The organizations moving but where are the organizational actors? An exploration of cultural and identity change

Abstract

This paper argues that strong identification within organizational subcultures in project teams, involved in the design and build of the ITER project France, allowed organizational actors to interpret communication tools, giving them a sense of identity which subsequently gave the team a sense of meaning and security that ensured their engagement and identification in a way that the organizational culture was unable to create. This paper goes on to illustrate the different dynamics which are played out at different levels of the organization and explores the way that resources for creating identity and meaning hindered the creation of a single and monolithic culture, and which more closely represented a fragmented and contested culture (Morgan, 1986; Clegg et al, 2005). The paper discusses the role of communication tools, in this process. The paper concludes that in a structural sense organizations can be developing for years, while an organisational identity, can dependent upon context, develop or change at a far slower pace.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide an analysis of the literature and a description of the qualitative research process chosen to understand how identity processes using evolving communication tools, for creating identity and meaning are hindering the creation of a single and monolithic culture, and which more closely represent a fragmented and contested culture.

I conducted research within an organisation whose management team was attempting to manage and to an extent change their image by changing the design of their communication tools. The management team at ITER Project, France, a revolutionary international power generation project, were interested in finding out how the multi national project was perceived internally, whether it affected the organisational culture and what the influence was on actors and stakeholder identity. The organisation had formed a project team for the development of communication tools by bringing together organisational actors who had previously worked in other sections of the international project. Strong identification with this subculture gave actors a sense of meaning and identity in a way that the central culture was unable to create. The actors discussed high engagement with parts of the culture whilst being disengaged with other parts. Disengagement is different from notions of denial because it is more active and more knowing on the part of the individual (Goffman, 1961, Thomas and Linstead, 2002).

Literature Review

The culture, identity and change literature was examined prior to primary research being undertaken.

Organizational culture

In this paper, I accept the version of culture as something an organisation is and also, in line with Alvesson, (2002), organisational culture is accepted as an *'umbrella concept for a way of thinking which takes on a particular direction rather than mirroring a concrete reality for particular study.'*

This concurs with Frost et al's definition (1985:17) reproduced in Alvesson, (2002) which states *'talking about organisational culture seems to mean talking about the importance for people of symbolism- of rituals, myths, stories and legends- and about the interpretation of events, ideas, and experiences that are influenced and shaped by the groups within which they live. Culture is then a system of common symbols and meanings'.*

Culture in this paper is viewed as shared meanings derived from individuals interacting with one another (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984). Frost et al (1985) defines organizational culture as *'to mean talking about the importance of symbolism- of rituals, myths, stories and legends.'* Alvesson (2002) states that although organization culture includes values and assumptions about social reality these are less meaningful than meanings and symbolism in cultural analysis. Alvesson (2002) uses the term *'organizational culture as an umbrella concept for a way of thinking which takes a serious interest in cultural and symbolic phenomena. This term directs the spotlight in a particular direction rather than mirroring a concrete reality for possible study.'* Culture is then central to understanding behaviour reactions and interpretations within the organization; it is a setting, within which these phenomena can be understood.

Organization Identity and Organizational Culture

Barlney et al (198938) said *'organizational identity is a product of sense making.'* Dutton and Dukerich (1991) stated that having a sense of self is evident in organizations. Sense making is the process by which we ask *'how can I know what I think until I hear what I say'* (Weick, 1979. p. 134). The important components of sense making are the actor, retention, selection, and enactment. It is the process that involves observing organizational events, detecting and isolating patterns of association amongst events and translating them into meaningful terms. This paper is examining organizational identity during organizational change at the organizational level so this could be altered to say 'How do we know what we think until we hear what we say?' This is in accordance with Giddens (1991) who emphasizes the importance of self- reflection and self consciousness in understanding how we understand ourselves in relation to the culture of the organization. These self- reflexive processes are balanced by feedback from others (Mead, 1934;, Sarason, 1995). These 'others' reiterate the notion of social comparison.

In order to understand how organizational actors are interpreting communication tools in their identification process we need to understand the way things happen in the organization over time. The result of actions and behaviours associated with how an organization defines itself is the framework by which organization culture manifests itself. Identity focuses on who we are and culture focuses on how we get things done. Organizational identity is not an end in itself. It is often noticeable in the behaviour of the organizational actors within the culture and may be viewed through the organizations

culture to answer the questions who are we? Our identity influences our behaviour and our culture is the result of our behaviour. An organizations culture will reinforce the development of desired identity. It is social identity which drives the creation of culture. Organizational culture addresses the internal aspects of the organization in terms of values, beliefs and assumptions. Organizational identity gives the internal and external stakeholders a reference point for what the organization is.

The literature on culture and identity is often linked and early literature struggled to justify their separation. Dutton and Dukerich (1991:546) stated:

… *'an organization's identity is closely tied to its culture because identity provides a set of skills and a way of using and evaluating those skill that produce characteristic ways of doing things…'"cognitive maps''' like identity are closely aligned with organizational traditions'.*

Identity

Based on the theories of Cooley (19202), Mead (1934), and Goffman (1959), Albert & Whetton (1985) defined organizational identity as members shared beliefs of organizational characteristics that are central, distinctive and temporally continuous. They proposed that organizational identity ask the question '*who are we as an organization?'* Organizational identity describes the essence of an organization (Albert & Whetten, 1985). According to this viewpoint, it is important to understand what an organizations identity is because it becomes a way in which organizations define themselves to customers, employees, suppliers, and investors. An organizations identity may influence the actions taken by individuals. Albert and Wheeton first defined organizational identity as being fixed and this has caused considerable debate. Just as an individual's identity develops and grows without the individual becoming unrecognizable so the organization can undergo change. For this reason, this paper adopts the Alvesson & Svengingsson, (2003) definition that identity is a process in which individuals create several more or less contradictory and often changing managerial identities (identity positions) rather than one stable, continuous manager identity. While multiple studies have documented types of organizational identity noticeably lacking are works on the formation process of identity. In order to put a boundary around the level of identity this paper will focus on, I am adopting a definition of workplace identity as referring to the distinctiveness and status self-categorizations used by an individual to signal his or her identity in a specific workplace (Elsbach, 2004a). This definition, therefore includes, individual, group and organizational identity.

These self-categorizations include personal identity (Turner, 1999) signifying a persons group and status categorizations, e.g. 'I'm a motivated team player' and social identity categories (Tajfel, 1982), which focus on status and distinctive categories such as '*I'm a member of the management team.*' These identity categories, although not necessarily related directly to a work situation are how organizational actors describe themselves at work e.g. 'someone's sister.'

This definition stems from several branches of organizational and psychological research including research in situated identities (Alexander and Lauderdale, 1977; Ibarra, 1999) and identity centrality, (Sherman, Hamilton and Lewis, 1999) which define identity in relation to context. This would suggest that the specifics of an identity's self- categorizing can vary according to context (Brickson, 2000). Brewer (1991) goes further to suggest that because categorization is based on social comparison and categorization theories; identity categorization confers status based on the legitimacy and rank associated with a category and distinctiveness based on inclusion or exclusion from specific categories.

Therefore, our personal self categorizing, by defining us at work, says how we are distinct and how we compare with in groups. However our social categorizing says how our group is distinct and how it compares with our groups. Status and distinctiveness are components of workplace identity (Elsbach 2004). Turner (1987) has suggested that individuals deliberately choose to define themselves as members of specific groups or categories. Self categorization theorists propose that individuals choose to define themselves as members by selecting self categorizations which illustrate positive distinctiveness and comparing themselves with others. They say and do things to try to change the parameters so that a subjectively more meaningful and self-favouring identity becomes salient (Hogg and Terry, 2000:125). Hatch (1993) defined identity as how we define and experience ourselves and this identity is affected by our activities and beliefs and justified by our cultural assumptions. Hatch also made the link between physical symbolic artefacts (in the case of ITER these symbolic artefacts are the communication tools) and identity by stating that we use our cultural artefacts symbolically to present an image that will be interpreted by others. Hatch also linked this with culture when proposing that while our projected image is put into context by our cultural heritage the interpretations that others make are put into context by their own culture. If these people are members of the same organization then this culture-identity–image routine is fairly contained. When external influences are involved such as stakeholders, identity and image become more interdependent. I would argue that how we embed identity in organizational culture and how our identity expresses cultural understandings is at least partly through symbolic artefacts, in this case communication tools, so therefore it becomes important to examine the link between culture and identity.

Dutton and Dukerich (1991) state that others reactions affect identity as those reactions are mirrored on to us and this process would encourage organisational members to involve themselves in issues which would change public opinion of their organisation. This would suggest that there is a difference in how organisational members perceive themselves and their organizations and how external stakeholders see them and if there is a discrepancy then the members are motivated to change that image or identity and to align with what they believe others think of them. Dutton and Dukerich then suggested we *'might better understand how organizations behave by asking where individuals look, what they see, and whether or not they like the reflection in the mirror'* (1991, p.551).This mirroring process, in terms of the link between identity and image was described by Dutton and Dukerich (1991:550) as

.... 'What people see as their organization's distinctive attributes (its identity) and what they believe others see as distinctive about the organization (its image) constrain, mold and fuel interpretation…. Because image and identity are constructs that organization members hold in their minds, they actively screen and interpret issues like the Port Authority's homelessness problems and actions like building drop-in centers using these organizational reference points.'

From this we could then propose that organizational actors then construct their identity in relation to the events and images around them and also in relation to what we perceive ourselves to be. Hatch & Schultz (2002) has claimed that when we do not accept the images we have of ourselves or our organization we seek to alter these images. Hatch went on to state that what sustained this sense of ourselves as different from the image through the organizational mirror was the organizational culture.

When organizational images are mirrored in identity they will be interpreted in relation to an existing organizational identity which is embedded in cultural understanding. Subsequently, this identity will be altered or reinforced through the process of reflection, the reflection process then encompassing the deep cultural values and assumptions of its actors which then becomes closely associated with the identity. Hatch & Schultz (2002) proposed that we come to perceive objects, cultural artefacts, as possessing those meanings experience adds to them. I would propose that we as actors carry that meaning implicitly and through the artefacts as a tool, a language, we translate the implications and make sense of our cultural understanding bringing them to a cultural surface. These artefacts then are used in a self-defining, identity forming process. I would argue though that the process by which cultural meaning and artefacts meets is one of social construction.

Organizational actors will make the organizations character known by its outgoing discourse (brochures, advertising and other communication tools) and this communicates identity as an organization within the organization and to others as image outside the organization. So not only is identity the organization members' expression of its intended public culture to underscore its intended values and assumptions but also used to attract the external community. Rindova and Fombrun (1998:60) stated that; projected images reflect not only a firm's strategic objectives but also its underlying identity. Images that are consistent with organizational identity are supported by multiple cues that observers receive in interacting with firms.

When symbolic objects like these are used to express an organizations identity their meaning is closely linked to the distinctiveness that lies within any organization culture (Hatch, 2000). Individuals can alter organizational identities and the relationship between individuals and organizations is reciprocal just as organizational identities can influence individual behaviour and individual behaviour can influence organizational identities (Pratt & Foreman, 2000). Nagel (1994) found that ethnic and cultural identity develops through an on going dialectic between individual processes of self- perception and external political, social, and economic forces. We can also realize our social identity through our workplace or through our personal relationships. It is often necessary to communicate our identity be it social or organization, to others. Accurate representation of our identity helps us as well as others to navigate our way through our environment. Presenting our identity helps guide behaviour along appropriate lines. We behave differently when we are aware of others identities. In the case of ITER artefacts are a means through which not only identity is communicated but also we use the information gained from the interpretation of our surroundings as a sensor to alter our identity and the signals we send to others.

Symbols and Artefacts
This section on symbols and artefacts focuses on how meaning is attributed to or constructed from symbols and artefacts. '*Organizational symbols and symbolic activity are important indicators of group and organizational identity narratives*'(Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Symbols in communication tools allow the user to publicly and concretely affirm or display their affiliation with, or affection for, an organization in the same way as we may display a company logo on our car windscreen or wear our university's logo on our sportswear. Association with a group is visibly marked and proclaimed through using or displaying a symbol. Visible symbols are in fact powerful statements of affiliation and identity perhaps because they are physical. Given the potentially powerful communication

impact of symbols I considered that worthwhile to study the relationship between symbols, identity and change in communication tools.

There is a two way relationship between identification with the organization and attraction to the organization's symbols. Higher levels of identification with the organization lead to higher levels of attraction to the organizations symbols, while higher levels of attraction to the organization's symbols lead to higher levels of identification with the organization. The idea of corporate identity design implicitly assumes that stakeholders can be drawn to organizations with the help of design (Morgan, 1999; Schrubbe-Potts, 2000).

What attracts organizational actors to interpret communication tools that might lead them to identify with the organization or to alter their own work place identity? There are two ways in which symbols vary from one another. One is the structure of the symbol (denotation) and the other is the content of the symbol (connotation). The structural aspect (denotation) is the physical properties that describe the communication tool for example, colour, shape and construction. This refers to the symbols most explicit, obvious and straightforward characteristics (Leed-Hurwitz, 1993). For example: *Is thelogo orange or yellow?* Henderson and Cotes (1998) studied denotative aspects of symbols and found that several physical aspects of a symbol (in this case the work was specifically on logo's) naturalness, harmony, elaborateness, its proportional relationship all effect on whether the symbol is recognized and how much shared meaning arises from that recognition. They also tested other variables such as 'roundness', 'organic' and 'symmetric'. Research by Feucht (1989) suggests that men prefer diamond shapes and women prefer heart shapes and that the combined preference of two genders is an's' shape. Perhaps shapes that relate specifically to the organizations industry or service sector lead to higher instances of shared meaning. This highlights the fuzzy nature of the difference between denotative and connotative meaning in symbols. Perhaps the specific meaning of a shape cannot be captured in a denotative measurement of 'symmetry'. Uher (1991) suggests that both zig zag lines (which resemble bared teeth) and shapes which look like eyes elicit innate physiological avoidance behaviour in humans, so specific physical features of symbolic artefacts may generate special biological or physiological responses from humans.

Different colour combinations may be more pleasing and attractive than others and may have an effect onof the attraction of the physical artefact and subsequent identification from it. There are a number of ways in which colour can also have an effect. Research has shown that 'warm' colours are deemed more exciting, active and arousing than 'cool' colours (Adams &and Osgood, 1973; Bellizi, Crowley &and Hasty, 1983; Crowley, 1993; Hamid &and Newport, 1989). In addition, warm colours draw us closer. So an orange wall would make us move nearer to it and a blue wall would notrather than a blue wall (Bellizi, Crowley &and Hasty, 1983). Research also shows that 'cool' colours are evaluated more positively than 'warm' colours (Bellizi, Crowley and Hasty, 1983; Crowley, 1993; Guilford, 1934; Guliford and Smith, 1959; McManus, Jones and Cottrell, 1993).

When examining logo design (Dondis Dondis, 1974; Swinehart, 1996) found the degree of complexity affected its attractiveness. Henderson &and Cote (1998) used a variable called 'elaborate' (made up of individual scores of 'complexity', 'activity,' and 'depth') and found that logos scoring at moderate level of elaborateness were preferred to logos scoring at moderate levels of elaborateness which were preferred to logos that were either too simple or too elaborate. They also found that a logo's level of harmony (made up of measures called 'representativeness' and 'organic') or not has a significant effect on logo

effect. Henderson &and Cote (1998) also found that natural-ness had an influence on whether or not a logo commanded a 'shared meaning' among participants.

A symbol can be defined as an object – a word or statement, a kind of action or a material phenomenon- that stands ambiguously for something else and/ or more than the object itself (Cohen, 1974). Alvesson (2002) definition is of a symbol as rich in meaning in a particular object and therefore communicates meaning in an economic way. The complexity of a symbol and the meaning it expresses calls for considerable interpretation. Naturally, people have their own private symbols, the meaning of which is relevant to them, however in this context it is the organizational meaning which is of importance.

Communication tools, as artefacts, using the metaphor of a language, allow us to form, affirm or influence our identity within the daily fabric of organizational life. Understanding the role artefacts, such as communication tools, play in the affirmation or alteration of our workplace identities could assist us in both managing change.

Change

Presumably organizational change should be easy to define, as it is an observable phenomenon. Change can be a set of relevant points measured at a point in time and then re-measured at a second point in time. If there is a variance in the measurements then change has occurred. Van de Ven & Poole, (1995, p510) defined change as …"*empirical observation of difference in form, quality, or state over time in an organizational entity*". However, when examining the micro process of organizational actors this approach could pose difficulties. Researchers have proposed that it is crucial to understand change recipients reactions to change and the way they shape change (Isabella, 1990; Labianca et al., 2000; Balogun & Johnson, 2004). McKinley et al. (2000) propose that major initiatives such as a cultural change program will produce an employee response but may not necessarily bring about change if we have defined change as an observable difference in characteristics.

An organizational level phenomenon such as actors' responses to organizational level change is translated into a series of individual level change events in which the actor experience change directly (Dean et al, 1998; Wanous, Reicher & Austin, 2000).What this suggests then is that organizational change may have different effects on different parts of the organization (Daft & Weick, 1984). For example, incidences of re-structuring involve changes in the reporting structure and resources. However, these changes may not be equally spread around the organization. Some may be unaffected whereas some may have new leadership. Some may experience a substantial shift in resources, positively or negatively, others little at all.The focus of this paper is on organization level change events, which are intended to be transformational in nature when viewed from the organization actors' perspective. We accomplish organizational transformation by changing the ways actors in the organizations behave (Ledford et al, 1989; Ledford & Mohrman, 1993). Therefore, organizational level changes may or may not lead to a transformation of the organization (Sastry, 1997) depending on the degree to which actors transform their behaviour (Reger et al, 1994).

The mechanism by which an actor's response is formulated is a cognitive one in which the actor decides whether he or she has been personally affected by the change. This paper focuses on the particular type of individual characteristic and the actor's identification with the organization and the role communication tools help shape the actor's identity and subsequently response to change. The literature provides some insight into the types of

organizational change events which may be expected to provoke behavioural reactions in organization members. Examples of large scale change events can include mergers, setting up of different international teams and changes of culture, all of which are apparent in the ITER case study . The results of these changes generally reposition the organization in relation to its environment. This can be contrasted with a relocation of an office which has an impact that is generally internal. It may be disruptive to actors within the organization but is unlikely to impinge on the organizations dealings with its environment. Some benefit may be gained if management is prepared for these changes and these benefits can be in terms of whether actors in the organization accept and support these changes or they are revised (Greenlaugh & Rosenblatt, 1984). By definition these changes affect a large proportion of the organizational actors (Ledford et al, 1989; Cameron, Sutton & Whetton, 1988). Consequently, if we manage these changes, understanding the reaction organizational actors may have means they may be more likely to succeed and have a positive impact in the organization. These changes often generate publicity for the organizations when they are implemented (McKinley et al, 2000). How well they are managed can have a positive impact on this publicity with a consequent influence of the organizations reputation (Fombrun, 1996). Change, in terms of the case study used here, is introduced by a senior management decision in collaboration with the seven nation partners and enacted by middle managers. This senior management action which initiates the change can be called a large scale organizational change event. When considering the impact of these change events a number of categories may be documented. For example, we could look at whether all change events are equal or whether changes initiated in different organizational systems have different impacts on organizational characteristics.

Tsoukas & Chia (2002) have argued that social reality is not composed of solid objects that are complete and in some sense 'finished' interacting with each other. They regard social reality as always being in a state of becoming. Our reality then is constantly shifting with some episodes being more in flux than others. Our positions within the organization can change as an individual (having to relocate) as a group (being given a new project) as an organization (targeting a new market) and these factors operate in tandem. Sometimes our interpretation of communication tools is unconscious and sometimes conscious. It follows that our interpretations are transient and subject to change and re evaluation in a constantly shifting organization. However, recently there has been a move to change the focus. Change at the level of the organization or industry has been explored, but it has been argued that a more micro level analysis is necessary in order to gain a fuller understanding of the dynamics of strategic change (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003). Arguments have come from empirical research on organisational innovation and situated practice (Johnson & Huff, 1997). In order to understand the effect of the processes of change there is a need to incorporate the lived experience of the actor.

Schein (1985) has suggested that by breaking down that which has become taken for granted and the building up of that which is new, the use of symbolic devices is important. Trice & Beyer (1985) have shown that the use of symbolic rituals helps us not only maintain continuity but also evoke change. In order to instil change, leaders can use and modify those shared symbols to promote their message and these may be effective where other methods such as revised recruitment have not been (Bennis & Nannus, 1985). To quote Johnson (1990) *'there is a link between the management of substantial strategic change and symbolic intervention and that link has to do with the importance of relating changes in that which is taken for granted to new visions of strategy but in terms and through means which are meaningful to the organization.'*

The literature leads to a conclusion that many factors may potentially influence organisational actors' responses including the change outcomes and the actual processes of the change itself.

Organizational actors' response to change process
Effective communication plays an important role in organizational actors' responses to change events (Brockner, De Witt, Rover & Reed 1990, Buckhardt, 1994). The literature focuses on three aspects of open communication. Firstly, the more open the communication between managers and employees the more positive employees feel about that change. If organizational actors feel that information is being hidden from them then they are more likely to resist that change (Wanburg, Bunce & Gavin, 1999) and will demonstrate lower commitment to the organization (Gilmore, Shea & Useem, 1997). Another dimension is the reason for the change. If management does not give a viable reason for the change the organizational actors are more likely to resist that change (Newman, Bennett, Bies & Martin 1998).

The strongest relationship between individual characteristics and individual responses to a change are those which have the organization as the focus. For example, individuals who demonstrate a high level of commitment to the organization prior to the change are likely to respond more positively than those who do not; (as are individuals who trust the organization and its management (Brockner et al 1997). Strategy can be understood as a search for meaning. Weigert (1988:268) in Brown & Starkey, (2000) wrote '*We have only those socially constructed identities that we can construct in our conversations with others. Identities …are realized in stories.*'

The socializing approach assumes that change in behaviour interactions amongst actors will lead to change in beliefs and organisational culture (Bate et al., 2000). This means that the speed and success of change is internal because the meaning of events is understood through discussion and social construction.

Exploring an alternative perspective drawn from the psychology literature Kahn (1990) argues that people occupy roles at work to a varying degree. Based on Goffman's (1961) work he suggests that people can use varying degrees of their personal selves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, in the roles they perform. The assumption is that people are constantly bringing in and leaving out various depths of their selves during the course of their work days and on a continual basis depending on work contexts. Kunda (1992:329) also draws upon up Goffman's (1961) idea that "individuals are stance taking entities" and that they "take up a position somewhere between identification with an organization and opposition to it", and that these individuals can shift the balance by changing their involvement in either direction at even the smallest [upsetting] trigger. Kahn developed the terms *personal engagement* and *personal disengagement*. Personal engagement is the expression of a person's preferred self in task behaviours that promote connections to work and to others, full emotional and cognitive personal presence and active full role performances. Personal disengagement is the simultaneous withdrawal and defence of a person's preferred self and identity resulting in passive, incomplete role performances. It has been argued that engagement is driven by organisational actors' sense of finding meaning within work, feeling degrees of safety plus having both personal and organizational resources available to complete the job (Kahn, 1990; May, Hilson and Garter, 2004).

When organizational actors fail to adopt the aims and values of organizational change programs the prescriptive change literature characterizes this inertia as a form of "denial" at the level of the individual (Bridges, 1991). One of the arguments used is that the individual's "bounded rationality" is created and maintained through cultural lenses (Simon, 1957), and may function to create commitment to all activity which preserves the current cultural paradigm. Thus these lenses act as filters for making sense of activity which means that "upsetting events" in the forms of organizational upheaval may be denied or not even recognized as significant by individuals at the lower levels of the organization (Weick, 1995). This view of culture is problematic because it reduces the notion of agency, constructing the individual as a passive recipient, capable of being manipulated and conditioned by organizational culture into either denial, or blind acquiescence and commitment (Willmott, 1993).

Research has shown that major change efforts can register as a threat to identity and can lead to some organizational actors selectively focusing on positive aspects of the organization (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Reger, Mullane, Gustafson, & DeMarie, 1994). This is not necessarily always positive as Dutton et al (1994) noted that *'...changes in structure, culture, organizational performance, organizational boundaries, or organizations competitive strategy may induce members to revise their perceptions of organizational identity and construed external image'* (p15).
Gagliardi (1986) maintains that the organization's primary strategy is to adopt instrumental and expressive strategies in order to protect the organizational identity. The very nature of identity suggests an integrative function (for example, *'who we are within an organization'*). The problem is one of understanding the process by which we maintain versus change our identity and what affects this process and in which ways. The relationship between the organizational physical symbolic artifacts and our identity process within the organization has not been closely investigated. This paper asks a number of questions relating to this relationship.

This paper researches organizational change as a process of becoming (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) and adopts a detailed micro analysis of the lived experience of the actors. Organizational change situations are not populated by fixed identities operating according to fixed routines, but are ongoing processes in which actors' beliefs are interwoven, habits and new actions collide and new experiences are encountered and have to be accounted for in the sense-making of actors (Beech, 2000). Management may pressure for change and this can mean conflict if groupings of actors are resistant to change (Fahey, 1981; Pettigrew, 1985; Johnson, 1987). These actors will draw on their values and symbols of the state of the organization prior to change in order to legitimize their view point and deny any need for change (Lorsch, 1986). When in circumstances of organizational change actors will gossip, tell stories and recognize symbolic behavior (Balogun & Johnson (2004). I used these concepts as a base to analyse why organisational actors can in these circumstances reject the organisational culture but maintain a strong sense of identity with their sub cultures.

Change, emotion and context

In organizational life, social contexts can be portrayed as unstable and contradictory (Gioia et al, 2000; Jackall, 1998; Sennet, 1998; Watson, 1999); . cCited in Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003). These elements of change and contradiction create instability and individuals search for ways to deal with and understand anxiety and their own identity.

There is also variation on how people draw on and depend on different sources of identity stabilizers in the organization - in this case communication tools. Identity here relates to the question *'who am I?'* and *'where am I?'* As Giddens (1991) stated *'the self as reflexity understood by the person... self identity is continuity'*.

Failure to embrace the aims of a culture change program is characterized by the prescriptive change literature as a form of "denial" at the level of the individual (Bridges, 1991). The individual is constructed as a passive recipient capable of being manipulated by organizational culture into either denial, or blind acquiescence and commitment (Willmott, 1993). When organizational actors fail to adopt the aims and values of organizational change programs the prescriptive change literature characterizes this inertia as a form of "denial" at the level of the individual (Bridges, 1991). One of the arguments used is that the individual's "bounded rationality" is created and maintained through cultural lenses (Simon, 1957), and may function to create commitment to all activity which preserves the current cultural paradigm. Therefore these lenses act as filters for making sense of activity which means that "upsetting events" in the forms of organizational upheaval may be denied or not even recognized as significant by organizational actors at the lower levels of the organization (Weick, 1995). This view of culture is problematic because it reduces the notion of agency, constructing the individual as a passive recipient, capable of being manipulated and conditioned by organizational culture into either denial, or blind acquiescence and commitment (Willmott, 1993).

Shared understandings or meanings are important to organizations and seemingly routine behaviour frequently involves actors making interpretations regarding the appropriate actions to be taken in a particular context. This was defined as 'negotiated order' by Day and Day (1977) and 'practical action or situated action' by Suchman (1983). Balogun & Johnson (2004) have proposed that the interpretations that middle managers arrive at affects the way structures during change are developed This action of understanding (Rafaeli & Vilnai- Yavetz, 2004) involves two levels of understanding an action which will fit into a routine and the larger picture of the action performed within the context of the organization. Within the overall organizational context we understand the tasks and perspectives of other organizational members and an understanding of the organizations identity and other characteristics such as power. Schein (1985) established that organizations maintain shared understanding regarding organizational values, priorities and assumptions.
Understandings differ and their effects can be located at different levels of conceptualization. These levels can be defined as micro and macro, so micro would refer to individuals and their interactions and macro refers to social structure and culture (Wiley, 1999, p 255). The 'why' of why actions need to be taken would come from the macro level which is more abstract and involves the organizational structure and culture. Routines operate at both these levels (Rousseau, 1985; House et al 1995). These different levels influence and interchange with one another (Wiley, 1988).

Methodology

This section describes a research design which was aimed at understanding how and with what effect the communication tools project has on creating identity and meaning which

hindered the creation of a single and monolithic culture, and which more closely represented a fragmented and contested culture. This was an action research approach and was pertinent because I was able to interact with all participants including the key decision makers while also providing an understanding of the context and history that were shaping events. Narrative strategy was used to focus on the meaning of processes for individuals-that is the way they are experienced, visual process mapping was used to trace overall physical change patterns and laddering to focus on the mechanisms of emotions and power aspects. Consideration of the topic and the exploratory nature of the research identified an action research paradigm using qualitative research techniques which allowed me as the researcher to view the research problem in its entirety, get close to participants, penetrate their realities, interpret their perception and work with them as approporiate.

The participants, who were organizational actors, interpreted the developing communication tools (referred to as artifacts), which they identified as being central to change incidents. The research techniques used to understand these interpretations within a change process were interviews with the participants over four phases using laddering and auto driving techniques, participant observation and photographic ethnography over a 3 month period. This gave the opportunity for an in-depth ethnographic experience in the context of place and over time which elicited micro level details on the processes involved in interpretation and consequent identity formation processes.

In order to access the range of participants and behavior of interest and to achieve saturation, a total of 40 interviews were conducted. While the sample design provided a broad range of responses, participants were by no means randomly selected or statistically representative of the entire organization. A total of 10 participants, took part going through from stage 1 to stage 4 of the interviews. The initial objective in phase one of the interviews was to find out about the organizational culture and whether or not participants were aware of interpreting physical artifacts, and whether or not the information gained was used to make sense of their organization and any issues arising within the organization. Phase 2 consisted of interviews with an issue focus aiming to find out what issues within the organization, at that time, were important to organizational actors and what their feelings towards them were. Phase 3 consisted of interviews using auto driving techniques with photographs and documents focused more on specific artifacts, previously discussed by participants to find out about participants themselves and their perception of their own and others identity in relation to the physical areas. Phase 4, again using a selection of photos chosen by the participants focused even further on physical attributes by using laddering techniques to take the participants from attributes of the physical artifacts to values. After participants had time to reflect, I photographed any areas that they had mentioned and asked them to discuss what was happening in the photographs and what it meant to them.

My initial research objective was to explore the process by which the artifacts are interpreted by organizational actors and to examine the possible relationship among the different categories and levels of organizational actors and frequency of use of the interpretation of physical objects.

This paper reports on qualitative research conducted within an autonomous project team and with different stakeholders. Prior to the creation of this communication tools project the organisational actors had been employed by other international participant organisations in the main ITER project. The result was an organisation which consisted of multiple, distinct and disparate sub cultures.

In this context, the communication director was charged with leading a cultural change which included embedding the new values and behavior across the project team and beyond. Analysis of the data collected showed a certain amount of disconnect between the strategic direction in which the organization was moving, and the experience felt or 'lived' by the employees, almost as though the organization was going through a transformation whilst the people were feeling 'left behind'. There were various reasons for this.

It was perceived that the newly created project team lacked a strong identity and that members of the project team went about their business *despite* it rather than being aided by it. The term 'stuck' was a common expression, intimating that the project team operated independently and territorially, in contradiction to the ethos of the organization being an organization that initiated a number of project teams, all of which should be interconnected and interdependent.

Several employees appeared to mourn a *loss* of identity, having previously been aligned to other projects. There was also some comment about the way that the organization was becoming 'unclassified', and its original identity of being 'important and secret' eroded. There were also issues surrounding the way that the project teams identified with the organization.

The paper argues that strong identification with the subcultures at the local project teams gave organizational actors a sense of meaning and security that ensured their engagement and identification in a way that the corporate culture was unable to create. For example employees gained status and legitimacy by drawing on their qualifications, experience or length of service as their own 'secure points of reference' (Thomas & Linstead, 2002:8). This 'localized' form of constructing identity resulted in higher engagement and identification with close colleagues and local managers, as their identities were constantly constructed through similarities as well as uniqueness, differences and superiority (Parker, 1997). This simultaneously enabled them to disengage from the communication directors attempts to move people towards a more unified organizational culture. Despite systems and structural change over two years the organizational actors continued to identify with their local cultures at the expense of subscribing to the idealized notion of a more 'unified' culture at the organizational level.

The idea that people can use varying degrees of self and identity in work enlarges the space for personal choice. This paper also argues that it allows for the possibility of high engagement with certain parts of the organisational culture whilst being disengaged with other parts, and that disengagement is different from notions of denial – it is more active and more knowing on the part of the individual. With this view we acknowledge that it is an employee's 'pursuit of autonomy' (Ackroyd and Thompson (1999:7) which leads to the choice of whether to, or where to engage, rather than a deviant, misplaced or denying perception of corporate cultural change events. For practitioners the paper provides lessons in how to engage organisational actors in change and suggests that following on from restructuring and merger activity, centralised cultural initiatives, whilst seemingly necessary and desirable, may prove to be counterproductive in creating a unified identity.

This paper illustrates the different dynamics which are played out at different levels of the organization and explores the way that resources for creating identity and meaning

hindered the creation of a single and monolithic culture, and which more closely represented a fragmented and contested culture (Morgan, 1986; Clegg et al, 2005). In conclusion in a structural sense organizations can be "on the move" for years and years, while the individuals' cultural identity can develop or change at a far slower pace.

References (incomplete)

Ackroyd, S. and Thompson, P. 1999 *Organisational Misbehaviour*. Sage.

Balogun, J. and Johnson, G. (2004) Organizational restructuring and middle manager sensemaking, *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol 47. No 4, 523-549.

Beech, N (2000) Narrative styles of managers and workers. *The Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, Vol. 36 No.2;

Bridges, W., *Managing transitions*. 1991. Addison Welsey

Clegg, S.R. , Kornberger, M. and Rhodes, C., (2005) "Learning/Becoming/Organising." *Organisation*. Vol. 12, No.2, pp 147 - 167

Fahey, L.(1981) Ön strategic Management Decision Processes. *Strategic Management Journal*, 2 .

Gagliardi, P. (1986) The creation and change of organizational cultures: A conceptual framework. *Organizational Studies*, 7, 117-134.

Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gioia, D.A. & Thomas, J.B. (1996) Identity, image and issue interpretation: Sensemaking during strategic change in academia. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41, 370-405.

Goffman, E. (1961). *Encounters: Two studies in the sociology of interaction*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril Co.

Johnson, G.(1987) Strategic Change and the Management Process. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice-Hall.

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal,* 33, 692-724.

Kunda, G. (1992) *Engineering Culture*. Temple University Press.

Lorsch , J. W.(1986) Manager's Culture: the invisible Barrier to Strategic Change. *California Management Review*, XXVIII, no 2.

May, D. R., Gilson, R. L., & Harter, L. M. (2004). The psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety and availability and the engagement of the human spirit at work. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 77,* 11-37.

Morgan, G. (1986) *Images of Organisation*. Sage.

Parker, M. (1997) "Studying Organisational Symbolism." *Organisation Studies.*

Pettigrew, A. M.(1985) *The Awakening Giant*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford .

Reger, R.K., Gustafson, L.T. Demarie, S. M. Mullane, J.V. (1994) Reframing the organization : Why implementing total quality is easier said than done. *Academy of Management Review*, 19, 565-584.

Simon, Herbert (1957). "A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice", in *Models of Man, Social and Rational: Mathematical Essays on Rational Human Behavior in a Social Setting*. New York: Wiley.

Thomas, R. and Linstead, A. (2002) "Losing the plot? Middle Managers and Identity." *Organization*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp 71 – 93.

Tsoukas, H. and Chia, R. (2002) On Organizational Becoming: Rethinking Organizational Change. *Organization Science,* Vol.13, No.5

Weick, K. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organisations*. Sage.

Willmott, H. (1993). `Strength is Ignorance; Slavery is Freedom : Managing Culture in Modern Organizations', *Journal of Management Studies, 30, 4.*