature. The existing body of work on 'culture initiatives' focuses predominantly on organisations which engage in culture work mainly with the view to improving their performance or in response to some competitive threats (e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Harris and Ogbonna, 1999;

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[31] Some of the here presented ideas were discussed in Ciuk (2008b)

2002; Harris and Matallinos, 2002). The focus on culture work in traumatised (Hormann and Vivian, 2005), distressed (Puplampu, 2005) or simply 'hurt' organisations (Beeby *et al.*, 1998) has, surprisingly, received scarce attention. Therefore, before discussing the various tenants of the culture change initiative undertaken in Aporia, some careful consideration will be given to the stormy past the organisation had gone through.

What follows then is a discussion of the substantive and cultural changes preceding the project, here theorised as organisational depression. This focus on the context in which the culture change was undertaken will be treated as a prologue to the change initiative discussed later in the chapter. Similarly, the discursive refashioning of the past (Gabriel, 2000), understood as the wider practices of change, will be elaborated on in the subsequent part of the discussion.

As described in the context chapter, before Aporia embarked on the culture change initiative, it had undergone a period of intense changes linked, at least in the participants' narratives, to a toxic leadership episode (compare Goldman, 2006; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Pelletier, 2010; Starratt and Grandy, 2010).

During this time, Aporia turned into an organisation that had lost its core and the sense of direction; it was a company plagued by unprecedented staff turnover, and populated by scared, resigned and frustrated employees who did not know any longer what their organisation stood for; a firm that had disappointed many of its customers and tarnished its reputation. In other words, Aporia became an organisation that was eroded both internally and externally. In the here offered interpretation, this was an organisation that suffered from depression; its culture had dissipated, its sense of identity had been lost, even its image had eroded.

In this respect, organisational depression is a third organisational pathology, alongside the two other dysfunctional organisation types indentified by Hatch and Schultz (2002): hyper-adaptive and narcissistic organisations. The two pathologies identified by Hatch and Schultz (2002) are based on the premise that for organisational identity to be healthy, there must be a balance between the influences of organisational culture and image. According to the quoted authors, the first pathology, hyper-adaptation, is a

situation when the organisational identity is built predominantly on the external image of the organisation thus downplaying its cultural heritage. Organisational narcissism, on the other hand, illustrates the opposite situation – an organisation which derives its identity predominantly from its culture, largely ignoring the outside world. The findings presented in this thesis, however, suggest a third possibility; a situation when an organisational trauma leads to a culture erosion that subsequently deals a blow to the organisation's image and at the same time undermines its members self-definition so that they can no longer answer the question what it is that their organisation stands for (see Albert and Whetten, 1985; Gioia and Thomas, 1996).

In the wake of the organisational trauma, Aporia's organisational culture became eroded. Deprived of their cultural reservoirs, attempting to organise in the debris of the former organisation, the employees did not get much consolation from the information coming from the outside world. The organisation was typically perceived as unreliable and untrustworthy, or at least this is what the organisation members believed was the case (what Dutton and colleagues, 1994, referred to as the construed external image). Many of its former clients (in this case doctors prescribing Aporia's drugs) and business partners (doctors who used to provide services for Aporia, such as lectures) refused to have anything to do with the organisation. Under these circumstances, organisational identity could no longer be spun with the help of the cultural reservoirs, as these had been corroded, nor could it derive any meaningful identity resources from the outside. Organisation members had 'chaos in their heads', as they felt that the organisation was 'spinning aimlessly' and 'heading towards a beautiful disaster'. They did not want to identify with an organisation which they were embarrassed of. The organisation was 'going to pieces' from the inside and from the outside. Thus, the processes underpinning the identity dynamics described by Hatch and Schultz (2002) became distorted and perpetuated the identity crises, similarly to Ciuk and Kostera's (2010) observations about organisations which are affected by archetypical forgetting. Since in this work organisational identity is conceptualised after Czarniawska (1997) as a narrative project, organisational depression will now be discussed in terms of its consequences for the identity narrative.

When affected by depression, organisational identity lost its grounding in culture. The external grounding of identity had also drifted away, leaving behind a battered

organisational image. The identity narrative then lost its meaning and appeal for the organisation members who started to feel embarrassed to be part of the depressed organisation. Reflecting on the cultural script made no sense, as the devaluated organisational values no longer applied to the absurd, as it seemed, times. Revisiting of the eroded cultural script then only highlighted the absurdity of the toxic times perpetuating the identity narrative disintegration. The audience, presented with a disintegrated narrative, enhanced its view of the untrustworthy organisation. And so Aporia's culture kept eroding, disintegrating the identity narrative, and bankrupting its image. The organisation was falling deeper and deeper into depression, as illustrated below:

Figure 20: Organisational depression, based on Ciuk and Kostera's (2010) narrative reading of the identity dynamics model proposed by Hatch and Schultz (2002)
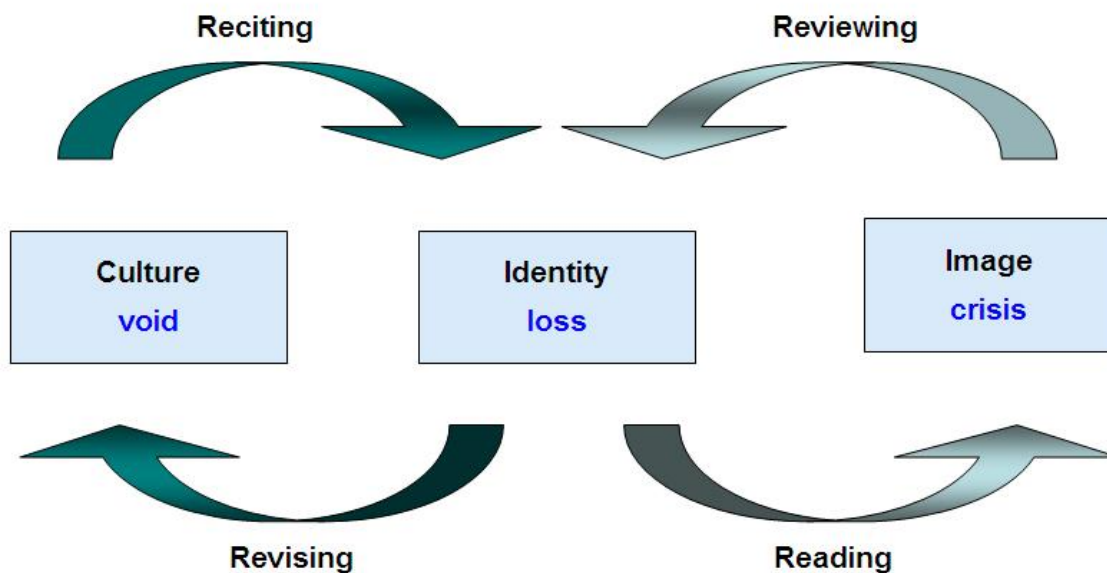
For Hatch and Schultz (2002), a healthy organisation requires a balance between the influences from the inside (culture) and the outside (image). However, as the case of Aporia illustrates, the balance is not enough. When organisational culture gets eroded, organisation's identity and image are likely to suffer as well. Even if the cultural changes are interpreted similarly by the external audience and the organisation members, the identity narrative might still get disintegrated. The integrity of the identity narrative requires, as Czarniawska (1997) observed, some degree of continuity. Cultural erosion disrupts the organisation members' self-definition not because their cultural understandings are at odds with the information coming from the outside world, but because there is a void where there used to be a meaningful vision of the organisational

self. The new face of the organisation that emerges out of the toxic times is a face the organisation members can neither recognise nor accept as their own. It is a gloomy vision of an organisation devoured by a dangerous illness; it's a depressing picture of a depressed organisation.

The here proposed notion of organisational depression is not new, however its conceptualisation is. Organisations have already been labelled as depressed by a number of scholars. For example, Kets de Vries and Miller (1984) talked of a depressive organisational type which they characterised as one where the organisation members share a feeling of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness (also present in the findings of this study, especially when analysing the collages). In Kets de Vries and Miller's (1984) study, the organisation members have lost their motivation and were unable to experience pleasure, which, according to the authors, could be traced back to a neurotic leader who had passed on his pathological features to other organisation members. This perspective captures very well all the clinical symptoms of depression, which largely overlap with the findings of the here presented study, but it does not offer much insight into the dynamic interrelations between the symptoms. Rather, it looks at given symptoms of depression and aggregates them to the organisational level, thus accounting for the organisational, rather than individual depression. Similarly, Cohen and Cohen (1993:41) refer to organisational depression when describing the pathological state as one where 'organization members are indifferent, apathetic and lethargic'. According to these authors, organisational depression is down to the organisation members who seem to have no energy and no emotion and express little or no interest in the future. Again, the symptoms of the individuals affected with depression are generally the same as the ones identified in the here described case of organisational malady. Nonetheless, there is little mention in Cohen and Cohen's (1993) description of how organisational depression affects organisational identity and how, in turn, it is interpreted by the outside world.

Organisational depression, as described in this study, stands for more than the traditional apathy, lethargy and lack of initiative of its members. It generally comprises all these symptoms but, most importantly, it indicates other potentially fatal problems on the organisational level of analysis, namely a loss of organisational self (Gioia *et al.*, 2000) and an undermined organisational image. The organisational self of a depressed

organisation cannot be restored with the help of culture because it had been eroded, nor can it seek confirmation in the outside world, since its social self has been bruised as well. Organisational depression, as described here, is a disease that devours the organisation's heart leaving behind a phantom that mourns its loss, not knowing where to look for consolation.

This image of a depressed organisation might evoke associations among some readers with the concept of 'miasma' as discussed by Gabriel (2008b). Miasma, according to the quoted author, paralyses the will to resistance, it relates to the experience of never being up to standard and finally, it is almost always attributed to the leader. As Gabriel (2008b:60) reiterates, 'miasma is a state of pollution' which affects people from inside; it 'brings about a state of moral and spiritual decay, a corruption of all values and human relations of trust, love and community – people suspect their neighbours of being the cause, scapegoating and witch hunt are rife' (ibid:55). Although, some of the elements of organisations affected by miasma are similar to the ones in depressed organisations (both evoking the imagery of pollution, corruption of relations and spiritual decay), as conceptualised in this thesis, organisational miasma and depression are two separate phenomena.

Gabriel (2008b) himself, drew a clear distinction between miasma and depression. While depression can be cured, miasma pervades the organisation even after its original cause is removed from sight. It keeps haunting the organisation and leaves little hope for rescue. Organisational depression, as suggested here, does not necessarily have to be an incurable organisational malady, as it does not have the fatal miasmic quality. If organisational depression is a state of a culture loss which triggers identity and image crises, at least it leaves some hope for resurrection once the culture void is filled back with meaning, for example through the gradual 'reframing of everyday life' (Alvesson, 2002). This is something that the new management of Aporia set out to do; it launched a culture programme to put an end to the organisational crisis, or, as it is suggested here, to climb out of organisational depression. Subsequently, the turbulent past became an important resource that was mobilised in the new discourses of the attempted culture change.

8.2 Act I: Discursive struggles over the change[32]

In line with some previous work on the topic (e.g. Gabriel, 1993; McCabe, 2004; Parker, 2000), the talk of organisational culture change was abundant with temporal references, wherein the past, the present and the future became contested terrains subject to multiple, at times strikingly divergent, interpretations promoted by various group of organisational actors. Quite unsurprisingly in light of the turbulent past of the organisation, the majority discourse accompanying the change was largely of a postalgic nature (Ybema, 2004), expressing a longing for a brighter future and a sense of discontentment or at best only partial satisfaction with the status quo. The features of the postalgic narratives, however, differed across the organisation, especially in their treatment of organisational past. Whereas the new crop of employees, including the new management of the organisation, tended to author largely nostophobic narratives (Davis, 1979), depriving the past of any value, the longer serving staff were more likely to engage in a nostalgic rendering of the organisation's Golden Age (Gabriel, 1993) and simultaneously present the toxic leadership episode as a stormy period that they managed to survive. In each case, the competing discourses of the past, intertwined in the talk of the present and future, can be interpreted as 'politicised processes of reality construction' (Ybema, 2010:496). It is through these discourses that the organisational actors negotiate the meaning of their organisational reality, and simultaneously author their temporally-bound collective and individual identities (Brown, 2006).

I will now discuss in more detail the discursive struggles accompanying the change initiative in Aporia and try to unpack its link to the politics of identity construction of different groups of organisational actors.

8.2.1 Organisational postalgia

As Gioia *et al.* (2002:622) have noted, 'Accounting for organizational history is essential to any change process'. Similarly in Aporia, the refashioning of the past was an important element of the change project. The majority discourse surrounding the change initiative, 'with its longing for a heavenly future', can be described as postalgic

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[32] Some of the here presented ideas were discussed in Ciuk (2010b)

(Ybema, 2004:825). This yearning for the future, however, entailed not only forward-orientated narratives, but also comprised talk of the organisational past and present. More precisely, postalgic narratives in Aporia were based on two distinctive themes: 'fantasies of a grandiose future' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008) and the 'rubbishing' and separation from the past (Munro, 1998), linked to the scapegoating of the old company. While the first thread of the postalgic narrative was predominantly shared across the organisation, with some slight variations, the process of 'rubbishing' of the past was strongly contested by powerful symbolic counter-narratives predominantly residing on organisational margins (Gabriel, 1995).

8.2.2 Fantasies of the days to come

Both the substantive changes undertaken in Aporia, as well as the 'culture project', were depicted in the official managerial discourse as bringing the organisation closer to achieving success, a hope that appeared to be shared by the vast majority of organisational members. The official rhetoric, as exemplified in the General Manager's talk to the staff, depicted the organisation as 'an ambitious working environment with great aspirations'.

There seemed to be an organisation-wide consensus as to the need for a success. Interestingly, the 'aspirations for, and the possibility of, a better tomorrow appeared to haunt both managers and staff' (McCabe, 2004:852). The vision of what the projected success might look like was, however, much more fragmented. The official talk tended to concentrate on the financial performance of the organisation. The promising sales figures were interpreted as 'the first signs of success' and an indication that the former negative trend had finally been reversed. Graphs with growing sales figures decorated the management's offices giving credibility to the assertion that the awaited success was on its way.

There were, however also other locally shared understandings of what the longed for organisation should look like. These fantasies of organisational success were most explicitly articulated in the narratives accompanying organisational collages. They depicted Aporia as distinct from other companies; an organisation that its members are

'proud to be part of', a 'company that others look up to'. For some, predominantly non-managerial staff, the success was associated with an internally stable organisation. On the other hand, others, mainly the new management team, wanted their organisation to turn into 'a gazelle in the market'[33] which would 'startle the competition'.

What these other fantasies of success often had in common was a longing for togetherness and belonging (Munro, 1998). This craving for togetherness, the findings suggest, were closely connected to the situation after the toxic leadership episode, when the organisation became disintegrated, or, to follow the interpretation suggested earlier, when it succumbed to depression. Interestingly, numerous organisation members, regardless of their seniority or length of service, seemed to endorse the unitarist, or, in Martin's (2002) words, the integration perspective by stressing the need to work towards common objectives as one team.

The collective fantasies of success in Aporia therefore bear a lot of resemblance with what Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) refer to as 'fantasies of grandiose future'. Yet, unlike the phenomenon described by the quoted authors, the fantasies of success were not confined to managers, but succumbed to across the board. They incorporated individual and collective ambitions and hopes, but were also indicative of widely shared fears. The fantasy of success was particularly visible at the beginning of the 'culture project', when the new management team came on board shortly after the toxic leadership episode. The prevailing feeling in the organisation at that time was of having 'the last chance' to reverse the negative trend, as revealed in collages, but also in interviews and informal conversations with organisation members. Achieving commercial success was therefore seen as a prerequisite for staying in the market and convincing the headquarters that the Polish subsidiary was not a lost cause. The stormy history of the organisation, marked by perpetually rotating leaders and a resulting lack of continuity, the danger of a decline and then intensified efforts to climb out of depression, fuelled collective fantasies of success – a success that would bring the long awaited epic turn to the organisational saga.

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[33] When translated directly from Polish, the interviewees spoke of 'tigers' and often used an image of a tiger when creating collages that illustrated their hopes for the future. The Polish 'market tiger' does not imply a small size company that develops fast, as the translation into English suggests , but any rapidly developing company that poses a (potential) threat to its competitors.

8.2.3 Separation from the past

The postalgic discourses highlighting the need for change not only outlined the brighter future that was lying ahead, but also promoted a separation from what was referred as the 'bad past' of the organisation. This process of 'rubbishing' (Munro, 1989), 'stigmatising' (Badham *et al.*, 2003) and rejection of the past (McCabe, 2004) has already been reported in various studies (e.g. Biggart, 1977; Ciuk and Kostera, 2010; McCabe, 2010). The rewriting of history is usually intensified in times of organisational change (Gioia *et al.*, 2002; Parker, 2002), which was also the case in Aporia. The language employed to talk of the changes drew clear temporal distinctions between the past and the present. The official rhetoric was more cautious in its reference to organisational history. It suggested that the organisation would aim to 'enhance its organisational culture' while simultaneously declaring 'respect for the past'. In more informal talks, however, the language was less ambiguous. There was no more reference to 'enhancement' of culture, but rather of building the 'organisation from scratch'. In the discourse of the new staff, the present was always favourably contrasted with the past and its older employees (compare also Dawson, 2003). In line with this newly narrated discontinuity, Aporia became subdivided into an old and a new organisation. The old Aporia was a thing of the past which was getting in the way of the new organisation which was 'still a baby', as the General Manager described it.

It is argued here that the construction of a clear-cut separation from the past enabled the newcomers to author their collective identities in a positive light. Therefore, it can be suggested that the 'symbolic boundaries that managers [and other organisation members] constructed around the past/present are integral to their identity' (McCabe, 2004:842). Had they not distanced themselves from the turbulent past of the organisation that they had decided to join, their identities as successful professionals might have been endangered. Once the role of the new managers was defined as 'starting a brand new chapter in the organisation's history', the task seemed to be very challenging, but it was at the same time also very flattering. As one of the newly employed managers described the situation: 'This is a huge opportunity; (…) we have a great impact on what is going to happen in the organisation'. Presenting oneself as the one on whom the future and even the sheer existence of the organisation depends, casts oneself as a 'rescuer' who is not afraid to live up to the challenge. The change talk filled

with postalgic longing of the future (Ybema, 2004) and nostophobic disregard for the past (Davis, 1979) can, then, be regarded a useful resource that selected organisational actors produce, enhance and consume while authoring their individual and collective (social) identities. This observation is in line with Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) who saw organisational discourse and individual's identity work as filled with tensions, yet tightly intertwined.

Interestingly, the opportunity to redefine their personal identities as belonging to the new organisation was used not only by the newly employed managers, but also by some employees with longer service in the organisation. For example, one of the top managers with over a two year service in Aporia admitted how disappointed she was with Aporia's position in the market. She expressed her desire to work again for one of the top organisations in their sector, which would be more in line with her professional track record. When she joined Aporia, it was among the top fifteen firms in the country but then dropped over thirty places down in the rankings. For her, and most likely for some other members, it was much harder to identify with what she perceived to be a poorly, or at best moderately, performing organisation. In this light, it is not surprising that she identified more strongly with the new management team, which she perceived as professional and successful, as opposed to the longer serving staff who, in her words, did not 'have the new spirit' and therefore found it hard to 'find their feet in the new reality'. By distancing herself from the past and the staff who were tied to it, the manager was able to preserve the endangered feeling of self worth. In terms of 'identity work' (Watson, 2008), the new management team with its discourse of radical separation from the past offered an alluring 'base of identification' (Knights and McCabe, 2003) on which even some of the longer serving staff could actively build on.

While the 'rubbishing' of the past (Munro, 1989) which accompanied the change talk in Aporia was a useful resource for the new organisation members, it presented the longer serving staff in a less favourable light thus posing a threat to their organisational identities. As previous research has already demonstrated (e.g. Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Gabriel, 1993 or McDonald *et al.*, 2006), such discursive threats presented by change or change talk are likely to be countered with competing discourses which offer an alternative interpretation of the organisational reality. In Aporia, the longer serving staff, pushed by the newcomers to organisational margins (Gabriel, 1995), challenged

the dominant discourses by symbolically refashioning the past (Gabriel, 1993) and thus reinventing the present. First of all, the nostophobic (Davis, 1979) and postalgic discourses were confronted with nostalgic revisiting of the past which reversed the symbolic ordering of the past and present. Secondly, the meaning of the belonging to the turbulent past of the organisation was reinvented in the stories of victimisation. How the two complimentary discourses were fashioned and how they linked to the identity work of those involved will be discussed in more depth in what follows.

8.2.4 Nostalgia and the resurrection of the past

In previous studies, nostalgia has been referred to as a 'morality of the present' (Ylijoki, 2005) since it is based on a poetic rather than a factual refashioning of the past (Gabriel, 1993) in the course of which the present is cast as inadequate and lacking. In Aporia, the themes evoked in the nostalgic tales highlighted the insufficiencies of the present, similarly to the findings of previous research (e.g. Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Davis, 1979; Gabriel, 1993; 2000; Ylijoki, 2005). However, the nostalgic tales also had other important symbolic functions. When contrasted with the nostophobic discourses, nostalgic narratives offered a reappreciation and at least partial resurrection of the past. They reminded that not all that belonged to the past was bad and that not all things new were necessarily good, or different to what was before (compare also McCabe, 2004). In this sense, organisational nostalgia was not so much a regressive force, which has probably earned it the label of 'infamous' (e.g. Magala, 2010), but rather a counter narrative to the main organisational discourse.

In fact, the longer serving staff welcomed many of the changes promoted by the new management team, such as transparency, simplification of procedures and unfreezing of the sales budgets. It seemed that the most contested issues were related to what Maynard-Moody *et al.* (1986) referred to as 'status drama'. As the quoted authors observed, organisational changes have profound symbolic implications. In Aporia, the replacement of a bulk of staff with new members, coupled with the arrival of a new management team which on many occasions devalued the past, meant that the few remaining longer serving staff were pushed to organisational margins (Gabriel, 1995). Their symbolic role in the organisation was undermined and this is what the

organisational veterans primarily opposed and challenged in their nostalgic tales. Their protest then was more related to symbolic than the substantive changes that were being enforced. If nostalgia is to be viewed as a regressive force, then its regressiveness in Aporia should be primarily linked to the attempt to restore the challenged symbolic order in the organisation rather than an opposition to the substantive changes.

In the symbolically charged narratives of the past which were spun by the old guard, the real value was located in the past and the people had affinities to the past. More precisely, the symbolic reappreciation of the longest serving employees was achieved in the nostalgic tales primarily through the poetic trope of attribution of fixed qualities (Gabriel, 2000), namely 'professionalism' to the former employees or the longest serving members. The 'Golden Age' of the organisation was yearned for not only due to the family-lie ties that were said to characterise the working relationships in the past, but also due to the type of people that worked in Aporia at that time. They were narrated not only as 'nice', 'friendly' and 'decent' but also as people of 'really big calibre'. They were referred to as professionals, with good product knowledge and medical background. They were said to 'think differently and be able to do more [than the new staff]'; 'they would do things rather than sit all day and write pointless e-mails'. The new crop of employees who seemed to have colonised the present had neither the special quality nor the calibre of the past, at least in the storied organisational reality as interpreted by their longer serving colleagues.

Interestingly, in Aporia not only the organisation's veterans responded to the initiated changes and their accompanying change discourse with nostalgic narratives. There were also other groups of employees who concocted their collective, or at times individual, nostalgic tales. Contrary to the longer serving staff, they did not evoke the organisation's 'Golden Age' which they were often not part of, but instead created their own objects of nostalgia, not infrequently located outside the organisation. The few remaining members of the taken over organisation which became part of Aporia a few years prior to the research made references to their previous employer where 'everyone was happy, had certain status and a social package'. Similarly, others recalled their personal experiences of other employers where, as one of the members observed:

> 'all members of the Board knew my name. Even somebody like [Chris] who came here [from the HQs] and was the Chairmen of the Board knew me. He knew who I was and what I do. (…) I notice that things are different here'.

Finally, nostalgia was starting to emerge in the accounting department which became part of Aporia after it had been moved from the other division of Aporia Global (see Chapter four). The accountants expressed concerns that their working conditions and position within the organisation might deteriorate with the official change of their employer.

It appeared, then, that in Aporia organisational nostalgia was much more fragmented than is typically presented in literature (e.g. Gabriel, 1993; 2000; McDonald *et al.*, 2006; Milligan, 2003; Ylijoki, 2005). Different objects of nostalgia were reinvented by different groups of organisational members in their attempts to cope with the changing organisational reality. In each case, the nostalgic reinterpretation of the past served the psychological needs of their authors (Tannock, 1995) and was largely related to the 'status drama' (Maynard-Moody *et al.*, 1986) triggered by the changes and/ or the change talk.

What is important to note at this point is that nostalgia in Aporia was not only limited to the discursive domain. As the 'car parking story' demonstrated, the longer serving staff were able to complain about what seemed to be an unfair treatment for them. As a result of the intervention, the car parking spaces were reallocated once again, this time round, however, based on more transparent criteria, one of which was seniority. Consequently, some of the organisation's veterans received the most prestigious spaces pushing some of the newcomers to less symbolically desirable locations. Similarly, the support departments' protest against not being included in the incentive trip to California is another example of how the staff who felt that they were treated as 'second class citizens' in the organisation mobilised efforts to challenge the newly established social order. Although their efforts did not produce the desired outcome, their dissent was voiced.

The findings of this study consequently resonate closely with the previous work on nostalgia (e.g. Gabriel, 1993; 2000 and Davis, 1979), or more generally, 'discourses of temporality' (Ybema, 2010), which has pointed to the fundamental role of nostalgia in people's 'identity work' (Watson, 2008). However, what the previous studies often emphasised was nostalgia's role in building collective identities (Brown and Humphreys, 2002, compare also Strangleman, 1999). Aporia's case illustrates that

organisational nostalgia can be more fragmented and dispersed in the organisation than is often assumed in Organisation Studies.

At the same time, while nostalgia and postalgia can be seen as 'two antagonistic discourses' (Ybema, 2010:496), both proposing competing interpretations of organisational reality, the boundaries between them are not always clear-cut. In Aporia, both the newcomers and the longer serving staff were yearning for a brighter future and their hopes for the years to come were intriguingly similar. What is more, the organisation's veterans also wanted to distance themselves from the turbulent past of the organisation, but their 'dismissive backward glances' (Ramsay, 1996:157) were not that far-reaching. Unlike many of the newcomers, they did not 'demonise the [whole] past' (Starkey and McKinley, 1994) of the organisation.

Finally, as Aporia's case has illustrated, nostalgia does not have to be perceived only as 'latent' resistance to change (e.g. Ylijoki, 2005). Instead, as a discursive resource (Davis, 1979), it can become integrated into wider domains of social action targeted at challenging the new social order. In the same vein, nostalgia does not automatically imply resistance to substantive changes. In Aporia, the participants engaging in nostalgic narratives welcomed many of the substantive changes, in particular the ones which were interpreted as aimed at improving the running of the organisation. Changes were contested when they were lined to the 'status drama' (Maynard-Moody *et al.*, 1986) – when they were perceived as affecting the symbolic position of the participants.

8.2.5 Stories of victimisation and the refashioning of the past

The nostalgic tales were not the only discursive means used by the longer serving staff to provide a competing meaning of the past to the one promoted by the newcomers. While nostalgia can be interpreted as resurrecting the past of the organisation, stories of victimisation can be seen as reinterpreting the role of the longer serving staff in relation to organisational decline. As already stated, the nostophobic discourses accompanying the change efforts promoted by the new management team devalued organisational past which in turn discredited the longer serving staff who were seen as partly responsible for the organisational downturn. The longer serving staff, however did not see

themselves as accountable for the past organisational troubles and instead they cast themselves as victims of the past expatriate leader who was to blame for the past misfortunes.

The tendency among organisational members to look for the causes of organisational failure in the leader's actions has already been widely discussed in the academic literature (e.g. Pfeffer, 1977; Meindl *et al.*, 1985). As Meindl and colleagues (1985) observed, the symbolic role of leaders does not only involve serving as a major social referent for organisation members (Pye, 2005) but it also implies performing the role of a scapegoat that is blamed for organisational misfortunes (Pfeffer, 1977). Similarly in Aporia, the last expatriate General Manager was narrated as a toxic leader whose actions 'took the organisation to pieces', which helped the organisation members separate themselves from the traumatic past and attribute the blame to the leader, thus preserving their sense of self-esteem (compare, Reissner, 2010 and Whittle *et al.*, 2009).

In stories told by the longer serving staff, the last expatriate General Manager was depicted as a villain, whose fatal influence could often not be off-set even by the heroic efforts of his staff. In Aporia, the narratives depicting the expatriate leader as a toxic stranger were principally tragic stories, or more precisely stories of victimisation (Gabriel, 2000; Robinson, 1981).

The victims were narrated as unable to act and deprived of agency. Harm was inflicted on them by the malignant leader and there was nothing that could be done about it. The staff could neither protect themselves nor rescue the organisation. The evoked imagery to illustrate the experiences of the victims pointed to some sort of confinement, be it a 'prison', 'court' or 'police state', similar to the imagery of a claustrophobic environment captured by Gabriel (2000) in the tragic stories of suicide he analysed. Gabriel's storytellers emphasised the feeling of entrapment and insecurity triggered by the whimsical management that was equated with the unpredictable and merciless forces of nature. Also in Aporia, the destructiveness of the leader had a similar quality; it was compared to a tornado or a wild cat that 'can kill you' when you are least expecting it.

It is suggested here that stories of victimisation, where the innocent victim (be it an individual, group or the whole organisation) is subject to unwarranted malevolence by a

venomous villain, are particularly suitable for a symbolic refashioning of the past. By highlighting the malevolence of the villain and the suffering of the innocent victim, the stories give the traumatised workers (Vickers, 2004) vent to emotions.

In Aporia, the stories of victimisation brought to the forefront the incapacitation of the victims. Such recasting of the past enabled the organisation members to distance themselves from the past misfortunes and thus avoid assuming responsibility for it. In fact, the stories of victimisation which highlighted the scale of the harm the victims suffered, can be interpreted as conveying also another meaning. The protagonists were cast as suffering victims, yet by enduring the pain, the victims gained also the attributes of war veterans, and therefore turned into heroes. The victimised heroes did not go for the exit option (Hirschman, 1970) and did not 'abort the sinking ship' as many others did, but decided to stay on board 'at the cost of their own health (compare literature on the physical and psychological consequences of toxic work environments, e.g. Colligan and Higgins, 2005). The stories of victimisation found in Aporia not only highlighted the trauma of the victims and the malice of the villain, as Gabriel (2000) and Robinson (1981) suggest, but also the heroic endurance of the survivors.

To sum up, the stories of victimisation performed a triple function in Aporia. First, they enabled the organisation members to release the negative feelings that they had accumulated in relation to the toxic leadership trauma, as earlier observed by Gabriel (2000). Secondly, by attributing the blame to the toxic leader and highlighting their own inability to act, the organisation members denied any responsibility for the organisational decline thus securing a feeling of self worth, as also found in Gabriel (2000) and Whittle *et al.* (2009). Lastly, by emphasising the trauma they had weathered while still staying loyal to the organisation, they cast themselves as war veterans who deserve respect for the incurred injuries. The toxic leadership episode might indeed be something they were happy to put behind, nonetheless not as co-accomplices in the crime, as the new arrivals in the organisation often depicted them, but rather as innocent victims if not heroic survivors. In this respect, the stories of victimisation do not challenge the nostophobic picture of Aporia's recent history as a time of decline, or 'depression'. However, they reconstruct the role of the longer serving staff in the decline. In the stories of victimisation, the ties to the past are something that embellishes rather than blemishes their owners.

8.3. Act II: Working with the change

Building on the existing body of work on organisational change and narrative, the culture change initiative in Aporia has so far been described in terms of the organisational context in which it was initiated and the subsequent discursive struggles accompanying the change efforts. It has been stated that the project was undertaken after a traumatic period in the organisation's history, here referred to as 'organisational depression', which became an important hallmark of the culture initiative in Aporia. In the remainder of the discussion I will focus on organisation members' attempts to do culture work in practice (compare Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). More specifically, I will look at the design of the project, its underlying assumptions and organisation members' approach to cultural work. To this end, I will draw on the existing, largely critically orientated, literature on cultural engineering.

8.3.1 The pursuit of excellence

The culture change initiative undertaken in Aporia consisted of a series of steps which were to mark the cultural transition. It was designed as a project with a pre-defined time-scale and a carefully planned set of steps that were to assure its success. The intervention was not to mark the beginning of a slow process of a cultural evolution through the 'reframing of everyday life' (Alvesson, 2002), rather it was a managerially driven initiative which was, with some involvement of different organisational actors, to produce concrete results within a concrete time-frame. In this respect, the initiative exemplifies what Alvesson (2002) and later Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) refer to as a 'grand technocratic project', as summarised in the table below:

Table 9: Comparison of Aporia's culture initiative with Alvesson and Sveningsson's (2008) scheme of 'grand technocratic project'

General scheme of a 'grand technocratic project'	Aporia's 'culture project'
• Step 1: evaluating the situation of the organisation and determining the goals and strategic direction;	• Step 1: evaluating the situation of the organisation (staff survey on operational performance) and drafting of an improvement plan, of which the 'culture project' was an important element. Invitation of consultants (and giving access to the researcher) to carry out the culture study.
• Step 2: analysing the existing culture and sketching a desired culture;	• Step 2: Translation of corporate into organisational values. Consultant's culture study (and the researcher's second wave of fieldwork).
• Step 3: analysing the gap between what exists and what is desired;	• Step 3: Feedback from the consultants (and the researcher)
• Step 4: developing a plan for developing the culture;	• Step 4: Design of the values and leadership promotion campaign (with the help of consultants').
• Step 5: implementing the plan;	• Step 5: Promotion campaign (education primarily through workshops and the Leadership Academy and formal reinforcement systems)
• Step 6: evaluating the changes and new efforts to go further and/or engaging in measures to sustain the cultural change. (ibid:44).	• Step 6: Consultant's study (and researcher's third wave of fieldwork) and subsequent recommendations

The design of Aporia's project of enhancing organisational culture was largely inspired by a methodology developed by the consultants and packaged as a highly professional and reliable product (compare, Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005). It focused primarily on the training in and promotion of organisational values. However, after the initial study carried out by the consultants, the promotion of organisational values was supplemented with a focus on raising leadership awareness.

The culture project in Aporia was planned as an educational cascade in which top managers were reserved the role of primary educators to the middle managers who were then to spread the educational mission across the organisation by 'showing', 'explaining' and 'working with people'. This educational view of culture change was largely in line with manager's understanding of their role which was to: 'explain to people why this [the culture project] was important and to show examples how [the values] worked.' It was expected that once the staff had gained the necessary

understanding of the promoted values and leadership, they would act, or at least be more likely to act, accordingly. The missing awareness was treated as a gap that was to be filled by a skilled diffusion of knowledge, as most planned and rational approaches to culture change typically envisage (see e.g. Kotter, 1996).

In terms of its assumptions, the 'culture project' was indicative of a variable approach to culture (Smircich, 1983) and corresponded with the views of culture optimists (Obgonna and Harris, 2002) who believe that culture can, and indeed should be managed (e.g. Geroge *et al.*, 1999). Furthermore, the premises on which the initiative was based bear a striking resemblance to views of what Willmott (1993) referred to as corporate culturism, as advocated for example in the work of Peters and Waterman (1982), Deal and Kennedy (1982), Kotter and Heskett (1992) or Ouchi, (1981). Although the fascination with corporate culturism and strong unified cultures had its peak in the eighties and early nineties and has since then received strong criticism (see e.g. Child, 1988; Parker, 2000), its allure has clearly not worn off. As Ogbonna and Harris (2002b:673-4) commented, 'the appetite of practitioners for culture management initiatives remains unsatiated'. In what follows, I will discuss in more detail, the attempts at 'doing culture work' in Aporia by looking at its two constitutive elements: the espoused values and leadership.

8.3.2 Working with organisational values[34]

Unlike some of the previously described culture engineering programmes (e.g. Kunda, 1992), in Aporia there was no mention of Peters, nor was there any talk of Waterman, Kotter, or any other author or publication. In fact, the scientific grounding of the project was never stated, nor were there any examples provided of organisations that had successfully embarked on a similar culture project and achieved the expected results, which could point to some sector macro learning, as reported by Ogbonna and Harris (2002b). In Aporia, the rationale for the project was presented as commonsensical and based on what was regarded as a generally accepted and universal truth that in order to be effective organisations had to build strong cultures. Arguments supporting the need for the project and building a strong culture were often conveyed by the top managers

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[34] Some of the here presented ideas were discussed in Ciuk (2011)

and consultants in the form of platitudes which were to convince other organisation members that 'consistency [was] power'[35] and that 'there [was] a need for uniformity.'

Interestingly, although the managers that were supposed to actively engage in the promotion of organisational values did not officially question the need for values, they were less clear as to how exactly strong values were to improve their efficiency. They therefore relied on the consultants to provide what they regarded as expert knowledge on the cultural issues.

By contrast, the consultants, acting as the 'merchants of meanings' (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1990a), talked about managing organisational culture with great ease and confidence, as is typical for the 'advise industry' (see e.g. Collins, 2006). When referring to culture, they would employ powerful metaphors. They talked about the systems of norms which are: 'the conscience which organisations want to shape'. In their words, organisational culture was: 'a matrix which is each time filled with what is important for an organisation', whereas values were labelled as an: 'internally injected code of conduct. (…) a chip' which 'build[s] the social capital of organisations'. Such metaphors are much more than an embellishment of speech (Morgan, 1983) as they 'structure action' (Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges, 1990:344). By referring to values as a 'chip' and an 'injected code of conduct', it is suggested that values can be designed as one pleases and then installed in other organisation members, who will thereafter behave as the injected guidelines stipulate. The agency of the individual is then replaced by a carefully designed corporate product, a 'matrix' that is filled with 'what is important for an organisation'. It is therefore vital to make sure that the 'chip' contains all the necessary information and that it is installed properly. Consequently, the translation of values, which imbues the corporate 'chip' with the appropriate set of guidelines, is of utmost significance. By the same token, the 'chip', understood as 'values [which] translate into clear and transparent behaviours' in the General Manager's words, must be skilfully installed in individuals through an intensified promotion inside the organisation. And indeed, the translation of corporate values (the 'corporate chip'), and their subsequent promotion and implementation ('installation') were regarded as pivotal to the culture project in Aporia. In particular, the process of

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[35] The phrase: 'Consistency is power' is a variation of an often used Polish saying: 'Unity is power' ('W jednosci jest sila').

translating corporate into organisational values received a lot of attention. As will be discussed later, it was a highly complex activity undertaken with multiple purposes in mind and marked by competing urges of identification with and dissociation from the corporation. After all, the expectations from the newly translated values were far from modest, as will be discussed in what follows.

8.3.3 The having mode of relating to values

The 'chip' metaphor put forward by the consultants was not fully adopted by the managers, its reincarnation in the form of 'values as a compass'[36] (also initially used by a consultant) was often referred to in official communication with other employees (e.g. during a National Sales Meeting when the values project was officially launched) or in interviews with the managers involved in the project, who often reiterated that it was crucial 'to have values in the organisation and to go in a given direction'.

The management's expectations of values did not, then, go as far as the consultants' envisioned. The 'culture project' was rather focused on an intensified promotion of values understood as an awareness campaign. It was expected that employees become familiar with the organisational values and develop a feeling as to how they were to implement them in their every-day activities. The values did not have to be internalised, 'inserted' or 'installed' in individuals, as the consultants 'chip' metaphor suggested. It was believed that the awareness and understanding of the values, together with a system of rewards and punishment (as e.g. through the GM's awards or the Appraisal System), would induce employees to abide by the values. The totality of the cultural indoctrination, as Fitzgerald (1988) and Willmott (1993) persuasively depicted corporate culturism, was in the case of Aporia, designed to be partial. Its outcomes, however, were not to be compromised.

Although values were juxtaposed with procedures and considered to be more effective than the latter, they were approached in a similar manner to procedures. Values, like procedures, had to be written down, communicated and explained to the staff, in order to produce behavioural changes. They were to guide everyday actions, not because the

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[36] The direct translation from Polish would be 'values as a sign-post' which refers to setting direction.

organisation members were expected to internalise the values, but because they were officially espoused and thus, like procedures, considered to be binding. Subsequently, behavioural compliance was assessed and exceptional achievements acknowledged (e.g. by the institution of the GM's 'value awards'). Values were said to be principally different from procedures and potentially able to replace them. However, the expectations of values were strikingly similar to the expectations of procedures.

It seemed that Aporia's translation of corporate culturism (Parker, 2000) was, in some respect, its softer incarnation. It did not have the aspiration to colonise organisation member's affective and normative domains, yet it assumed that by a formulation of corporate expectations in terms of value statements, appropriate education and execution, behavioural changes in form of the expected compliance would follow. The behavioural compliance, in turn, would lead to the improved effectiveness of the organisation – which was the overriding objective of the management. Therefore, it appeared that what Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1990) described as 'resigned behavioural compliance' would in fact be quite satisfactory for the management of Aporia.

The culture change initiative, inspired by the on-going allure of corporate culturism and the consultants' powerful imagery, was to bring the organisation closer to its ideal of excellence. The rhetoric that it used, as well as its careful design, evoked the values of effectiveness, efficiency and rationality, typically espoused in the managerial discourse (Knights and Willmott, 2007). Corporate values were treated as a vehicle that could bring the organisation closer to the somewhat mythical ideal of corporate excellence. In this sense, the approach to organisational values in Aporia was very instrumental and resembled what Fromm (1976) referred to as a having, as opposed to being, orientation towards the world. The German philosopher defined having and being as:

> two fundamental modes of existence, (…) two different kinds of orientation towards self and the world, (…) two different kinds of character structure the respective predominance of which determines the totality of a person's thinking, feeling, and acting. (Fromm, 1976:33).

The having mode of existence is based on the drive to possessing and turning everything into one's property. On the other hand, the being relatedness to the world is, according to Fromm, authentic and can be regarded as an antithesis to having. The having orientation is manifested by a strive for incorporation, in which one attempts to turn things into one's position, be it in a literary or symbolic manner.

In Aporia, values were approached predominantly from a having orientation. Their presence in the official discourse was conditional upon their perceived effectiveness. The being mode of relating to values, on the contrary, featured predominantly in fantasies of a few organisation members who expressed a hope that 'values [would] be working in real life.' Somehow, ironically, the common belief was that it was necessary to first 'work on the values' so that the values would work themselves.

The having mode of relating to values manifested itself in Aporia primarily in the management's approach to values as a business problem. This was reflected in the language used to refer to values. Values had to 'be worked on', as if they presented a task to accomplish or a shortcoming that was to be made up for. Consultants were invited to assure a professional perspective on the problem. Subsequently, a set of steps was planned so as to assure the efficiency of the undertaking. Values turned into a project, they had to be swiftly operationalised, effectively implemented, and subsequently incorporated into the organisational reality. Organisational values, like any organisational product, had its managers.

Value champions, together with a project leader, were appointed as responsible for the promotion of values. Presentations, accompanied by visual imagery were prepared and delivered as part of the promotional campaign. A scale was devised which would enable the managers and consultants to measure the effectiveness of their efforts, as progress (defined as an increased awareness) was an expected outcome of the initiative. In fact, tangibility of values was an important issue and much effort was undertaken so as to impose some kind of definite form on the otherwise elusive values. The already mentioned visual imagery and a scale to measure value awareness in the organisation was one of the attempts at taming values. Further, values were turned into a competence that was expected from the staff. In the staff appraisal form, the four promoted values were allocated a place alongside the technical and functional competences and in some cases, were also referred to as individual goals whose attainment (e.g. realisation of value presentations) was rewarded in form of an annual bonus. Values approached as skills or competences, similarly to selling skills or assertiveness, were to be mastered. Consequently, training sessions were prepared which were designed to enable organisation members to master the newly required skills/competences. Awards were

established for those who were able to manifest their aptitude in exhibiting one of the four values, in this case referred to as 'categories', and 'four winners [would be] appointed'.

Importantly, the having relatedness to values was also clearly visible in the expectations of values. Values were an investment, an organisational project that, as some respondents observed, 'consumed a big part of the training budget'. Therefore, it was hoped that it would bring a certain return, as any good investment does. Although this type of attitude was widely shared across the organisation, mainly among the management but also many other staff, the expectations as to what the values would achieve were very different and depended on individual preferences. Some were hoping that having values and making them known publically, would affect the image of the organisation. Others highlighted the expected changes in staff behaviour, such as increased co-operation between people, or improved 'internal customer service', as this was described. Some, were referring to their hope that in the future the organisation would be singled out in a country-wide survey as one of the favoured employers. A few participants, made some general observation suggesting having values was important so as to know that the organisation was heading in a good direction, although they did not specify how one was linked to the other. While others, were more upfront about their individual gains. One top manager declared to be a big supporter of working through values so as to promote leadership. In his words: 'If the values project is to change the reality, let's do it, if not, then don't do it.' The having orientation to organisation values was also present in voices highly sceptical of them. Their scepticism was often phrased in utilitarian terms, as one of the assistants vividly put it: 'What will I get from all this?'. Others reiterated this view, suggesting that 'this has to pay off' and that they would rather the organisation 'talked to their pockets'.

Finally, the having orientation to values was also adopted by staff who had no specific expectations of them, yet quite liked the idea of simply having values. Values might not benefit the organisation, but they also 'won't do any harm'. In other words, it is better to have (something) than not to have (anything).

Interestingly, the concept of the having relatedness to values can also shed some light on the organisation members' attitudes to the promotion of values. As Fromm (1976:38)

remarked: 'Empty talk cannot be responded to in the being mode'. In the having mode, the learning process comes down to acquiring more knowledge, as a consequence:

> The students and the content of the lectures remain strangers to each other, except that each student has become the owner of a collection of statements made by somebody else (…). (Fromm, 1976:37)

In Aporia, where the instrumentally motivated 'culture project' was designed as an 'educational and awareness campaign', Fromm's observation seems particularly relevant. What exactly this argument suggests and what the implications of the 'culture projects' were in Aporia will be discussed in more detail as a separate act in Aporia's tale which looks participant's experiences and responses to the project. In the meantime, however, the second theme of Aporia's culture project, namely the promotion of leadership, which was elevated into the status of an organisational value and approached with unquestioning faith and admiration, needs to be investigated.

8.3.4 The deity of leadership[37]

Aporia's 'culture project' was based on two cornerstones: the promotion of organisational values (a common theme in culture change initiatives, see e.g. Höpfl *et al.*,1992; Murphy and Mackenzie Davey, 2002) and leadership (as also found e.g. by Driscoll and Morris, 2001). The promotion of organisational values was the initial focus of attention, however with time, leadership gained in importance in the official discourse. In fact, it seemed that in Aporia managers regarded leadership as intrinsically valuable. Organisational values, by contrast, were seen and approached as tools which were valuable as long as they could contribute to the cultivation of the desired leadership behaviours.

Top managers, before and after the consultants' intervention, appeared to share the view that leadership was an important feature of any organisation and was underdeveloped in Aporia. This view was surprisingly close to the consultant's diagnosis expressed in one of their articles published in Polish specialist press which declared that in Polish organisations effective leadership was largely missing. It appears quite plausible to suggest that the consultants invited to facilitate the 'culture project' in Aporia might in

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[37] Some of the here presented ideas were discussed in Ciuk and Jepson (2008)

fact have been looking for (allegedly) poor leadership in the organisation after they had established that these were the 'insipient preferences' (Abrahamson, 1996) of the executives issuing the study. However, it seems equally reasonable to suggest that the consulting company had been selected due to its declared interest in the promotion of leadership. Both of these interpretations hold some credibility, yet they will have to remain in the sphere of speculations, as I was unfortunately not invited to participate in the undoubtedly insightful backstage discussions between the management and the consultants (see Clark and Greatbatch, 2004).

As already indicated, in Aporia, leadership was largely perceived as desirable and inherently good, in particular for the top managers. In fact this group of participants often suggested that middle managers needed to have leadership abilities to be 'truly good managers', which largely corresponds to the academic arguments of Hickman (1990), Kotter (1990), Mintzberg (1973/1980) and Rost (1991), who have viewed managing and leading as two distinct processes that can be exercised by the same person at different points in time. The executives in Aporia spoke of leadership with salience and trust as if it was an indispensable cure that the organisation needed. The only difficulty was to convince the middle managers, as they were primarily expected to embrace the leadership role, to start acting as leaders.

What exactly was meant when there was talk of leadership, was, however, differently understood by different organisation members, thus mirroring the ambiguity of the leadership concept (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003; Grint, 2005; Pfeffer, 1977) in academic discourse. Some spoke of leadership as associated with change, reminding of Kotter (1995) or House (1995), and others referred to leadership as assuming responsibility for a team (resonating with Adair, 2007). In other instances, the definitions of leadership focused on effectiveness (Golemen, 2000) and charisma (Conger, 1999). In fact it seemed that the only agreement around the concept of leadership was the view put forward by the top managers that leadership was an 'issue' for the organisation. In their eyes, leadership was a valuable asset that was missing in the organisation. Other employees, by contrast, referred to leadership only in relation to a missing vision and a clear direction for the organisation (reminding of Bryman, 1992 and again Kotter 1990). The wish for leadership, typically equated with the person of a leader (compare Grint, 2005) was particularly visible in the second wave of research

shortly after the toxic leadership episode. This finding is hardly surprising in light of the leadership literature which points to the increasing reported need for (strong) leadership in times of crisis (see e.g. Shamir and Howell, 1999).

With the help of the consultants a new definition of leadership was created and promoted within the organisation. The leadership concept was then tailored to the specific needs of the organisation (Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005), or more precisely, to the way the management defined these needs. The new, and officially endorsed description of leadership, embodied a mix of ideas from dispersed leadership (*i.e. everybody can and should be a leader,* e.g. Pearce, 2004), authentic leadership (*leadership is inherently good, leaders need to have strong moral values*, Avolio and Gardner, 2005), McClelland's (1987) motivation theory, transformational leadership (*vision, change, inspiration, integrity,* Bass, 1990) and finally charismatic leadership (e.g. Conger,1999).

Interestingly, organisational values were also included in the official organisational definition of leadership as one of its components. Values were yet another element needed for effective leadership; they found their place in the organisation next to leadership competences, energy, self-motivation and ambition (as defined in the organisation's leadership model, discussed earlier in the thesis). In fact it seemed that in Aporia the belief was that organisational values could not pass the test of time on their own. As the General Manager observed: 'organisational values became part of the organisation for good, because this is how leadership is defined.'

Official organisational values could exist as an element of leadership, leader's tools, or vehicles to promote leadership; on their own values were of little value. Leadership, on the other hand, was seen as inherently good (just as Burns, 2003, suggested) and desirable. Its importance was unchallenged and it had its devout believers who insisted on converting others to their cult. It required adequate attention and sacrifice, if lean years were to be avoided. In this respect, in Aporia leadership enjoyed the status of an organisational (or at least managerial) deity.

8.4 Act III: Making sense of the change[38]

So far, the analysis of the 'culture change initiative' has focused predominantly on the formal side of the project, namely its design, underpinning assumptions and implementation. However, as Balogun (2006) observed, change initiatives are not only about sensegiving (Dunford and Jones, 2000; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), but primarily about sensemaking, a view later reiterated by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008). It is therefore crucial to investigate the 'culture project' with regard to how organisation members, both directly involved in the project as well as those staying on its margins, made sense of the initiative and how they experienced the evolving project (Cairns and Beech, 2003).

As described in the findings section, the initial attitudes to the project were generally quite sceptical across the organisation, in line with some of the earlier work on cultural interventions (see e.g. Harris and Ogbonna, 2000; 2002; Kunda, 1992; Scheers and Rhodes, 2006). Indifference, lack of understanding and doubts about its purpose and applicability were typically expressed in interviews and informal conversations. What is interesting is that reservations about the project were voiced not only by the staff who were on the 'receiving end' of the initiative (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006), but also by middle and top managers directly involved in the project. Even employees appointed to perform the functions of 'value leaders', as well as the executive in charge of the whole initiative, expressed concerns about the project, which was described as, 'not a dream task within [their] scope of duties'. These findings are in line with observations of Tornbull (2001) and Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003) who discovered that embracing organisational values was considered to be problematic not only for the shop-floor workers but also for the middle managers who were expected to promote them among their staff. The current study further adds to Ogbonna and Wilkinson (2003) and Tornbull (2001) another interesting insight by demonstrating that even top managers who are in charge of promoting organisational values can have reservations towards this undertaking and might treat it as yet another task 'within their scope of duties'.

The discovered prevailing feelings of indifference towards the project of promoting corporate values across the organisation, in particular at its launch, are in line with the

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[38] Some of the here presented ideas were discussed in Ciuk (2008a; 2009b)

findings of Murphy and MacKenzie Davey (2002). Similarly to the quoted study, in Aporia the officially espoused organisational values were generally perceived as commonsensical and thus their promotion was at times regarded as verging on offensive and out of place. However, unlike the study of Murphy and MacKenzie Davey (2002), some members of the Polish subsidiary did perceive the project as an attempt to manipulate staff and as part of corporate indoctrination and propaganda. When analysed more carefully, following Martin's (2002) postulate to look not only for similarities, but also to investigate discrepancies and ambiguities in organisations, more subtle differences in the approaches to the change initiative become visible.

First of all, the group which seemed most concerned about the promotion of values as a form of manipulation consisted primarily of more mature organisation members, usually working in the medical department. These were often former academics holding a PhD degree who were confident in their expert knowledge and who highly valued professionalism. Their work required meticulousness and expertise which they had been using for years working in the organisation. As they emphasised, they did not need anyone to remind them or define for them what corporate (or organisational) values were so as to perform their tasks. This knowledge, as they said, came to them naturally 'with their mothers' milk'. The official promotion of values was hence regarded by them as disparaging. Furthermore, they, together with other more mature employees, revealed that the organisational values and, in particular their promotion, reminded them of communist times and their propaganda. They talked about the promotion of values as 'flocking people under one banner', which has proven to be ineffective in Poland during the communist era. It seemed that their personal experiences of the communist marches during which people were expected to chant the officially espoused verses of the regime inoculated them against similar attempts in the future (which is in line with the findings on resistance to persuasion and its relation to attitude certainty by Tormala and Petty, 2002). The distrust and resentment towards the old regime seemed to have turned into distrust and resentment towards any attempts at indoctrination, be it of a political or corporate nature.

Numerous younger employees shared some of this dissatisfaction, yet for different reasons. For them, the talk of organisational values seemed to be a corporate and largely American initiative. Some participants admitted that the initiative reminded them of

Amway, which in Poland is an often quoted example of corporate cult-like brainwashing, and corporate indoctrination (for examples of ethnographic studies on Amway see Krzyworzeka, 2010; Pratt and Barnett, 1997; Pratt, 2000).

Reservations towards the project were also voiced by a group of employees with long tenure in the organisation. Their experiences with changing expatriate leaders and the resulting permanent state of 'change overload' (Corley and Gioia, 2004) taught them to approach any changes with what can be referred as 'learnt forbearing indifference'. As the name indicates, learnt forbearing indifference comes with time and experience; it seems to be an outcome of socialisation which has taught the participants that change initiatives are frequent, yet infrequently last long. They are a necessary hallmark of corporate life which needs to be accepted. Nonetheless, involvement in such change initiatives is unwise, as they involve a lot of work but bring no lasting results. Learnt forbearing indifference thus seems to offer some psychological safety through a conscious detachment from new initiatives, so as to avoid unnecessary commitment and possible disappointment. It appears that with learnt forbearing indifference one gradually learns to observe the organisational reality with its crave for novelty and the (non)sense of change (Sorge and Witteloostuijn, 2004) without letting oneself be lured by the tempting new language of yet another project which will quickly be forgotten. In Aporia, the bulk of employees approached the culture project with learnt forbearing indifference, often because it seemed to be another version of a management initiative, detached from the every-day activities of the organisation and its members' priorities. In particular sales staff highlighted the unrelatedness of the promoted values to their tasks and objectives, which were clearly defined and subsequently evaluated in terms of profit generation.

There were some scarce dissonant voices which expressed some, generally moderate, enthusiasm towards the promotion organisational values. These positive views were generally expressed by top managers involved in the project, in particular the General Manager but also by some other employees who hoped that they would be able to accomplish some important things 'under the banner of the 'values project', as one of the middle managers bluntly put it. However, organisational values were regarded as an important means of achieving other organisational goals, especially in the top management group, thus pointing to what has been referred to using Fromm's

terminology (Fromm, 1976), as a having orientation to values. Values were expected to 'change the reality' and as long as they could perform this function, they were worthwhile.

Finally, some voices across the organisation, regardless of affiliation or seniority, expressed the view that it was good to have values 'as an indicator of some standards', something that could differentiate the organisation from other players on the market. As was described in the background chapter, the periods during which the second and third waves of the study were carried out, were marked heavily by increased public and media interest in detecting corruption, fuelled by the political discourse of the ruling party at that time. Numerous corruption scandals were revealed and hit the headlines, both in the pharmaceutical industry and more generally in the Polish health care sector. The awareness that one was working for an organisation with values, performed a calming function for some employees in Aporia. It was easier for them to identify with what seemed to be a respectable organisation that had an honourable mission and a set of values that were declared to be abided by than with a pharmaceutical company without such values (often associated with generic companies). In other words, the promotion of organisational values was perceived as potentially improving the public image of the organisation and thus facilitating identification with the organisation, which resonates with the observations of Dutton *et al*. (1994), later reiterated in Kärreman and Rylander (2008).

The initial attitudes towards the promotion of values, however, changed over time. The intensified focus on organisational values in the form of presentations by top and some middle managers, training sessions, GM's awards, articles in the company magazine and finally the incorporation of values into some substantial changes, such as the staff development review, stimulated the employees' sensemaking around the previously ignored values. Höpfl *et al*. (1992), based on the findings from British Airways and BT, suggested that this increased reflexivity helps organisation members to identify breaches in the officially espoused 'text of values' (Scheers and Rhodes, 2006:233) and their implementation. Consequently, the observed breaches fuel scepticism, which was also found to be the case in the here presented findings.

Using Weick's (1995) terminology, the increased focus on the officially espoused values helps to 'extract cues' which initiates the process of sensemaking. According to Weick (1995), sensemaking starts with noticing. An event is bracketed out of a "flux of raw experience and conceptually fixed" (Chia, 2000:517). The bracketing, which marks the beginning of sensemaking is, as Weick states, typically a result of a surprise, a perception of inconsistency or equivocality. An event becomes noticed and captures our attention. The process of noticing is guided by our mental models that were acquired during socialisation and the course of our lives. Therefore an understanding of past organisational experiences is so crucial in making sense of organisation members' responses to change. In Aporia, for many years run by changing expatriate leaders who had typically introduced a series of corrective changes without actually being able to refine them all before the end of their tenure (see Gabarro, 1987 for a discussion of the dynamics of taking charge), organisation members were sceptical of new managerial initiatives resembling some of the old and largely forgotten initiatives.

The project of promoting organisational values focused organisational members' attention on the inconsistencies between what was officially declared and what was observed in every-day interactions. Argyris and Schön (1978) writing about similar inconsistencies, referred to the officially endorsed declarations as the espoused theories, which they confronted with the real and often subconscious motives that guide peoples' behaviour (the theories-in-use). Paraphrasing the above quoted authors, in Aporia one can talk about the espoused values, the officially promoted organisational values, and the values-in-use – which guide organisational members' behaviours. In interviews and informal conversations with organisational members, as described in the findings section, some emotionally charged stories were told to illustrate these inconsistencies as organisation members in Aporia actively engaged in acts of imposing order on their complex experiences of change. They told and retold stories as a 'medium of interpretative exchanges' (Boje, 2001:4).

Stories were told in which the evolving interpretation of the changes which Aporia was undergoing emerged. The narratives referred to the undertaken promotion of organisational values, and more generally to the process of organising and leading shortly after the toxic leadership episode, when the bulk of the organisation members, together with the management team and the organisation's leader, were relatively new

to the organisation. The culture change initiative did not encompass all the changes undergoing in Aporia. Many substantive changes, such as the new motivation system, career paths or the new sales strategies, were introduced simultaneously to the promotion of values and leadership. Subsequently, the interpretation of the culture project was often inextricably linked to the perceptions of the substantive changes undertaken in Aporia, which resonates with the observations made by Anthony (1994) and Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008).

Many of the narratives elicited at the beginning of the 'culture project', both from the sales force as well as the support staff, in particular the ones with longer service in the organisation, indicated the 'awaiting position'. This, however, did not apply to the top managers who were expecting action from the staff and showed signs of impatience towards those who did not exhibit 'the new spirit', as the HR manager referred to the newly encouraged attitude of initiative-taking and goal-orientation. Participants often initially withheld their judgement about the new management team and the changes it initiated, which can be interpreted as intensified efforts at making sense of the new situation. The process of imbuing the unfolding events with meaning required more time and 'raw material'. The initial narratives were hence more fragmented and messy resembling what Boje (2001:3) referred to as antenarratives which convey temporary understandings of the 'flow of livid experience' before the more retrospective narrative starts to form. However, later in the research project the organisation members tended to integrate different tales encapsulating their and other members' experiences into more formed and symbolically charged stories (Gabriel, 2000).

One of the most emotionally and symbolically charged narratives did not refer directly to the content of the 'culture project', but to the rhetoric used by the leader of the organisation which accompanied the changes in the organisation, as well as his and more generally the executive team's, actions. The new leader was reported to employ the metaphor of a car (according to some reports, a racing car) to talk of the organisation. This powerful rhetorical trope was used by the new General Manager as part of his 'worldmaking' (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1990b) in which he promoted a view that every single member of the organisation, and analogically every department, was seen as necessary for the organisation to achieve success, which is according to Barry and Elmes (1997) a common theme in official strategic discourse. This rhetoric can be

interpreted as promoting an integration view of organisational reality (Martin, 2002) which furthers the manager's interests (Cornelissen, *et al*. 2008) by promoting increased commitment in pursuit of the common organisational objective. Yet, with time the car metaphor employed by the general Manager proved to be counter-effective, ironically because it initially stimulated the members' imagination. Many of the interviewed support staff recalled unprompted the metaphor and referred to it with disappointment. According to the group of employees classified as support staff, the vision of the organisation promoted by the metaphor was detached from reality. In the eyes of the support staff, the classification of organisation members into different groups depending on their allegedly different impact on business was perceived as inconsistent with the official rhetoric and the imagery triggered by the car metaphor.

The General Manager, and the management team, were often perceived as disengaged with the activities of the support staff, for example by not allocating enough time to engage with them, avoiding physical proximity, organising a couple of day long meetings with training sessions for the commercial group and inviting the support staff only for one day (without offering them any training opportunities) or organising what was (initially) believed to be an incentive meeting in an exotic location (California) and leaving the support staff uninvited, despite their bitter protest. These quoted examples generally fall into the category of Schein's (1985) primary culture embedding mechanisms that are at the leader's disposal when managing the meanings of the followers. Here, they were, however, not used consciously by the leader to manage the meaning of his staff but actively interpreted by his followers in the process of sensemaking independent from his intentions, which, according to Smircich and Morgan (1982), is still a case illustrating leadership as the management of meaning.

The above inconsistencies served as cues or, to use Czarniawska's (2006), terminology, meaningful actions, which helped the staff to imbue events with meaning. They were used to conjecture about what the staff perceived to be the real motives of the leader (and the management, due to attribution of unity, Gabriel, 2000). The inferences about the leader's and other executives' motives were in turn, incorporated into the participants' beliefs and narratives about how things really are in the organisation (their theories-in-use), where the support staff were 'not appreciated', 'indoctrinated with slogans', and 'divided into better and worse groups'. Finally, the followers' theories-in-

use were reflected in their attitudinal statements which pointed to the feelings of bitterness, frustration and disappointments. As Weick (1995) observes, sensemaking is embedded in past experiences and the beliefs people have about the reality. Consequently, it might be suggested that the powerful narratives of exclusion developed in Aporia will further direct the organisation members' attention to events which could be interpreted as reaffirming the views shared by the group. Thus, the process of narrating organisational exclusion is likely to act as a self-reinforcing mechanism, embedding further stories of injustice and disappointment into the wider unofficial discourse of living 'on the side track', 'next to [the] company', banished to dwell on a small isolated 'island'.

The narrative of exclusion was often interwoven with other symbolically charged narratives, namely the narratives of the 'old guard'. A large part of the narratives of the 'old guard', namely the nostalgic tales (Gabriel, 1993; 2000), have already been described at the beginning of this chapter and theorised as a counter-narrative to the nostophobic approach to the past (Davis, 1979). The 'old guard', however, did not only engage in nostalgic refashioning of the past, but also authored stories of the present which highlighted breaches of the officially espoused values.

As was described in the findings section, one of the newly promoted values was 'endurance' which was defined, among others, as 'pride in the tradition of the company'. Yet, the employees with the longest service with the company believed that the opposite was true. Their narratives conveyed feelings of bitterness over being looked down on by the newcomers and included stories that showed inconsistencies in the official discourse (and the espoused value) and the organisational reality. Small incidents, like the parking spaces allocation, were turned into powerful stories that encapsulated the perceived disrespect for the past and were used as a basis for generalisations about the 'real' worldviews predominant in the organisation.

Interestingly, even top managers who were involved in the 'culture project' were able to identify some inconsistencies between the espoused values and organisational reality. To quote an example, Ann, a top manager, told a story about another top executive, and the champion of the 'care' value. In the story, the 'care' value champion was depicted as being insensitive to a colleague's personal tragedy and unable to rise above

bureaucracy. Nonetheless, this story of a breach of the espoused values was not interpreted by the top manager as indicative of some underpinning values that were at odds with the espoused philosophy. Rather, the breaches were narrated as individual failures of the breaching person, here the HR manager, and something that could be worked on. Inconsistencies indicated here developmental opportunities, and were not turned into symbolic repositories of meaning. These differences in approaches to values' breaches could be interpreted using one of the Weick's (1995) properties of sensemaking which grounds it in identity construction. While the employees who were targets of the change initiative were more prone to generalise individual breaches which confirmed their initial indifference and scepticism to the project, the managers directly involved in the initiative tended to identify more with it. They invested more time and effort to make the project a success (e.g. by translating the corporate values into the local context) and consequently became more susceptible to its appealing rhetoric, which Anthony (1990) saw as 'cocooning' the managers in a world of their own. Similarly in Aporia, it seemed that it was the managers involved in the promotion of values who were more seduced by their appeal than the ones who were designed to be seduced.

8.5 Prologue: Interpreting the change

To this point, the tale of Aporia's culture change project has been discussed in terms of the context in which it was undertaken, the discursive struggles that accompanied the change initiative, its design and implementation and finally the perceptions and experiences of the project. What has not been explicitly discussed yet are the outcomes of the project. Although the issues of causality in research and, in qualitative projects in particular, are not without problems of their own (see e.g. Maxwell, 2004), some consideration of the impact of change initiatives is called for (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Anthony, 1994; Harris and Ogbonna, 2000). I would therefore like to suggest two complimentary interpretations of the here explored 'culture project' which focus on different aspects of the initiative, thus highlighting what can be perceived as its different consequences. At this point, however, I would like to reiterate three observations which I made in the methodology chapter.

My reading, or 'translation' (Stanley and Temple, 2008), of the events in Aporia is 'one [or to be precise, two] of many possible interpretations, one fashioned not as testable truth but rather (…) a view that opens up new terrains of thought' (Barry and Elmes, 1997:432). Similarly, when I am referring to the consequences, effects or implications of the 'culture project', I am writing about the consequences, effects or implications of the project as reported by the organisation members on which I base my argument. Finally, since 'culture projects' are often intertwined with substantial changes (Anthony, 1994) which are, however, carried out and conceptualised as separate from them, it is often extremely difficult, if not impossible, to attribute some consequences purely to the culture initiative. Therefore, I would like to caution the reader that the implications of the culture project that will be discussed in what follows might be partly attributable to substantive changes undertaken in the researched organisation which, however, were not necessarily carried out under the 'culture' banner. Whenever the organisational actors referred directly to the substantive changes or when such a link is apparent, it will be highlighted in the subsequent analysis.

The first interpretation offered looks at the culture change project as a spectacle for multiple audiences and draws in particular on the work of Mangham and Overington (1987) and Goffman (1959). The dramaturgical reading of the events is here undertaken to highlight the performative aspects of the 'culture project', wherein performance is linked to purposefulness and intention thus 'ceases[ing] to be mere behaviour' (Mangham and Overington, 1987:103). In this respect, the dramaturgical metaphor is particularly useful to analyse the formal aspects of the project, namely the intentionality of its design and implementation. Furthermore, the drama metaphor directs attention to the audience of the spectacle, in this case the organisational actors at whom the culture spectacle is directed and their experiences and reactions to the show.

The second interpretation of the 'culture project', on the other hand, takes a wider cultural perspective. The context in which the culture project was undertaken, namely organisational depression, is brought to the foreground. The doing of cultural work (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008) is then interpreted as an attempt to climb out of organisational depression and theorised as a quest to define organisational identity (see e.g. Albert and Whetten, 1985; Hatch and Schultz, 2002). This reading of the 'culture project' focuses not only on the doing of culture work underpinned by the nostophobic

approach to the past (Davis, 1979), but also attempts to point to the possible cultural implications of attempts at culture management of a traumatised organisation.

The two interpretations of the 'culture project' at Aporia will be discussed separately in the remainder of this chapter.

8.5.1 Culture change project as a spectacle for multiple audiences[39]

The culture project in Aporia, which was largely based on the process of translation and subsequent promotion of organisational values, took place on the local Polish scene. However, it was also marked by the corporate actors and the corporate scene on which these actors operated. The Headquarters provided the first stimulus to the Polish 'culture project' as it was 'part of a larger corporate initiative of building the corporate image' (similarly to other projects reported in the literature, see e.g. Harris and Ogbonna, 2002 and Ogbonna and Harris, 2002b). However, the Polish actors had some freedom as to the way they wanted to work with the corporate values. Furthermore, the Polish culture project was based on values which were originally formulated at the corporate level and subsequently adopted without any adjustments by the Polish subsidiary.

Initially, the managers involved in the culture project in Aporia attempted to make sense of the corporate value labels and meanings, as defined in the official corporate document, so as to agree on one interpretation upon which they could build the Polish version of the espoused values. It was the HQ, however, which initially defined what the corporate values were and how they should be interpreted, which resembles a process that in the literature is typically referred to as *sensegiving*. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) defined sensegiving as a process in which a leader endeavours to 'influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality' (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991:442). In the present context, however, not only the HQ engaged in sensegiving, but also the local actors, and more precisely the managers involved in the 'culture project'. Therefore a differentiation between *the first* and *second order sensegiving* seems particularly useful to highlight the two loops of sensegiving in the 'culture project' undertaken in Aporia. The first loop of

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[39] Some of the here presented ideas were discussed in Ciuk (2009a; 2010a)

sensegiving can be regarded as *first order sensegiving* and defined, along similar lines to Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), as the corporate actors' attempts to influence the sensemaking of the local organisational members. Analogically, the second loop of sensegiving, which takes place on the local scene, can be referred to as the *second order sensegiving,* and defined as the efforts of the local actors (managers) to give meaning to the other organisation members.

A lot of effort in the culture project in Aporia was spent backstage (Goffman, 1959) where the actors rehearsed their performance before the public appearance in front of the wider audience. In particular, I am referring here to the first informal launch of the 'culture project' where the local actors worked on the translation of the corporate values during which they imbued them with the meanings they wanted to promote. A rehearsal is understood here as a 'less routine, more creative elaboration of ideas and feelings' than a performance (Mangham and Overington, 1987:108). It is fundamental for the performance since '[p]racticing provides us with a meaning for 'real thing'' (Goffman, 1974:62). By labelling the translation meeting as a rehearsal, I do not suggest that is did not possess any qualities of a routine performance. Rather, my intention is to highlight the preparatory nature of the translation process which invited the testing of various interpretations of the script – the text of corporate values as imposed by the Headquarters – and involved the negotiating of its meaning. In this interpretation, a rehearsal is a special kind of performance during which the acting out of a script is constantly interrupted by the negotiation of its meaning. The rehearsal is about trying out different possible scenarios before agreeing on the script of the final performance that is to be delivered in front of a live audience.

The rehearsal was seen as pivotal for the culture project in Aporia as local actors were convinced that in order for them to successfully promote the values, or to use the here adopted terminology, for the second order sensegiving to be effective, the values had to be suitable for the local context. In other words, the 'preferred redefinition of organisational reality' had to fit the local context which it was designed to define, a challenge resonating with the discussions in the international management literature (see e.g. Meyer *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, the translation of corporate values became a complex and highly political process. First of all, it was a linguistic task of transferring the content expressed in a foreign language into the mother tongue of the organisation

members. Most importantly, though, it entailed cultural and political editing of the corporate script (for more on the original usage of the 'editing' concept see, Sahlin-Andersson, 1996).

During the cultural editing process, elements of the corporate definition that were perceived as unsuitable for the local scene (e.g. 'care for the shareholders', possible to declare in the US but perceived as 'not gripping at all' in the Polish context) were disposed of or altered, and local meanings added (e.g. 'pioneering' defined as 'being open to new ideas and their implementation in the working place'). However, not all elements of the corporate definition that were perceived as not applicable for the local context were removed from the value statements. At times, the unfitting corporate claims were seen as desirable by the local actors and were subsequently included in the Polish translation practically in an unchanged form. Such selective cultural editing was visible particularly when discussing the corporation's leading position on the market, something that the local subsidiary could only aspire to. In this case, identification with the corporation was perceived as highly desirable and thus particularly suitable for the local value declaration.

The political editing, in turn, involved imbuing organisational values with meanings that were congruent with the goals and interests of the local actors (e.g. endorsement of 'balanced risk', as supported by the General Manager, or reference to 'customer-focus'). The cultural and political editing of values can then be perceived as attempts at reconciling the corporate belonging and the social, cultural and political embeddedness resulting from the local functioning of the subsidiary.

Once the values were translated, they were expected to perform important functions allocated to them by the local actors. The promotion of organisational values were seen as an important element of communicating a carefully designed message to a wider external audience (e.g. the organisation's clients, patients, as well as its business partners and the general public). In this sense, the declaration of organisational values was linked to building a desirable image of the organisation (compare e.g. Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Gioia *et al.*, 2000; Ravasi and Schultz, 2006), which resembles the process of *impressing* as conceptualised by Hatch and Schultz (2002). However, it is worth noting that Hatch and Schultz (2002) theorised *impressing* not only as conscious

efforts to impress others, but also as the unmanaged expressions of identity that leave impressions on others, or in Goffman's (1959) terms, the impressions we give off in the presentation of self. For reasons of clarity, the attempts at *impressing* in Aporia will be subdivided into two processes. *The first order impressing* will be used to refer to the conscious efforts of the local actors to leave impressions on the audience through a statement of values. *Second order impressing,* on the other hand, will be restricted to the unconscious process of giving off impressions, as described by Goffman (1959). It pertains to leaving impressions on the wider audience through the way the organisation operates. This is attempted by directing the sensegiving efforts at the internal audience in the hope to achieve a desirable change in behaviour, which in turn could impress the wider audience and thus affect the image of the organisation.

Aporia's cultural spectacle was aimed at both *first and second order impressing.* As summarised by the General Manager: 'The tips for the employees are clear: they are to come up with numerous ideas, and then implement them, be effective, so achieve the set targets, show care for the client and patient and [finally] be persistent in doing this.'

So far the audience of the culture spectacle has received little attention in the analysis. However, as Kostera (2007) observes, the social theatre is an interactive theatre, where not only the actors, but also the audience author the show (compare Bennett, 1997, on the active role of audience in theatre). The success of a performance depends on its perception by the audience and its ability to cause the audience to be engaged and to 'apprehend relationships and emotion' (Mangham and Overington, 1987:90). In theatre, this is not possible without the audience taking on a 'theatrical consciousness' and agreeing to suspend their disbelief (ibid.). In the organisational theatre, however, the suspense of disbelief is much harder to accomplish (as discussed e.g. by Willmott, 1993), in particular when the performance sets out not only to enact images of reality but to change the reality it is enacting. For this reason, the sensemaking of the audience, which is about 'authoring as well as reading' (Weick, 1995:7) of the official script, is a crucial part of the culture work undertaken by the actors. The audience affects the show not only by its reactions to the performance, but also through the role it plays in the rehearsals even when it is not permitted to enter the backstage. More specifically, the audience can be interpreted as *sensitising* the actors towards their expectations, interpretations and the possible reactions to the performance.

In Aporia, the effects of the audience's *sensitising* were visible in the numerous actors' efforts to deliver a performance that could engage and capture the organisation members and minimise the risks of cynicism and detachment which are frequently the unintended consequences of change projects (see e.g. Fleming and Spicer, 2003; Harris and Ogbonna, 2002; Tornbull, 2001). First of all, the actors took great care in arriving at appropriate labels for the organisational values, since, as they emphasised, 'labels are very important' and 'a good slogan is easier to remember'. Similarly, the meanings attached to the labels, as defined by the actors for the audience, had to sound convincing. Although there appeared to be an agreement as to the 'superordinate value' of profit generation, as also found by Murphy and Mackenzie Davy (2002), it was also evident that 'this isn't very thrilling and it does not give people energy' which the translated values were designed to achieve. Furthermore, the values were translated in a way that could, in the actors' view, minimise the gulf between the values statements and organisational reality, which is not infrequent in organisations (see e.g. Höpfl *et al.*, 1990; Murphy and Mackenzie Davey, 2002). As one actor acknowledged: 'We have people with different length of tenure. I want to rule out a situation that they won't buy into it, because they don't see this [value] in our activities'. The 'different length of tenure', mentioned above, was indeed a crucial element in the sensitising process. As Weick (1995) emphasises, an important property of sensemaking is its retrospective nature. For this reason, experience gathered in the past, in this case with 'length of tenure', was rightly interpreted by the actors as likely to affect the way their performance was going to be perceived (compare e.g. McCabe, 2004 and Reissner, 2010). The culture spectacle analysed here was not a solitary act; it needed to fit the ongoing organisational drama and entice the audience that was not new to the organisational theatrics business. In this light, managing (the culture show) is indeed a performing art (Mangham, 1990).

The main audience of the 'culture spectacle', in this case the organisational members, were expected to 'buy into' the reading of the script proposed by the actors. In order to be moved by the performance, the audience had take on a 'theatrical consciousness' (Mangham and Overington, 1987) and suspend their disbelief. However, as it turned out, not many organisational members were willing to succumb to the show. Not surprisingly, the ones who seemed to be most susceptible to the performance, were the

performers, as previously observed by Anthony (1990; 1994). However, as the case of Aporia illustrates, even the actors had their moments of doubt (compare Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003) and required some convincing from the orchestrators of the show – the ingenious merchants of meaning (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1990a) – the consultants.

In the meantime, the majority of the internal audience observed the show with emotional detachment. The detachment often adopted the form of the already mentioned *learnt forbearing indifference* or what Collinson (1994) referred to as 'resistance through distance', which was here linked to the change overload syndrome (Corley and Gioia, 2004) largely associated with the changing expatriate leadership. The audience realised that the actors had to engage in the performance precisely because of their organisational role. As actors (and managers), they were expected to 'play their part' (Höpfl, 2002). As one organisation member succinctly observed: 'let's not fool ourselves, [such performances are] characteristic for big corporations'. By referring to the culture project as a standard performance typical of multinational conporations, the audience could register the show put on by the actors from a distance and 'not engage in such things'. For this part of the audience, even inconsistencies in the performances did not matter much, as they were generally indifferent to the show, knowing that the current spectacle would be soon surpassed by another. After all, the corporate show must go on and the organisational theatre lives off performances, regardless of the play it currently stages, be it a 'Culture project' or any other 'art of management' (Mangham, 1990) that is currently on.

However, not all spectators who refused to suspend their disbelief perceived the show with *learnt forbearing indifference*. In fact, in part of the organisational audience, the performance produced some intense emotional responses. A number of organisation members were irritated and angry at the show as it was perceived by them as manipulation reminiscent of vulgar communist propaganda. In their view, Poland, with its historical baggage, was a particularly unwelcoming terrain for corporate indoctrination. They regarded the culture spectacle with distaste, narrating the show as communicating an offensively truistic message largely unsuitable for the calibre of the audience it was targeting. The storied response to the show from this part of the audience, often with a nostalgic overtone, depicted the sceptical audience as

intellectually superior over the ones who 'buy into all this [nonsense]', as well as the actors who engage in the silly show.

Finally, there was a group among the audience who interpreted the performance, and the rhetoric it was surrounded with, as a deceit. In their experiences of organisational reality, values were far often espoused than adhered to, as found also in other studies (e.g. Murphy and Mackenzie Davy, 2002). Their reading of the show suggested that their role in the organisation was of lesser importance than they believed it to be. For them, the newly staged performances were discriminating and endangering their organisational identity, to which they reacted with indignation. The associated feelings of injustice then, enhanced the feeling of commonality of experience - belonging to the marginalised group. As a consequence, the occupational group identities (e.g. 'we' – the accounting team, 'we' – the registration department, 'we'- the financial department) became enhanced, as was the wider organisational identity that cut across different departments: 'we' – the (marginalised) support staff. Consequently, while the actors concocted the spectacle, the audience grew further apart, engaging in their own micro spectacles of resistance (Gabriel, 2008a).

The script which the actors employed to perform their spectacle was designed to be consumed by the audience and 'implemented' in the organisational reality. And indeed, this is what part of the audience did, yet often in ways unintended by the actors. The rhetorical value of the script (the translated values, and in particular their labels) gained considerably in significance, serving their users as a strategic resource (Hardy *et al.*, 2000). Initially, it was the management and the team involved in the culture project that focused on organisational values. They actively engaged in the sensegiving activities (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), defining the values for the employees and then expecting them to act accordingly. As Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges (1990) observed, organisational artefacts, such as labels, are used by groups of people but they also, at least temporarily, belong to those groups. Indeed, it seemed that in Aporia the revamped organisational values were initially the property of the management who brought them back into the spotlight and gave them a status close to procedures. Values were embedded into the organisational reality as part of some substantive changes (such as the new motivation system), and turned into one of the dimensions of the official organisational leadership definition. Organisation members were subsequently expected

to incorporate the values into their daily activities. Nonetheless, the initial managerial possession of values, was, as Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges (1990) predicted, only temporary.

After the intensified popularisation and promotion of values, they became public, or to use Dunford and Jones's (2000) terminology, 'collective property'. Every organisation member could refer to value labels and use them to advance their interest. Although not all organisation members pursued this avenue, some appeared to have learned how to strategically consume the values discourse to validate their activities (e.g. when describing a prospective project as an enactment of the official values), to imbue them with the desirable meaning (e.g. when describing one's performance in annual appraisals) and finally as a means of enforcing desired action from others (e.g. as was the case with the protest letter to the General Manager). In this sense, these findings resonate with the argument put forward by Hardy and Phillips (1999) who suggested that official discourses can and indeed sometimes are used by actors as 'legitimising resources'. Similarly, the findings add to the previous work of Mueller *et al.* (2003) who, using the framework of rhetoric, illustrated how participants, while not necessarily negating the change agenda, can draw on wider ideological discourses to enhance their arguments when negotiating with others.

At this point, however, it needs to be highlighted that the potential of the official discourse for opening possibilities of strategic and creative appropriation by different participants, as discussed in this thesis, was very much context dependent. As Grant and Hardy (2003:8) have pointed out, rhetoric is not 'a portable resource, but rather … a device that is contingent on context'. The symbolism of organisational value labels and their potential to act as a potent discursive resource was not linked to the values per se, but it was rather derived from its current central location in the wider official discourse. It was therefore the official focus on the value discourse in Aporia that made its appropriation, or misapprioriation (Chreim, 2006) by the staff more powerful. In this light, is seems accurate to suggest that ironically, engagement with the official discourse might in fact sometimes become one of its most powerful sources of contestation.

8.5.2 Towards organisational delusion

While the dramaturgical reading offered above has highlighted the performative aspects of the 'culture project' and directed attention to the organisational members and their reactions to the performance, it has reserved little space for the context in which the culture work took place. Therefore, I will now pursue another line of interpretation which is more sensitive to the local situatedness of the change initiative in light of which the meaning of the initiative will be investigated.

The context for the planned culture change in Aporia was conceptualised in this thesis primarily in terms of an organisational history marked by a period of toxic leadership which was then theorised as organisational depression.

It is suggested here that organisational depression, as a special kind of organisational trauma, constitutes a unique context for a culture change initiative not only due to a number of substantial changes associated with organisational decline but most importantly, due to its profound cultural implications. As stated earlier in the discussion section, Aporia as an organisation that had suffered from depression, was eroded both internally and externally. It was a haemorrhaging disintegrated organisation (Puplampu, 2005) with incapacited staff overwhelmed by overgrown bureaucracy, who had lost the sense of belonging to the wider organisational whole (Munro, 1998). It was an externally troubled organisation whose image took a tumble; an organisation whose members no longer knew what it stood for.

In this context, the culture change project was not so much designed to follow the industry's bandwagon (as was the case with change programmes described e.g. by Harris and Ogbonna, 2000; 2002). Rather, it was presented as an initiative aimed at reinvigorating the organisation's image and cementing the eroded organisational culture, as a means of improving organisational effectivness. This was to be achieved by an increased focus on the organisational values (as advocated by the culture engineering movement, e.g. Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Peters and Waterman, 1982) and subsequently the promotion of leadership.

The organisational values that were to be promoted were inherited by the Polish subsidiary from the headquarters and were perceived as 'not very well chosen'. However, the lack of the perceived fit did not lead to the questioning of the corporate values, but instead directed the efforts of the management team towards adjusting the unfitting corporate values to the local context. In the process of translating the corporate values, their labels were replaced with what seemed to be the most suitable Polish equivalents and their meanings altered so as to appear less detached from the reality in the eyes of the Polish staff. In this respect, the process of defining organisational values resembles the work involved in creating a *bricolage*. In the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, *bricolage* is defined as a 'construction (as of a sculpture or a structure of ideas) achieved by using whatever comes to hand; also: something constructed in this way'. As Levi-Strauss (1962), cited in Louridas (1999:3), observes:

> [The bricoleur's] first practical step is retrospective: he must turn to an already constituted set, formed by tools and materials; take, or re-take, an inventory of it; finally, and above all, engage into a kind of dialog with it, to index, before choosing among them, the possible answers that the set can offer to his [or her] problem. (Levi-Strauss, 1962)

Similarly, the value translation process started with retrospection - making sense of the corporate script and negotiating its meaning. Then the editing, altering or 're-taking' elements followed so as to compose a new whole with a new meaning. The prevailing belief was that the subsidiary could not define its values fully independently from its headquarters. Nonetheless, the meaning the actors could convey in their identity *bricolage* composed out of the corporate 'means available' was a matter of their invention. To paraphrase Bauman (2004), the crafting of organisational vlaues was about recycling of the corporate elements and composing a new whole. The expressive work of the actors was, however, constrained by the purpose it was to achieve and the audience it was targeted at. As Louridas points out:

> Bricolage is (…) at the mercy of contingencies, either external, in the form of influences, constraints, and adversities of the external world, or internal, in the form of the creator's idiosyncrasy. (Louridas, 1999:5)

The process of defining organisational values involved meaning making and giving, composing and creating – it was an artistic and aesthetic act. The translated values consisted of statements about who the organisation was, which, is typically conceptualised as the fundamental identity question (e.g. Albert and Whetten, 1985; Gioia *et al.*, 2000; Whetten, 2006). This interpretation seems to be in line with the views of the organisation actors involved in the translation process, who often referred to the

statement of organisational values as 'something they identify with', or at least something that other organisation remembers could 'buy into'.

However, the newly defined values were not derived from within the organisation. They did not resemble 'emotionally charged desires or wants' (Ott, 1989:39). In fact, most organisational actors agreed in interviews that efficiency and effectiveness were the bottom-line in the organisation, whereas the officially espoused values, except for 'achieving', were not 'very well chosen'. This notwithstanding, the mangers involved in defining the values believed that the officially espoused values had to be more appealing than efficiency and effectiveness, which were taken for granted. It seemed that the shared expectations and norms regarding the acceptable organisational and corporate values strongly affected the process of defining the values, which resonates closely with the observations of Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008).

In Aporia, the official values were an element of the corporate heritage which became locally processed, revamped and packaged so as to appear 'enticing' enough to be consumed. The values statement endorsed in Aporia resembled to a large extent the desired identity (e.g. the 'customer focus', or 'readiness to take balanced risk', 'respect for the past'), however it was presented as already existing. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008:119), inspired by (Baudrillard, 1981), referred to this 'carved-out set of positive-sounding statements about values, often decoupled from everyday-life thinking and practices' as hyperculture.

In light of the here described findings, however, the term hyperidentity, rather than hyperculture seems more adequate. The translated values were set out to answer the identity question (as defined by Albert and Whetten, 1985) as to what the organisation stood for and adopted thus the form of identity claims. They did not refer to the broader understanding of culture (e.g. Hatch, 1993; Kostera, 1996; Martin, 2002). For this reason, it is suggested here that the translated and revamped statements about what is important for the organisation members, which reside predominantly in the fantasy realm, should be regarded not as hyperculture, as Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) advocated, but rather as hyperidentity. Hyperidentity understood in this way resembles what Soenen and Moingeon (2002) referred to as the *professed* identity which, according to the authors, should be understood as a form of ideological discourse.

Inspired by the classic work of Argyris and Schön (1974), Soenen and Moingeon (2002) distinguished between the official claims as to what constitutes organisational identity and organisation members' experience of what their organisational identity is, which they consequently refer to as the *experienced* identity. In their distinction, however, the authors only allude to the possibility of a decoupling of the two forms of identity, rather than suggesting that they are bound to be different. Hyperidentity, on the contrary, as defined in this thesis, puts the decoupling of the official rhetoric and the organisation members lived experience (or to be more precise, the *experienced* identity) in the foreground. Furthermore, it also highlights, similarly to the Alvesson and Sveningson's (2008) hyperculture concept, the confusing usage of language which presents the future project as if it had already been accomplished and turned into organisational reality.

In the case of Aporia, the increased focus on organisational values was not designed to give voice to the *experienced* identity, but rather to depict the *professed* identity in the most professional and convincing manner. The *professed* identity was to evoke an aesthetic response among the organisation members; a response that was hoped to turn artistic form into identity substance. As Höpfl (1994:25) observes, 'In the face of the absence of meaning, such constructions are an artifice, a hollow and appropriative substitution'. It seemed that in Aporia organisational identity, as defined in the value statement, did not have to be experienced, instead it had to first and foremost be marketable and consumable (compare Bauman's, 2000, discussion of liquid modernity). It was a product that had its target market and revenue to generate. Approached in the having mode (Fromm, 1976) as a functional product, organisational values, or more precisely value labels, were then embedded in organisational practices. The process of utilising organisational value labels by different organisation members has been discussed earlier in the chapter and referred to as a 'political reengineering of values'. In this instance, however, I would like to point to another aspect of the embeddedness of value labels into organisational practices, namely perpetuation of what can be described as organisational delusion.

In Aporia, values served as rationalisation for new initiatives (as, for example, the often quoted in interviews ECCO project), and, when the rationalisation was applied, it was used as a proof that values were indeed working. To paraphrase Giddens (1987), the two-way relationship of actions and values, can be interpreted as double hermeneutic.
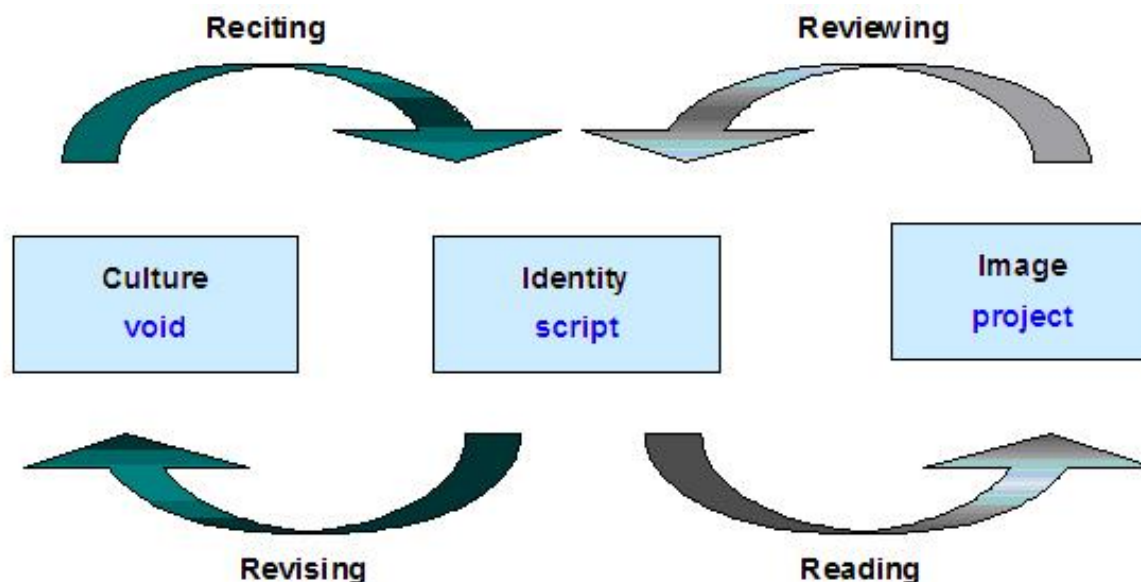
Values as labels provided a rationalisation for actions and imbued them with specific meaning (an idea to publish promotional leaflets on recycled paper was viewed as an embodiment of the 'pioneering' value and not another marketing tool). Labelled actions, in turn, contributed to the meaning that was attributed to the labels. Labels then, were not pure signifiers any more; they were interpreted in light of what they were believed to signify. By punctuating the organisational reality with value labels, some organisation members started believing that the officially espoused values were indeed embraced. There seemed to be little problem with finding 'raw material' for value labelling, as it was selected from among the daily activities of the organisation members, more or less arbitrarily (as more sceptical organisation members would point out). The singled out acts were then turned into contenders for the best value fit, or as the official name read: "The GM's value awards'. Once the value prizes were awarded, further evidence of 'meaningful [value] actions' (Czarniawska, 2006) was provided for those who agreed to treat these officially extracted cues (Weick, 1995) as indeed meaningful. And so the delusion that the espoused values and the values-in-use (Argyris and Schön,1978) were indeed one could be sustained.

Organisational delusion in the here proposed conceptualisation is another form of organisational pathology linked to the distorted processes of identity construction, as defined by Hatch and Schultz (2002). Identity is here spun in a cultural void detached from the symbolic reservoirs of the organisation, but unlike organisational hyperadaptation described by Hatch and Schultz (2002), identity is not built upon the external image of the organisation either. Instead, identity is a form of identity claims which provided a carefully prepared, rehearsed and scripted answer to the identity question (Albert and Whetten's, 1985; Whetten, 2006) or, as the official presentation of values declared: 'what [the organisation members] believe in'. These identity claims therefore constituted what was here referred to as hyperidentity - nicely sounding, however decoupled from organisational reality identity claims (see also Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008 on hyperculture).

The produced hyperidentity in the form of a set of translated organisational values was designed to make a change in the organisational reality. The *reading of the values script,* so the projections of the designed identity, was to leave an impression on the audience. It was to compel the organisation participants to alter their behaviours, so that

they would comply with the script, and convince the external stakeholders to hold a desired view of the organisation, just as the script prescribed (see Figure 23, below).

Figure 21: The enscripting of organisational identity, based on Ciuk ans Kostera's narrative reading of the identity dynamics model by Hatch and Schultz (2002)

Reciting   **Reviewing**

| Culture void | Identity script | Image project |

Revising   **Reading**

Due to the silence curtain surrounding the past, the script was, however, not *revisited* with the view of the existing cultural understandings (as, according to Hatch and Schultz, 2002, identity dynamics normally unfolds).The silence curtain was masking a cultural void that the reading of the script was eventually to fill with meaning. Ciuk and Kostera (2010) evoke the imagery of a phantom to talk about the organisational past that had been subject to the practices of sepization - the past that was pushed to organisational margins but one that refused to stay forgotten. The phantom of the past was, therefore, felt in the organisational present, just as Gabiel's 2008 miasma, yet denied its rightful place there. In Aporia, the newly spun identity was recited in a cultural void which detached it even further from organisational (experienced) identity (Soenen and Moingeon, 2002), making the performance even less credible, especially for the internal audience. How the reading of the scripted identity will affect the image project of the organisation is still to be seen, as more time needs to pass for the performance to reach its wider audience.

9 Conclusions

This research was undertaken with a view to contributing to the existing body of work on organisational culture change initiatives. More specifically, I set out to investigate how different organisation members perceive, experience and work with a culture change project and what the implications of cultural interventions are. In this concluding chapter I will come back to the original objectives of this research and reiterate the main findings of the study in the light of the earlier work on the topic.

The chapter starts by identifying three main contributions of the study which are then considered within the context of the limitations of the here undertaken project. The chapter ends by highlighting avenues for future research.

9.1 Contribution of the study

9.1.1 Empirical contribution

Arguably, one of the main contributions of this study lies in the richness of the empirical material and the specificity of the selected organisation. Although Harris and Ogbonna (2000) called for more longitudinal research on responses to organisational culture change over a decade ago, such studies are still relatively rare. The current research is a modest attempt to address this call for research by offering insights into culture work (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008) in an Eastern European subsidiary of a pharmaceutical multinational.

One of the objectives of the undertaken research was to explore the context in which the cultural intervention was undertaken and, by the same token, the role it played in the studied change efforts. So far most of the work on culture change programmes (with a few notable examples, e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Dobosz-Bourne and Kostera, 2007; Dobosz and Jankowicz, 2006; Harris and Metallinos, 2002) has largely concentrated on the Anglo-Saxon context. However, Poland, and Eastern Europe more generally, I argue, constitute a very relevant context for research due to its turbulent history. The specific cultural, social and historical situatedness of the case consequently

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offers a further interesting dimension to existing studies of culture change initiatives. In the current study, the Polish national history, in particular the communist era, was interpreted by some participants as crucial in their attitudes to the 'culture project' which they perceived as an attempt at manipulation reminiscent of the communist propaganda they had been subject to earlier in their lives. In their accounts, the participants presented themselves as too smart to fall for such propaganda. While, in their eyes, an extensive focus on the officially espoused organisational values was considered suitable for American corporations, it was perceived as 'going against the [Polish] national cultural grain' (Hergüner and Reeves, 2000:45) where people are less accustomed to corporate culture talk. This finding echoes with the observations of Tornbull (2001) who discussed some participants' detached attitudes to the officially promoted values as 'local superiority'. In the current study, however, the 'local superiority' was largely established thanks to favourable comparisons to the American part of the corporation rather than being exclusively based on the inter-organisational juxtapositions. The latter were also used by some participants, especially the ones coming from a department with strong academic background, but the former were more prevalent across the organisation. In this sense, the current findings have illustrated how drawing on the commonality of experience and the national history can be used as a mechanism enhancing participants' feeling of self-worth and rationalising 'cool alternation' (Willmott, 1993) from the change initiative.

The study has therefore highlighted the importance of the wider political context of the country, and not only the industry in which the studied organisation operates (as previously demonstrated by Ogbonna and Harris, 2002a) in studying cultural interventions. In the here analysed organisation, the attitudes to the 'culture project' were, to some degree, affected by changes in the country's political arena. Although, as discussed earlier, some participants compared the 'culture project' to communist propaganda, others welcomed the idea of promoting organisational values. For a small group of participants, it was important that their organisation had some officially espoused values which could differentiate their organisation from the competitors and hopefully prevent the organisation from ethical scandals. It seems therefore that the aggressive political style of the newly appointed ruling party and its declared commitment to rooting out corruption (see the background chapter in this thesis) left an imprint on a number of participants in the studied organisation. Although the

participants did not necessarily seem to endorse the official values themselves, the mere fact of having a set of promoted organisational values was welcomed by them. For this group, official values offered an opportunity to their organisation to differentiate itself from the competitors, especially the generic companies which were perceived as often acting in an ethically dubious manner (compare Makowska, 2010). This finding further highlights what was referred earlier in the thesis as a 'having orientation' to organisational values (Fromm, 1976). This observed instrumental approach to the espoused values, however, was manifested not only by the 'agents of change', but interestingly also the ones who were to be initially the 'objects' and 'targets' of the 'practised rhetoric' (Höpfl, 1994).

Moreover, the study was carried out in a traumatised organisation (Hormann and Vivian, 2005) which embarked on a 'culture project' that was built around 'the breathing of new life into old values' (Callan, 2008). Most of the reported culture change initiatives, on the other hand, focus on attempts to establish a set of newly introduced values or, more generally, a new 'ethos' (e.g. Badham *et al.*, 2003; Casey, 1999; Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). The unique nature of the studied initiative and the context in which it was embedded has contributed to some interesting findings. It has, for example, highlighted the discursive struggles over the interpretation of the past in relation to individual's identity work (see e.g. Brown and Humphreys, 2002; Ybema, 2010) and provided insights into the interplay of nostalgia (Gabriel, 1993;2002), postalgia (Ybema, 2004) and nostophobia (Davis, 1979). In doing so, the findings have illustrated that organisational nostalgia can be more fragmented than is typically depicted in the literature on the topic (e.g. McDonald *et al.*, 2006, Milligan, 2003) and does not necessarily imply 'latent resistance' (Ylioki, 2005) to change. As the current study demonstrated, members authoring nostalgic narratives can act on the principles nostalgia preserves (compare Tannock, 1995). Similarly, engagement in nostalgic tales might imply resistance to the symbolic order threatened by the changes rather than to the substantive content of the changes.

Finally, the current study has shed light into the basic struggles of a subsidiary of a multinational corporation which had to translate corporate, and foreign sounding, value labels and meanings into the local language and context. Although this issue resonates with some wider debates in the international management literature on the diffusion of

corporate values, it has been addressed here from a local, rather than the dominant corporate perspective. This investigating of the processes of how local managers attempt to make sense of such corporate values in order to translate them for other organisation members has drawn attention to some more deep rooted problems than mere incompatibility of value labels. In particular, as I have argued earlier in the thesis, the process of localising corporate values surfaced considerable tensions in the subsidiary when trying to reconcile its local situatedness and the corporate belonging. Thus, attempts at articulating the organisational identity with the help of the translated values were found to be marked by contradictory urges to on the one hand identify with the corporation, and on another to dissociate oneself from it so as to emphasize one's uniqueness. In this sense, the wider corporation rather than the local competitors appeared to serve as an important referent for the local managers when articulating the officially sponsored statement of the organisational identity. In contrast, as was discussed earlier, other members of staff were found to refer on some occasions to the espoused values as important signifiers of their organisation's uniqueness in the local market rather than within the corporation as a whole.

9.1.2 Theoretical contribution

This study also aimed to make a theoretical contribution to the existing body of work on organisational culture change initiatives by exploring the different facets of the 'culture project', as well as investigating its outcomes.

The findings of this study are in many respects in line with the previous research on the topic. The studied initiative was, as most of the reported accounts in academic literature, designed as a 'grand technocratic project' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008). Although the rhetoric surrounding the intervention might suggest that the project was 'led by the people', the project was drafted and managed by senior managers with the help of consultants also appointed by the executives. Some of the middle managers who were involved in the project were assigned to join in, despite, or sometimes because of their initial scepticism. The awareness campaign, which was conceived of as an important element of the implementation phase (as previously reported e.g. by Kunda, 1992; Ogbonna and Harris, 1998; Scheer and Rhodes, 2006; Tornbull, 2001), was structured

as a cascade, whereby the awareness of the espoused values was expected to be passed on through the different levels of the organisational hierarchy (compare Anthony, 1994; Badham *et al.*, 2003 and Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). As the findings suggest, executives are still lured by the appeal of cultural engineering, despite the ample evidence in literature which cautions against the promotion of 'designer cultures' (Casey, 1999). Although there appeared to be some evidence of awareness among the studied executives of the risks of cultural interventions turning into 'paper projects', their faith in the 'salvation power' (compare Case, 1999) of cultural cohesion seemed to have been stronger.

Similarly to the above discussed formal aspects of the studied project, its reception among staff was also in many ways in line with the previous, critically orientated, work on the topic. The culture intervention was indeed found to produce 'mixed' (Tornbull, 2001), and varied responses (Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003), whereby cynical detachment and indifference were among the most common attitudes (compare Murphy and Mackenzie Davy, 2002). However, the current study has also produced some additional insights, especially in terms of the organisational level outcomes of the intervention, which will be reiterated below.

Building on the analysis of the findings and the previous work of Hatch and Schultz (2002), an important thesis of this study is that culture change projects might perpetuate organisational delusion. In culture change initiatives the discourse of the promoted culture, especially when it is phrased as if the change had already taken place (compare Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008 and Gioia *et al.*, 2002), can easily be confused with the realisation of the intended change. More specifically, when the discourse of the newly promoted culture is embedded into the existing organisational practices, such as performance appraisals, or internal rewards for realisation of the promoted values, it can be regarded as a token of the success of the change project.

The corporate culturism literature (as expressed e.g. in the ideas of Deal and Kennedy, 1982: Ouchi, 1980; Peters and Waterman, 1982) with its resilient allure (Martin, 2002) recommends that a common set of values be defined, promoted and subsequently reinforced in the organisation by formal procedures and symbolic means. The formal reinforcement of the promoted culture often involves introducing the promoted values

and behaviours into the organisation's HRM systems, such as staff appraisals, career progression plans or recruitment guidelines and training programmes (see e.g. Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Kunda, 1992; Scheers and Rhodes, 2006). Whereas attempts at symbolic reinforcement of the promoted culture might involve some of the culture embedding mechanisms described by Schein (1985), such as establishing rewards for displaying the desired behaviours and realisation of the espoused values (see also Murphy and Mackenzie Davey, 2002). However, as the findings of this thesis have illustrated, the officially sponsored cultural discourse (value labels, descriptions of the desired cultural displays, etc.) becomes part of the organisational landscape and thus can be consumed along the prescribed lines, but also reshaped in unintended ways by different organisational members (compare also Chreim, 2006; Ogbonna and Harris,1998; Harris and Ogbonna, 2000; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003).

Importantly, the embededness of the culture discourse in wider organisational practices requires not only the employees, but also the managers who promoted the culture change in the first place to behave as if some change had indeed taken place if they want the project, and by the same token themselves, to be perceived as successful. This point resonates with the argument articulated by Anthony (1994) that managers are the ones who are most likely to be seduced by the culture change programmes they themselves promote. Expanding on Anthony's (1994) point, if the claim about the apparent realisation of the new culture is to have some credibility, raw material from the everyday organisational life needs to be found to support it. In this way, selected events, actions or qualities of organisational members need to be identified as an embodiment of the new culture and labelled as such. In this way, the labels attached to the organisational reality start serving as important signifiers of the new culture and subsequently imbue the culture discourse with meaning. Culture talk is then no longer filled with 'empty slogans', as the slogans have been attributed with meaning by the fragments of reality that they were selected to describe. It is this double hermeneutic of culture discourse, as described by Giddens (1987), that fuels the illusion that culture change, as described in the official discourse, has in fact been translated into organisational everyday.

Furthermore, the process of promoting and enforcing the desired culture by formal means and symbolic management turns elements of this discourse (e.g. value labels)

into powerful cultural artefacts (compare Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges, 1990), which can be used by different organisational members. I referred to this process as *political reigineering of values*. The official discourse promoted in the organisation with time becomes no longer the property of the ones who initially shaped it, typically the top management and the consultants. Rather, it turns into a 'collective property' (Dunford and Jones, 2000) which can be then used by different participants to pursue their individual interests. Behaviours, actions and organisation members' qualities can be described using the officially promoted labels. Thanks to the newly gained symbolic value, elements of the culture discourse become a powerful internal currency which can shape the interpretations of organisational reality, for example by giving credence to actions which are presented as being in line with the officially sponsored culture, or by undermining actions which are cast as clashing with the espoused culture.

Ogbonna and Wilkinson (1990) suggested that culture change programmes can lead to the desired changes in behaviours, as employees engage in manifestations of the officially prescribed behaviours, especially when these form the basis for their performance evaluation and can be easily observed and assessed by supervisors. Similarly, Willmott (1993:535) pointed to 'reinforced instrumentality' as an outcome of cultural engineering as employees perform the desired behaviours without internalising the officially sponsored values. What this study, however, has shown is that culture change programmes might effect also a different change of behaviours, one which involves employing the discourse of the promoted culture to describe the organisational behaviour without necessarily having affected any changes in these behaviours in the first place. This finding can be arguably explained by the fact that, unlike Ogbonna and Wilkinson's (1990) study, the values promoted in Aporia were not easily translated into a set of prescribed behaviours. In fact, they were regarded as common sense (similarly to the responses found by Murphy and Mackenzie Davy, 2002) and ambiguous by majority of staff. Therefore, the employees could regard the officially sponsored values with 'learnt forbearing indifference', as earlier discussed in the thesis. In this respect, the current study has illustrated how culture change programmes can provide the organisation members with a linguistic resource (compare Hardy *et al.*, 2000) which they can resort to while engaging in political behaviours, such as adding or undermining importance of the work of different organisation members. It appears that such an outcome of cultural interventions is more likely when the promoted organisational

values are, as was the case in the studied organisation, ambiguous, or to use Benders and van Veen's (2001) terminology, characterized by 'interpretive viability'. Paradoxically, it is precisely the 'ambiguity-by-design' (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991, Gioia *et al.*, 2000) which is often depicted in academic literature as 'forging identification with core ideology' (Fiol, 2002:662).

In light of the above, it is suggested here that the ones who might indeed initially be at 'the receiving end' of a culture change project (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006) designed as a technocratic enterprise (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008), are by no means confined to the receiving role. On the contrary, as the findings of this study illustrate, different organisational members can actively and creatively engage in acts of sensegiving (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), where they use the official cultural labels to promote a desired interpretation of their and others actions while otherwise 'doing business as usual'. Similarly, the creative reinterpretation of the official discourse is not reserved for those on the 'receiving end'. As the current findings suggest, official discourses can be creatively appropriated also by those who promote them in the first place and used in arguments with peers, which makes the lines between those who discipline and control and those who resist and comply more blurry than it is often depicted (compare Larson and Tompkins, 2005). In this light, the doing of culture work (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008) involves primarily the learning of the culture discourse and applying it skilfully to organisational reality.

9.1.3 Methodological contribution

The study can also be considered as promoting visual methods in organisational research. While visual methods are becoming increasingly popular in social sciences (e.g. Ball and Smith, 1992, Pink, 2001; see also International Visual Sociology Association and their journal 'Visual Studies'), they are still surprisingly rarely used in management research (for some notable exceptions see e.g. Bell, 2008; Panayiotou, 2010; Special Issue of Organization, 2008, on Images of Organizing in Popular Culture). In fact, the scarcity of organisational research employing visual research methods has recently prompted guest editors of the Special Issue of Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management to devote one issue of the journal to the

role of the visual and thus to 'raise awareness of the potential of visual methods to organization and management studies'.

I would in particular argue that collages, as a method of data collection, seem to be underutilised. It might indeed be difficult to use collages in organisational settings in the same form as is customary in marketing research (compare, Havlena and Holak, 1996) due to a number of practical considerations, as discussed in the methodology section of this thesis. Nonetheless, if collages as a method of data collection are adjusted to the practical constraints of doing research in organisational settings, they can become a valuable methodological tool for organisational researchers in their attempts to 'encapsulate the multidimentionality of human experience' (Deacon, 2000:1). As authors have already pointed out, images can help participants to recall past events (Barry, 1996), 'evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than words' (Harper, 2002:13) and facilitate discussion of sensitive topic (Maison, 2001).

In this study I have also employed another method of data collection which I referred to as organisational attribute collages which was designed to elicit narrative accounts from the participants around the themes that emerged in the previous wave of research and which were part of the official discourse on organisational culture. This method has proven to be particularly useful in terms of highlighting differences among different groups of participants and often encouraged participants to engage in insightful narratives. However, it has to be noted that special care is needed to maintain consistency between the declared perspective from which the study is undertaken and the approach to the data, as also persuasively argued by Hatch and Yanow (2008). Going beyond the traditional canon of research methods, as I have tried in this work, might indeed be a worthy endeavour (Deacon, 2000), however it is also one which requires some caution.

9.1.4 Practical contribution

While the study was not undertaken with a strong practical orientation, some implications for practice can be drawn from this research. First of all, the findings contribute to the existing body of work pointing out the perils of undertaking planned

cultural interventions (e.g. Harris and Ogbonna, 2002; Harris and Metallinos, 2002; Höpfl *et al.*, 1992; Murphy and Mackezie Davey, 2002). Irrespective of the ethical and moral considerations of attempts at cultural manipulation (for a discussion of these see Alveson and Willmott, 1992; deRoche, 1998; Willmott, 1993), such initiatives, especially in the form of 'grand technocratic projects' (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008), are, from the start, fraught with difficulties. As this study illustrates, similarly to the findings of Höpfl *et al.* (1992) and Scheers and Rhodes (2006), increased official interest in the espoused values is likely to increase the organisation members' attempts at making sense of the 'text of these values', which subsequently highlights potential breaches. Therefore, perhaps Alvesson's (2002) promotion of culture work through 'every-day reframing of reality' and symbolic management (Pfeffer, 1981; Pye, 2005) could offer a plausible alternative to big scale 'culture projects' promoting a unitary interpretation of the organisational life.

Secondly, the importance of the local context in staff perceptions and experiences of change initiatives can hardly be overestimated, a point which has already been voiced on numerous occasions (e.g. Ogbonna and Harris, 2002a; Pettigrew, 1985), but still, surprisingly, does not always appear to be taken seriously in practice. As the study in Aporia suggests, foreign initiatives imposed by the Headquarters on their subsidiaries may run counter to the local context and thus be disregarded as unfitting with the local reality.

Thirdly, change agents embarking on change projects designed to affect others (Bartunek *et al.*, 2006) also need to make allowances for the fact that the recipients of change efforts can take an active role in the change project. As this study has shown, organisational actors can and often do engage in creative ways with the official discourse thus sabotaging the initial ideas of the change proponents. As McCabe (2011:183) nicely put it, 'neither gurus nor managers are able to control how their ideas are consumed', and, I would add, reinvented.

Finally, the findings also can be used to caution the practitioners against engagement with nostophobic (Davis, 1979) discourses and disregard for the cultural reservoirs of the organisation, while trying to create a sense of urgency for change, as is sometimes recommended (for the most notable example see e.g. Kotter, 1996). Turning one's back

to an organisation's heritage, even in a traumatic context (Hormann and Vivian, 2005), can alienate groups of participants, intensify 'status drama' (Maynard-Moody *et al.*, 1986), and perpetuate decoupling of the discourse from the lived experiences of organisation members.

9.1.5 Limitations of the study

While the findings of this research offer some interesting insights into how organisation members attempt to work with culture change, how they experience and perceive such initiatives and finally what the outcomes of cultural interventions might be, the research has a number of limitations. The limitations of the study are largely linked to the research design, and the chosen methods of data collection and analysis, as well as some practical constraints encountered in the field.

First of all, the research was carried out as an in-depth study of a selected organisation. The chosen field for research was considered to be a unique case of a traumatised organisation undertaking a project of promoting the already existing corporate values. This uniqueness, however, raises questions about the value of the gained insights for other contexts. While it has never been the intention to produce generealisable findings, it can be suggested that the strength of this research resulting from the particularity of the selected case, also produces some of its shortcomings. Therefore further studies need to be carried out to explore whether the here observed findings hold true for other contexts or not and what the differences might be and how one could account for them. Some suggestions for future research will be discussed at the end of this section.

Secondly, my intention was to carry out a longitudinal study so as to be able to answer the question how people experience and work with culture change. I agree with Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) that longitudinal studies, especially ones which make extensive use of observation, can yield particularly useful insights into culture work in organisations. In my study, however, I had to rely much more on other methods of data collection than I had originally envisaged. I managed to collect data at the beginning of the culture project as well as at its official end. I was, however, largely absent during the time when the culture presentations were carried out and was also not permitted to

follow some backstage talks between the consultants and the management of the organisation. Rather than following the different turns of events in the culture project in person, I had to focus on the accounts of the participants which I supplemented with documentary analysis. These methods of data collection were particularly useful in terms of exploring participant's experiences and perceptions of the culture project but less so when analysing how people work with change. I was able to obtain insights into culture work through interviews and documents, however observation would have undoubtedly enriched my dataset and enabled me to conduct some more nuanced analysis of interactions.

Thirdly, the study was designed as an in-depth exploration of one organisation which, by definition, meant that I would not have a comparative basis for my research other than pervious research presented in the literature. I believe that a similar study carried out in a different organisation, perhaps another pharmaceutical company or a different traumatised organisation, would most likely prompt some important observations which might in turn affect the interpretation of my findings from Aporia's case. Nonetheless, I also endorse the view put forward by Stake (1994) that research into a single organisation can be highly insightful.

Furthermore, the limitations of this study are also linked to the methods of data collection and the approach adopted to the analysis. Although I employed a number of research methods to gather a varied and rich dataset, each of these methods themselves has a number of shortcomings. A detailed discussion of these, however, goes beyond the scope of this thesis and can be found in previous work (see e.g. Silverman, 2000). The practical application of the selected methods, as in any research, is also not fully immune to criticism. The issues particularly worth discussing, in my view, are: my previous role when interacting with the organisation and a number of practical constrains encountered before and during the fieldwork. These two points will be now discussed separately, which will be followed by some considerations of the adopted approach to data analysis.

First of all, I had engaged with the research organisation in the capacity of a language teacher for some time before I officially embarked on the research project. This has facilitated access to the organisation and opened doors to some participants who

otherwise might have been reluctant to partake in the research. However, such familiarity with the field has its downsides as well. It could potentially raise some questions about my pre-established assumptions about the organisation, the sympathies that I had developed towards selected individuals in the field which could affect the way I collected, interpreted and reported my data, and finally the ethics of such an endeavour.

I also believe that my familiarity with the field has invariably affected the way I viewed the organisation. Before embarking on the project I had had numerous discussions with selected participants about the industry they had worked in, the problems they had been faced with over a number of years, their understanding of relations at work and countless other work and often also non work-related issues. These conversations alerted me to certain aspects of the researched organisation, such as long working hours, sales focus, intra-departamental tensions, change overload, etc. At the same time, my familiarity with the field also enabled me to navigate in the organisation more easily. I knew who to turn to when I was looking for prospective participants, whom to ask for additional information on a given topic, and from whom to request internal documents. I was not and I did not attempt to be a professional stranger in the field (Agar, 1980) although I did not belong there fully either. I felt as though I was more belonging to the liminal space (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003), although most of the participants would probably see me more clearly as a member of the out-group. What I, however, see as crucial is being aware of one's home perspectives (Martin, 2002) and acknowledging them in the presentation of one's findings. While I attempted to follow Martin's recommendation to look at organisational reality from different perspectives, I often found myself lapsing back to what turned out to be the most natural way of looking at the reality for me, namely the differentiation perspective.

Similarly, I found that my sympathies tended to gravitate towards the groups in the organisation which I perceived as less privileged in the organisation, e.g. employees with longer tenure in an otherwise nostophobic environment or the office staff who believed to be treated as second class citizens. While I attempted not to privilege their interpretations of the events, I made sure that their voices got heard. Similarly, I found it difficult to be sympathetic to the approach adopted by the consultants and some top managers, as I found their approach to culture highly problematic. My understanding of

organisational culture was highly influenced by the academic reading of social constructivists' who are highly sceptical of attempts at culture management. However, it was precisely culture work that I set out to study. Consequently, the premises on which the culture project was based were from the start dissonant with my personal views on the manageability of culture (see e.g. Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Legge, 1994). In my research, however, I did not attempt to evaluate the foundations of the culture project, as this has successfully been done before (see e.g. Parker, 2000). Instead, I focused on the culture work as well as participant's experiences and interpretations of it. I also did not attempt to prove the researched managers or consultants wrong, but rather set out to explore their perception and experiences of the events.

In terms of the ethical issues stemming from my former relationships in the field, some researchers, especially the ones writing from the feminist perspective, might have some reservations about conducting interviews with familiar participants. After all, their possibility to decline my invitation to take part in the research might to some extent be infringed by the fairly amicable nature of our relationship. While this argument holds true, I never on purpose pressurised my participants into participating in the research. I attempted to balance the need for obtaining a rich dataset and not silencing any voices with the hints coming from my participants who were reluctant to speak to me. By and large, I did not get the impression that my requests for interviews were perceived as cumbersome, with a few notable exceptions. In particular some employees from the accounting department gave off the impression that they were slightly apprehensive about talking to me and would rather be left alone. In this case, I did not contact them and looked for employees from this department who were willing to share their observations with me. In some instances, I was told that some staff were disappointed that I had not contacted them in which case I would inquire about them and possibly invite them for an interview providing that they met my recruitment criteria. I found myself renegotiating access to some participants at different stages of the research (compare Birch and Miller, 2002) as I attempted not to take it for granted that a consent for an interview given in the first wave of research would be valid a few years later when I moved to the second and third phases of my project.

A number of practical constraints encountered in the field before and during the data collection phase have also left an imprint on the study. Most of these issues have

already been discussed in the methodology section and refer to the common struggles while doing fieldwork (see e.g. Kostera, 2007; Ybema *et al.*, 2009), such as difficulties with obtaining and later renegotiating access, scope of the access, and unavailability of some participants (especially sales representatives working in locations remote from Warsaw).

As mentioned earlier, not only the methods of data collection and their practical application in the research have their limitations, but different approaches to data analysis are also fraught with shortcomings. In the methodology section I discussed the problems with data fragmentation associated with coding (compare Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). I also mentioned that I attempted to supplement open thematic coding with narrative analysis. This latter method, however, could have been utilised more effectively than I was able to do in the current study. For example, I did not attempt to carry out a thorough analysis of the metaphors found in the field. While this would have certainly been a fascinating study, I found myself forced to narrow down my focus to issues more directly related to the overall research question. Similarly, a more rigorous investigation of stories, as suggested for example by Gabriel (2000), would have enriched this study by shedding more insights into the narrated versions of participant's experiences. Reluctant as I was to discard the constantly emerging new possibilities to collect new data and analyse the existing ones in a novel way, I attempted to maintain the fragile focus in the thesis.

9.1.6 Avenues for future research

As Harris and Matallinos (2002) have noted, most of the research on organisational culture change initiatives has been carried out in the Anglo-Saxon context, a comment which hold true a number of years after their work was published. With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2008; Harris and Matallinos, 2002), the body of work on culture change programmes still remains largely based on American and English cases. As the here discussed study has hopefully demonstrated, inclusion of cases from more varied contexts can be very promising. Therefore, I would like to join Ogbonna and Harris (1998) in their long-standing call for more variety in the research on culture. I would, however, interpret the need for more diversity in culture

research more broadly, rather than limit it to the need for more geographical, cultural, political and historical heterogeneity.

Looking at the existing body of work it is striking that the published studies tend to focus on change initiatives based on the promotion of new organisational values as a corporate initiative. The cases, therefore, often investigate headquarters or organisations which have themselves decided to embark on a culture change project. What has so far received surprisingly little attention are the subsidiaries of international corporations which have been assigned the task of culture change by their headquarters. It is interesting to see how different organisations translate global projects into the local context (see Czarniawska and Sevon, 1996). To put it differently, I am suggesting that more research is needed on the glocalisation of corporate culture initiatives. As the here discussed case has demonstrated, the process of sensitising corporate projects towards local contingencies provides a plethora of themes for research. In this context, one can investigate more closely the processes of co-construction of knowledge by the local actors (compare Heusinkveld *et al.,* 2011).

I would suggest that the aforementioned need for studies in more diverse contexts applies also to the nature of the change initiatives. Typically, the studies of culture change initiatives investigate the process of defining and subsequently promoting a new set of organisational values. While this might indeed reflect the most common theme in culture change initiatives (e.g. Casey, 1999; Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003), this does not seem to cover the variety of possible culture change initiatives. Aporia's project, for example, was based on the reinvigoration of the old corporate values.

It would also be worth exploring whether the responses to these attempts at culture manipulation, such as for example the *learnt forbearing indifference* observed in Aporia, are characteristic for other organisations as well or not. In which contexts are organisational actors more likely to associate culture change initiatives with manipulation? Aporia's case has suggested a number of possible interpretations, such as personal history of resisting manipulation, and individual's identity work.

Furthermore, as Balogun and Johnson (2004) have observed, change programmes generate ample opportunities for increased sensemaking. As this study has pointed out, culture change initiatives can raise some fundamental questions that go beyond the direct content of the proposed changes. As Aporia's case illustrates, the culture project has prompted sensemaking around what it was that the organisation stood for (compare Albert and Whetten, 1985) and how it could embrace its corporate belonging while simultaneously highlighting its separation from the corporation. In this sense, the case has surfaced the need to investigate not only organisational identity, which has recently received abundant attention (for a review see Cornelissen *et al.*, 2007), but also organisational alterity, the study of which has previously been advocated by Czarniawska (2008).

On a similar note, Ybema (2010) has voiced the need for more in-depth studies which investigate identity formation in relation to different organisational changes. In particular, I would highlight the potential for the discursive studies of individual and group identity work (Watson, 2008) in times of organisational change. This study, similarly to the work of McCabe (2004) and Ybema (2010), has investigated the time-bound discursive struggles linked to identity formation of different organisational groups in times of change. Since discursive activity can be perceived as an integral element of people's social actions, it seems reasonable to suggest that research focusing on organisational culture change projects would benefit from embracing some more discourse-sensitive approaches.

In terms of the research design, most of the studies on organisational culture change initiatives adopt a retrospective focus (e.g. Harris and Metallinos, 2002; Murphy and Mackenzy Davey, 2002; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003). However, as this case has vividly illustrated, Weick's (1995) proposition that sensemaking changes with time should be taken more seriously by organisational culture researchers. Studies of attitudes, perceptions and experiences of culture change programmes might be richer when investigated over a period of time, not least because it offers the researcher the opportunity to explore the evolving sensemaking around the change initiatives. On a similar note, Harris and Ogbonna (2000), as well as Alveson and Sveningsson (2008) argued for more longitudinal research, as these 'could supply a greater understanding of

timeframe and gamut of responses' to culture change initiatives (Harris and Ogbonna, 2000:336).

Finally, the here discussed study has proposed a novel interpretation of the concept of organisational depression and introduced the notion of organisational delusion. These two concepts were linked to the distortions of identity dynamics and subsequently theorised as an extension to the organisational pathologies identified by Hatch and Schultz (2002). In the case of Aporia, organisational depression was linked to a traumatic period of toxic leadership. The data on which the analysis of organisational depression was based was, however, retrospective, due to the difficulties with access to the organisation at that time. Therefore, I believe that it might be useful to follow the dynamics of climbing out of organisational depression more closely. At this point, one could focus the analysis on the micro-level and investigate participant's lived experiences of organisational depression, or look more broadly at the distorted processes of identity formation in times of depression. It would be particularly interesting to learn how organisations can recover from depression and how participant's make sense of their experiences. Should organisation depression be conceptualised as a state or rather as a process?

Similarly, the concept of organisational delusion calls for more empirical investigation. In the case of Aporia, organisational delusion was linked to the concept of hyper-identity, where nice sounding identity claims were taken for a representation of organisational reality, disregarding the gulf between the officially espoused discourse and the lived experiences of the participants. Organisational culture change project was here seen as perpetuating the gulf between the fantasy of a being mode of relating to values (see Fromm 1976), where values would be embraced by organisation's participants and embedded in organisational reality, with the reality of an instrumental approach to values (or, in Fromm's terms, the having relatedness to values). The findings from this research, however, only illustrate how organisations can fall into a delusion. More empirical investigation of organisations suffering from delusion would help to strengthen the concept. Is delusion a common state of affairs in organisations mesmerised by the excellence promise, or is it a rare pathology that only the unlucky few fall prey of? If delusion confuses the professed with the reality, does it mean that organisational delusion is a self-perpetuating malady? If the double hermeneutics of

values prompts participants to believe that organisational values are indeed embraced, does this mean that with time values will indeed become embedded in organisational reality beyond the realm of discourse? Investigation of these and similar questions would undoubtedly help to theorise organisational delusion further than the confines of the present study have allowed.

10 References

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