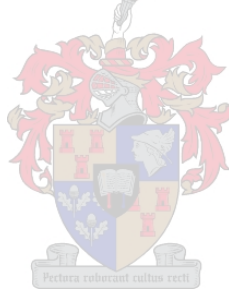


# IDENTITY IN ORGANISATIONS:

## A METHODOLOGICAL STUDY

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*Thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
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## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

This study examined organisational identity from a substantive and methodological point of view. With the burgeoning interest in the organisational identity construct, there have been a multitude of perspectives and meanings associated with the term. These perspectives formed the basis of three juxtapositions used to evaluate the nature of knowledge generated by various research designs used to study organisational identity. These designs included survey design, content analysis, case study design, ethnography, narrative analysis and discourse analysis. I concluded that the choice for a particular research design does constrain or make possible the generation of different types of knowledge regarding OI. The effect of design type has long been suspected and argued for, and this study provides further substantiation for this view. The choice of research design is not a neutral one but plays an integral role in the nature of the knowledge generated, and should be taken seriously as part of the research process.

Also from a methodological perspective, the aim was to explore whether an Internet-based, open-ended qualitative survey could provide a suitable description of organisational identity, and whether it would be possible to develop identity narratives from these responses. Data was gathered in a South African based multi-national engineering firm, the result of a recent merger of two engineering firms. Based on the responses to the survey, I was able to develop descriptive narratives of each of (what had been termed) the heritage organisations, each narrative comprising a series of inter-related identity statements capturing various facets of organisation identity. Three broad narratives for each heritage organisation dealt with the nature of the organisation and its position in the market, the importance of the profession and clients, and the value of people in the organisation.

Given the pervasive nature of technology, and that work in many corporate and professional settings is conducted via the internet, an internet-based qualitative survey allows information regarding organisational identity to be gathered fairly easily. The research undertaken in this study thus adds to the body of knowledge surrounding the use of a web-based qualitative survey in accessing organisational identity, and suggests that this form of data gathering in the organisation can be successful, provided that participants are computer literate and have access to the Internet.

The organisations in question were chosen as merger partners due to their similarity, and using the descriptive narratives developed from the survey, I was able to examine the question of distinctiveness in similar organisations, which has not yet been addressed. Despite the similarities, the identity of both

organisations was arguably distinct, and this could be traced to two factors. The first was an element of social actor, in this case the size of the organisation, which coupled with other factors influenced organisation identity in very specific ways. Secondly, distinctiveness arose from the construction of meaning around specific elements of the social actor by members of the organisations. Thus, much like personal identity, organisational identity is associated with similarity and difference (Buckingham 2008).

## Opsomming

Hierdie studie het ten doel gehad om the konsep van organisasie-identiteit te ondersoek vanuit 'n substantiewe en metodologiese hoek. Die groeiende belangstelling in die konstruk van organisasie-identiteit, gee aanleiding daartoe dat meervuldige perspektiewe en betekenis aan die term gegee word. Hierdie verskillende perspektiewe vorm die basis van drie naasmekaarstellings wat gebruik word om die aard van kennis, wat geskep word deur verskillende navorsingsontwerpe in die studie van organisasie-identiteit, behoorlik te bestudeer. Hierdie navorsingsontwerpe sluit in opnamestudies, inhoudsanalise, gevallestudies, etnografiese studies, teksontledings en diskoers analise. Ek het tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat die keuse van 'n bepaalde navorsingsontwerp weliswaar beperkend of fasiliterend van aard kan wees in die skeep van verskillende kennisbasse rondom organisasie-identiteit. Die impak van die tipe navorsingsontwerp word lankal reeds vermoed, en hierdie studie lewer verdere ondersteuning vir hierdie standpunt. Die keuse van 'n navorsingsontwerp is nie neutraal nie maar speel 'n integrale rol in die aard van die kennis wat geskep word en behoort aandag te geniet in the navorsingsproses.

Vanuit 'n metodologiese perspektief was die doelwit ook om te bepaal of 'n internet-gebaseerde, oop-einde kwalitatiewe opname, 'n toepaslike beskrywing en begrip van organisasie-identiteit kan lewer en of dit moontlik sou wees om identiteits-ontledings vanuit hierdie response te genereer. Data opnames is gedoen in 'n Suid-Afrika-gebaseerde internasionale ingenieurskonsultasiefirma, wat bestaan uit twee saamgesmelte firmas. Die response uit die opname het my toegelaat om beskrywende narratiewe van beide die oorspronklike organisasies te ontwikkel. Elk van hierdie bestaan uit 'n reeks van interafhanklike stellings oor identiteit wat die verskeie fasette van organisasie-identiteit verwoord. Daar was drie narratiewe vir elkeen van die oorspronklike organisasies en hierdie het gefokus op die aard en markposisionering van die organisasie, die belangrikheid van die profesie en kliente en die waarde van mense binne die organisasie.

Gegewe die deurtastende aard van tegnologie in veral korporatiewe en professionele omstandighede, sal 'n internet-gebaseerde kwalitatiewe opname die verkryging van inligting rondom organisasie identiteit vergemaklik. Die navorsing onderneem in hierdie studie dra dus by tot ons begrip van die toepassing van internet-gebaseerde kwalitatiewe opnames in die taksering van organisasie identiteit. Dit dui aan dat hierdie vorm van data-insameling in 'n organisasie suksesvol kan wees indien die respondente rekenaarvaardig is en toegang tot die internet het.

Die organisasies wat in die studie gebruik is, het tot 'n groot mate saamgesmelt aan die hand van hulle soortgelyke aard en waardes. Deur die beskrywende narratiewe te gebruik wat uit die opname ontwikkel is, kon ek die vraagstuk van onderskeidenheid in soortgelyke organisasies ondersoek, wat tot op daardie stadium nie gedoen was nie. Ongeag die ooreenkomste, is bevind dat die identiteit van beide die organisasies wel merkbaar verskil en dat dit toegeskryf kan word aan twee faktore. Die eerste hiervan is geëien as 'n sosiale agent, in hierdie geval die grootte van die organisasie, wat tesame met ander faktore die organisasie-identiteit op spesifieke manier beïnvloed het. Die tweede faktor ontstaan uit die konstruksie van betekenis rondom spesifieke elemente van die sosiale agent deur lede van die organisasies. Dit is dus duidelik dat organisasie-identiteit, soos persoonlike identiteit, geassosieer word met ooreenkomste en verskille (Buckingham 2008)

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*05/01/1934-23/07/2014*  
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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity as a substantive issue has enjoyed increasing attention over the last few years, and has been at the centre of debate and research in many fields of the social sciences and humanities, including sociology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy and political science, as well as management and organisational studies (Brown, 2001; Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol & Hatch, 2006; Fearon, 1999; Pratt & Kraatz, 2009; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998; Van Tonder, 2006).

To gain an idea of the number of studies in the field of identity (across various disciplines), Fearon (1999) searched dissertations, going back as far as 1981, for the word identity. He found that the number of dissertation abstracts including the concept “identity” had nearly tripled between the years 1981 and 1995, from 709-1911. During the years 1981 to 1985, the increase was approximately 2.3%, while the years 1986 to 1995 indicated an increase of 12%. Assuming this could be attributed simply to the increase in the number of dissertations over this period, Fearon conducted a similar search for the word “study”. Using this control measure, the number of dissertations increased on average by .64% for the years 1981 to 1985, and 4.4% for the years 1986-1995. It would thus appear that dissertations focussing on the term identity (in some form or another) have been increasing significantly faster than the number of dissertations in general.

Identification and identity have been studied at various levels, first at the level of the individual with a focus on personal identity, primarily in the work of Erikson (1959). Group identification has also been a focus of study in the form of Social Identity Theory, in the work of Henri Tajfel and his colleagues. Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008) suggest that the idea of organisational identification was hinted at by early organisational scholars, including Chester Barnard and Herbert Simon. Prior to this, Frederick Taylor suggested as early as 1911 that the goal of scientific management was the “close, intimate, personal cooperation between management and the men” (1911:44).<sup>1</sup> However, it was only in 1985 that the term organisational identity was formally used by Albert and Whetten (1985) as an interpretive framework to describe what they observed in faculty members as a result of a downsizing process. Since Albert and Whetten (1985) first used the term, organisational identity has enjoyed

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<sup>1</sup> The page number here refers to the i-Book and not the print version.



considerably more interest and the field is characterised by multiple theoretical approaches to identity (Corley et al, 2006; Nkomo & Cox, 1999; Pratt & Foreman, 2000b; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Van Tonder, 2004, 2006), and has been studied from several methodological perspectives (Aust, 2004; Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Chreim, 2005; Coupland & Brown, 2004; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Ruud, 1995).

Apart from the fact that identity is fundamental to each of us, and is thus interesting to study (Albert, Ashforth & Dutton, 2000; Gioia, 1998; Haslam, Postmes & Ellemers, 2003), there are two reasons why the study of organisational identity is important. First, because identity is a crucial part of what people think, feel and value, as well as how they act in social settings, the dynamics of identity, including those of organisational identity should be understood (Albert et al, 2000). Secondly, because identity bridges the gap between the micro and macro levels, it allows for interpreting approaches in understanding organisational settings and phenomena (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008; Albert, 1998; Gioia, 1998). This bridge is captured in the terms “identity” and “identification”, as each entity (at whatever level) must have “a sense of who or what it is, who or what other entities are, and how they are associated. Identities situate entities such that individuals have a sense of the social landscape, and identification embeds the individual in the relevant identities” (Ashforth et al, 2008: 326). Thus as an organisation identifies with elements in the broader societal environment and constructs “an identity”, so too organisational members identify with facets of the organisation, taking these as part of their own identity. Karreman and Alvesson (2001:60) capture the sometimes "blurred" nature of identity, reminding us that "...quests for identity intersect, intermingle and interact with organisational activity.... and organisational reality and work identities are simultaneously constructed".

### **1.1 The distinctiveness of Organisational Identity**

The original definition of organisational identity by Albert and Whetten (1985) considered those elements of the organisation assumed to be central, distinctive and enduring. Much debate on these dimensions has taken place, and questions have been raised about each of them. In the light of multiple organisation identities, questions have been asked about the possibility of widely-shared or central characteristics (Corley, 2004; Fiol, 1991; Fiol, Pratt & O'Connor, 2009; Glynn, 2000; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Pratt & Kraatz, 2009; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Ruud, 1995; Sillince & Brown, 2009). Further, given the constant construction of identity in talk, there have been questions on the temporal continuity associated with the construct (Brown, 2006; Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Brown, Humphreys & Gurney, 2005; Corley et al, 2006; Whetten, 2006). Finally,

the idea of distinctiveness is also a matter of some debate, challenged by some authors on the basis of the constraining factors of identification associated with identity. I will consider some of these arguments briefly.

Most researchers of organisational identity are in agreement regarding the existence of distinctiveness in organisational identity. Van Tonder (2011) suggests that the notion of uniqueness of organisations was highlighted by many authors prior to the conceptualisation of organisation identity as articulated by Albert and Whetten (1985). He observes that despite universal features displayed by organisations, they typically also defy categorisation. He cites the work of Argyris (1956:17) who highlighted that “organisations are in some respects like all other organisations, like some other organisations, and like no other organisations” (2011:632). The importance of distinctiveness lies in the organisation’s ability to distinguish itself competitively, leveraging the difference or uniqueness as competitive advantage (Van Tonder, 2011). In fact, organisational survival is viewed as being contingent on the organisation’s ability to differentiate itself competitively (Abimbola, 2009).

However the possibility of organisational distinctiveness in similar organisations (for example those engaged in the same type of business and operating in similar environments) has been challenged (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). This is based on the constraints inherent in similar organisation’s identifying with the same elements in their operating environment. The assumption is that, by identifying with particular features of the environment, in line with the organisation’s purpose and nature of business, constraints are placed on the degree to which the organisation can truly differ from other similar organisations (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). For example engineering firms, employing professional engineers and operating in a consulting environment would both be subject to the guidelines and constraints of the engineering profession as prescribed internationally and locally through legal and professional legislation. Furthermore, operating in a similar environment, namely consulting they are subject to similar discourses and practices that have come to be associated with best practice in a consulting environment at a particular moment in time. All these factors act as constraints in terms of what is possible and ultimately desirable with regard to the nature of the organisation, posing challenges to the organisation’s ability to truly distinguish itself. An opportunity presented itself to study two very similar organisations, newly-merged, based on their very similar characteristics. The firms in question had been very carefully evaluated to ensure similarity, so as to ensure the merger would be a success. This offered a unique opportunity to explore the distinctiveness of similar organisations operating in the same environment, and subject to similar demands and constraints.

## 1.2 The importance of organisational identity

The concept “identity” is often dismissed as “vague, hard to pin down, elusive”. Not surprisingly, several metaphors have been used in trying to describe the concept (Albert, 1998). Whetten likens identity to an onion, because “it is multi-layered (and perhaps has only a virtual center that, with quantum irony, vanishes when it is reached)” (quoted in Albert, 1998:11). Taking the metaphor further, much like an onion, peeling back the layers leads to tears, and, likewise, identity is accompanied by strong emotion. This is often the core of identity and the basis for identification (Albert, Ashforth, Gioia, Godfrey, Reger & Whetten, 1998).

Organisational identity plays an important role in locating the organisation in the physical, temporal and social world. Fiol and Huff (1992) liken organisational identity to a map. Like geographers, who use maps to depict the world, so that people understand where they are in relation to their physical environment, and where they can go from there, organisational identity provides a psychological reference point for management in guiding the organisation. Identity-related cognitions and assumptions (which are often deeply-ingrained and hidden) are powerful filters people draw on in making sense of their surroundings, and provide the basis for action. For this reason, organisational identity is important for strategic management (Sarason, 1995). If one considers strategy as “a theory of action”, and identity as “a theory of being”, strategy will flow from organisational identity, because who “we are” influences how “we will act”. Thus, the starting point for any strategic action will be the identity of the organisation, whether or not this is explicitly recognised. Given the importance of organisational identity, it is critical that management be able to access the nature of an organisation’s identity at a given moment in time.

Furthermore, organisational identity acts as a psychological anchor, playing a significant role in influencing how issues are interpreted, the accompanying emotional reactions and actions taken to deal with matters (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Fiol & Huff, 1992; Gustavson & Reger, 1995). When it comes to the interpretation of issues, identity acts as a gauge as to the importance of an issue, as well as influencing the meaning members assign to matters (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Furthermore, identity governs what can be regarded as legitimate interpretations of issues (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; King, Felin & Whetten, 2010). Identity influences member emotions by helping guide appropriate emotional responses, explaining both the direction and the level of emotional expression (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). When it comes to action, organisational identity provides routine activities for dealing with

matters, and guidelines against which the effectiveness of issue-related action is evaluated (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). As such, identity is the key to explaining why people respond to their environments the way they do, why they choose to stay or leave an organisation, why they approach their work and interact with others the way they do (Ashforth et al, 2008; Fiol & Huff, 1992).

The role organisational identity plays as psychological anchor has important implications for survival in a turbulent environment (Surgreen, 2010; Van Tonder & Lessing, 2003). By providing members with a set of guidelines in negotiating their environment, organisational identity helps keep focus on what is important and thus helps reduce uncertainty (Gustafson & Reger, 1995).

Organisational identity also has an important role to play during organisation change, as it has both positive and negative consequences for the latter. From a positive perspective, there is evidence that organisations with strong identities withstand organisational change more effectively (Van Tonder, 1999), as it provides a stabilising force through its essentially enduring character as both social actor and sense-making mechanism (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). From a negative perspective, organisational identity can inhibit the organisation's capacity to change as the mechanisms which act to bind and guide organisational interpretation and action, also provide a source of resistance to change (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Fiol & Huff, 1992; Gustafson & Reger, 1995).

From a more practical point of view, organisational identity (as defined in OIT) appears to be linked to organisational performance. Van Tonder (1999) found a consistent relationship between identity related organisational features and various measures of performance, namely turnover, profit, operating profit and total assets. Surgreen (2010) found that a strong sense of identity (SoI) influences employee behaviour, which in turn boosts or erodes performance. As such, organisational identity has strategic value, as it cannot be emulated and thus provides competitive differentiation (Van Tonder, 2011). For this reason, it is important to bring organisational identity to the surface in order to determine the impact on performance and competitive advantage.

Finally OI has implications for talent attraction and retention, not only in terms of employees but also in terms of consumers, business partners and shareholders, which is a necessity in competitive environments. The latter is particularly important in knowledge intensive organisations, where, owing to the lack of "measurable" results, clients build close ties with the organisation and its members in an attempt to ward off possible negative consequences (Alvesson, 2001).

Because of the significance accorded the concept of identity, questions are raised about how best to capture and study identity. Herein lies the methodological interest of this study.

### **1.3 Methodological interest**

Organisational identity has been studied in several different ways, including by means of quantitative surveys, content analytical studies, ethnographies, narrative studies, case studies and discourse analyses. Methodologically, there is considerable overlap in terms of designs used to study identity, complicated by the fact that one of the theoretical approaches to the study of identity is the narrative perspective. This is confounded by the fact that the organisation forms a natural “case”, which for this reason is often termed case studies. One of the aims of the study was therefore to set criteria for each design, so as to distinguish these which often, particularly in the case of organisational identity, become fairly blurred.

The confusion surrounding research designs and their usage extends beyond the field of organisational identity. Questions are raised by students and study supervisors alike as to what constitutes an appropriate design for a given research question. This is particularly so given the large number of students moving into social science research from fields traditionally associated with other forms of research. For examples engineers conducting research on management-related issues and veterinarians studying communities and their animal-related behaviour. These researchers are often faced with a wide range of possible research designs without clear guidelines as to which are most suitable for a given research question. Using organisational identity studies as an example, this study aims to identify key characteristics of various designs to make the distinction between these clearer.

Furthermore, the matter of research design and the nature of knowledge generated or constructed by a specific design has been suggested though not empirically demonstrated. The aim of this study is thus to demonstrate how different research designs construct knowledge about a specific field. Using organisation identity studies, the aim is to explore the relationship between research designs (used in the field of organisational identity research) and the nature of knowledge constructed by the design. The objective is thus to draw general conclusions regarding the relationship between research design and the nature of knowledge generated by exploring a specific context namely organisational identity research.

On a more practical level, bearing in mind organisational identity specifically, many of the designs employed are time-consuming. While they are able to depict organisational identity, they are difficult to carry out in large companies that are geographically dispersed, owing to time and geographical constraints. For example, case studies and ethnographies depend largely on the researcher for data-gathering by means of interviews and participant observation. The challenge in traditional surveys is that they are ill-suited to the exploration of identity, because in most instances they are designed with a fixed set of assumptions or questions, and identity is by nature considered to be “unique” or “distinctive”. One possibility is the use of a qualitative survey, which has as its aim the description of a phenomenon, particularly the diversity therein (Jansen, 2010). This allows for the open-ended exploration of organisational identity, as it is viewed by multiple organisational members. The qualitative survey, coupled with the internet as data-gathering medium, makes possible the study of organisations whose members are geographically dispersed and are spread globally. This provides a means of studying organisational identity in an open-ended way by reaching multiple organisational members, thus providing a multi-faceted view of organisational identity.

Before discussing the research objectives it is important to note that this study had two broad foci, a methodological as well as a substantive one. The methodological concern relates to exploring the relationship between research design and methodological choices and how these influence the nature of knowledge constructed in a particular study. This is achieved through a study of organisational identity, as substantive topic, in which the aspect of distinctiveness of similar organisations is also explored. The concerns have bearing in the field of social science research specifically as the application of these designs may differ in other research fields.

#### **1.4 Research objectives**

Given the discussion thus far, the overarching aim of this study was to explore the use of a qualitative survey in accessing organisational identity in a merged South African company. The more specific objectives of the study were:

- Using organisational identity studies as a mechanism:
  - To identify the distinctive features of various research designs, namely survey design, content analysis, case study design, ethnography, narrative analysis and discourse analysis
  - To highlight similarities and differences between survey design, content analysis, case

- study design, ethnography, narrative analysis and discourse analysis
- To explore the implications of each of the above-mentioned designs for what can be known about organisational identity.
  - To develop a mechanism for obtaining contextually based descriptions of organisation identity to use as a tool in managing organisations. To achieve the latter, it will be necessary:
    - To explore whether a web-based, open-ended qualitative survey can provide suitable descriptions and understanding of organisational identity.
    - To explore whether it is possible to develop identity narratives from the responses to a web-based organisational identity survey.
  - To determine whether it is possible for similar organisations to achieve the distinctiveness suggested as a feature of organisational identity.

### **1.5 Outline of the thesis**

With the burgeoning interest in the organisational identity construct, there has also been a multitude of perspectives and meanings (or definitions) for the term that differ from the original Albert and Whetten (1985) conceptualisation (Van Tonder, 2011). This history forms the focus of Chapter 2, in which I provide an overview of the literature for organisational identity, highlighting the diversity of approaches. I consider multiple definitions of organisational identity and attempt to distinguish central themes from these. I also consider various theories of organisational identity and discuss the conceptual framework that forms the basis for this study.

The thesis has two chapters on methodology, one dedicated to an overview of the methods by which organisational identity has been studied, and the other to a description of my own methodological process. In Chapter 3, I outline the methods by which organisational identity has been studied, highlighting distinctive features of each as well as similarities and differences where these are applicable. The designs discussed in the chapter include survey design, content analysis, case study design, ethnography, narrative analysis and discourse analysis. The aim of this chapter is to consider the relationship between methodology and the type of knowledge of identity it produces. In Chapter 4, I discuss my own research process in which I describe the qualitative survey and the rationale underlying the development of my own survey instrument. I also describe the challenges associated with data analysis and show how these were overcome. A detailed overview of the development of second-order categories and identity themes, termed in this study identity statements and narratives, is provided in

Appendix A: Construction of Narratives. While this forms a substantial part of the study, I have chosen to include it as an appendix to ease the flow of the discussion.

In Chapter 5, I provide a description of each of the organisation's identities, using a variety of identity statements and narratives. These were developed according to the constructions outlined in Appendix A: Construction of Narratives. In Chapter 6, I discuss the implications of the methodological process I have followed, and in Chapter 7 I consider the organisational narratives in light of the theory presented in Chapter 2. I also discuss the possibility of distinctiveness in organisational identity, using the narratives as basis. In Chapter 8, I conclude with the implications of the study, as well as its limitations and suggestions for future research.



## CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I consider various theoretical perspectives on organisational identity. I begin by considering the origin of the term identity, with particular emphasis on broad themes in the concept of identity, both personal and organisational. Thereafter, I provide an overview of definitions of organisational identity, exploring their diversity. I then provide an overview of identity and commonly associated terms: organisational culture, organisational image and corporate identity. Following this, I consider theoretical perspectives on organisational identity, highlighting both the social actor approach and the socially constructed views. Finally, I explain how these inform the conceptual framework, used as the basis for my own study.

#### 2.1.1 Origin of term identity

The emergence of the term “organisational identity” is predated by the concept of personal identity (Van Tonder & Lessing, 2003). Understanding of organisational identity is based on the latter. According to Abend, the term identity is derived from the Latin *idem*, which conveyed a sense of “sameness of essential character; sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing; selfsameness; oneness” (1974:607). While the term identity was first used circa 1570 AD (Van Tonder, 1987), the concept of individual identity is relatively new and has its origins in western individualism (Giddens, 1991; Baumeister, 1997). In medieval Europe, an individual was known in terms of their lineage, gender, occupation and social status within a social hierarchy which explained someone’s background and place in the larger social structure (Giddens, 1991; Taylor, 1994). This was, however, governed by institutional processes in which individuals had little control over their own self-definition. The concept of an individual or individualised identity emerged at the end of the eighteenth century because of the collapse of social hierarchies and the emergence of the notion of authenticity (Taylor, 1994). The notion of authenticity came about as philosophers began to view people as having an inherent morality that was guided by moral “feelings” within. These were viewed as independent and as having moral significance. Jean-Jacques Rousseau was the first to hint at this and phrased it as “following a voice of nature within us” (Taylor, 1994). Herder then articulated the idea as authenticity and suggested that people have a unique way of being themselves. There was moral significance attached to being “in-touch” with oneself and becoming the person only he or she could be. In this way,

an individual discovered their originality. The idea of originality, along with authenticity, led to the undermining of the social origin of defining oneself (Taylor, 1994). It was no longer sufficient to be defined in social terms but it was more important to acknowledge an individual's originality and authenticity.

The way in which the term identity is currently used stems from the work of Erickson in the 1950s and is used in two ways, one "personal" and the other "social". In a personal sense, identity refers to "distinguishing features (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential" (Fearon, 1999:4). These are often features in which a person takes pride and which are linked to their self-respect. Identity in the social sense refers to "a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes" (Fearon, 1999:4). Thus identity in its current usage has a dual meaning implying both personal and social, which gives rise to a paradox inherent in the term, with identity implying both similarity and difference (Buckingham, 2008). Identity is inherently shared and is thus similar, because the categories from which we draw our identity are socially located (Craig, 1995; Buckingham, 2008). At the same time, identity is distinctive, as people seek to "rescue" something which is unique to them, thus distinguishing themselves from others (Craig, 1995; Buckingham, 2008).

### **2.1.2 Themes associated with identity**

When considering the definition of identity (as a broad concept), one is struck by several key themes or ideas emerging regarding the concept and it is perhaps best to explain it in this way. Before proceeding to define "identity", there are two aspects to be addressed, so that the approach taken can be put into perspective.

The first concerns the nature of the definition. In the next section, I will deal with different perspectives on the nature of identity, which obviously implies slightly different definitions. However, for the purpose of defining identity, I have taken a broad range of perspectives on identity and the themes identified represent aspects of all the frameworks.

Secondly, the focus of this thesis is on "organisational identity", but, as there is agreement that identity is a robust concept able to accommodate different levels of analysis (Albert et al, 2000; Fiol, 2002;

Gioia, 1998; Hatch & Schultz, 2002) the themes identified, with one exception, would apply similarly to individuals, groups and organisations.

#### 2.1.2.1 Themes associated with the term identity

One of the most common ideas associated with identity is that of “sameness”. There are various meanings to be understood when speaking of identity as sameness. The first is linked to *permanence in time manifesting in the biological and genetic structure* of the person (Craig, 1995; Harré, 1998; Ricoeur, 1992). This aspect of identity is obviously not applicable to all levels of analysis, but it is important when it comes to matters of responsibility and accountability in individual identity. These will be discussed in more detail under narrative identity.

“Sameness” also means *continuity in the character or nature of the person* or entity and refers to those features that are “enduring” or that provide continuity to the person and link the past with the present (Albert et al, 2000; Erikson, 1959; Gioia, 1998; Harré, 1998; Van Tonder, 1999). This aspect of identity gives rise to differences in opinion regarding just how enduring identity is. While there are differences on exactly *how* enduring or fluid identity is, most theorists agree that there is (and should be) some degree of fluidity to allow the organisation to adjust to changes in the environment. Some even suggest that the organisation must change to preserve identity (Corley & Harrison, 2009).

Giddens (1991) highlights the role of reflexivity in allowing for “fluidity” in both individual and organisational identity. By reflexivity he means the sensitivity to change in and adaptation to aspects of the individual or collective, based on feedback from the environment. As we interact with others, we are faced with new information and knowledge, including new ways of being and doing. The individual or entity is presented with choices regarding life-style, actions, dress and relationships (or strategies, products, services and practices). The resulting decisions give rise to changes and adaptations in identity, thus allowing fluidity in the way an entity is defined. For this reason, identity is best viewed as a *process of ongoing identification* (Craig, 1985).

To explain this more clearly, Gioia, Schultz and Corely (2000) differentiate between identity as enduring and identity as having continuity. Identity as enduring would imply that it remains the same over time and has a measure of permanence. On the other hand, identity can entail a sense of continuity, while at the same time accommodating shifts in interpretation and meaning.

Identity thus contains elements of stability and fluidity, a tension described by Scott and Lane (2000a; 2000b) as “sticky”. Various reasons for this “stickiness” are power relations (Scott & Lane, 2000a; 2000b), psychodynamic reasons (Brown & Starkey, 2000) and cognitive processes (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

The third meaning of sameness is *associated with group identification* and the desire for people to belong to a group which is similar to them (Erikson, 1959; Harré, 1998). What this implies is that identity is a thoroughly social concept, as it points to the source of identity, interaction and relationship with others, at both an individual and organisational level (Craig, 1995; Gergen, 1991; Gioia et al, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Individual identity is formed in the context of groups and organisations, as individuals internalise aspects of the group or organisation identity, thus providing a sense of meaningfulness and connection (Albert et al, 2000; Fiol, 2002). This is particularly evident in top managers whose self identities are intertwined with the organisations they lead (Scott & Lane, 2000b). The process of identification applies to organisational identity as well, and this is formed by ordered inter-organisational comparisons and reflections (Gioia et al, 2000). Similarly to individuals, organisations also strive to identify with a group of selected organisations (Gioia, 1998).

While the process of identification provides a sense of meaningfulness and connection, it has *ideological antecedents, drivers and effects* as well (*individual identity influences OI and vice versa*). Erikson (1959) highlights the ideological nature of identity, stating that the group (or organisation) harnesses individuals’ energy in the service of its ideology. By ideological system, he means “a coherent body of shared images, ideas and ideals which (....) provides for the participants a coherent, if systematically simplified, overall orientation in time and space, in means and ends (Erikson, 1959: 57). Thus by providing a dominant system of meaning, identity exerts power effects by influencing individual efforts in a particular direction (as opposed to others). More recently the power effects of identity have been highlighted and explored in some detail (Brown, 2006; Brown, Humphreys & Gurney, 2005; Chreim, 2005).

The importance of power in understanding collective identity is highlighted in Brown’s narrative theory of identity, through the dimension of “Voice”. The importance of this dimension has to do with the fact that a narrative is always “voiced” (either verbally or in written form) from a particular standpoint for a specific audience, and is thus never neutral (Brown, 2006; Coupland & Brown, 2004; Anataki & Widdicombe, 1998). Organisational identity, while it is a narrative accomplishment, serves

the purpose of agency in achieving particular ends (Brown, 2006; Coupland & Brown, 2004). However, the power consequences of OI are not uni-directional, and employees may in turn “voice” alternative versions of their organisation’s identity, thus effectively resisting its “official” version.

While identification with a group is important, people (and organisations) also strive to be distinctive (Albert et al, 2000; Gioia, 1998; Ricoeur, 1992; Van Tonder, 1999). Taylor (1989) believes that identity implies identifying with some sort of a framework and herein lies the distinctiveness associated with identity. By framework, he means “a crucial set of qualitative distinctions” (1989:19) which provide “a set of self interpretations” and definitions of what is significant. Baumeister (1997) also refers to identity as “the definitions that are created for and superimposed on the self. These definitions refer to concepts about who the person is and what the person is like” (1997:682). It is in knowing what one stands for (or does not) and what is important (and not) that one begins to take on a distinctive identity, because identity must entail preferences. One cannot be everything. The framework not only defines who the person is but also provides a standard against which choices and judgements, including moral ones, can be made (Taylor, 1989). In the context of organisational identity, Albert et al refer to this as a “rudder for navigating difficult waters” (2000:13). Identity thus provides a set of criteria for determining the success, failure, value and effectiveness of actions and outcomes (Gioia, 1998).

While having a framework in defining who I am (or we are) is undoubtedly important, there must be scope for ambiguity, multiplicity and plurivocity in identity (Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998). Ambiguity provides people (and organisations) scope in the way they define themselves, allowing for a range of beliefs, opinions and actions, given the influences and dynamics of various contexts (Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998). Multiplicity refers to the multiple facets of identity which allow for different social selves as well as to accommodate the various roles a person (or organisation) is required to play. For example, a woman may be a wife, a mother, a daughter, an academic or a consultant, all of which roles require different (sometimes seemingly contradictory) actions (Albert et al, 2000; Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998; Harré, 1998). Finally, identity is characterised by complexity, which refers to what may be conflicting and contradictory behaviour and beliefs required by various roles and social selves (Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998; Harré, 1991).

### **2.1.3 In summary**

The concept of organisational identity is predated by that of personal identity, the meaning of which has changed over time. Identity, as originally conceived, located a person in a social group or category,

and it was from these that he or she drew almost exclusively their self-definition. However, with the rise of individualism and the notion of authenticity, identity has taken on a personal meaning, which is associated also with the distinctiveness of the person. Identity, according to its current meaning, implies a bridging of the personal and the social, and has been invoked as an explanatory concept in groups and organisations as well. Having set the context for understanding identity as a broad concept, I will move to exploring organisational identity specifically.

## **2.2 Defining Organisational Identity**

While the idea of the organisation having a distinct character, competence and history is not new (Van Tonder, 2011), the term *organisational* identity was first used by Albert and Whetten (1985), who began using the concept out of necessity, as they needed “an interpretive framework to make sense of our experiences as faculty members at the University of Illinois during a period of financial turbulence” (Whetten, 1998:vii). This definition still guides thinking in the field. Organisational identity is considered to be that which is central, distinctive and relatively enduring about the organisation. However, Van Tonder comments that, while at face value the definition seems clear, “the meaning parameters of the construct, its development history, and its role and place in the theories of organisation (in various disciplines) have been quite ambiguous, serving only to reinforce its enigmatic status” (2011:633). There is thus some debate as to what constitutes organisational identity and how it relates to similar terms. Questions have been raised about both the notion of centrality and how multiple identities can be accounted for, and I will take up the durability of identity, issues at a later stage.

In the years of scholarship that followed, various definitions were posited as to exactly what is central, distinctive and enduring about organisations. The lack of conceptual clarity has led one editor to comment, “It seems as though everything is identity!” (Corley et al, 2006:86). In addition, organisational identity is studied from different epistemological perspectives and this too has led to some debate about the usefulness of the concept (Cornelissen, 2002a; Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2002a; Cornelissen, 2002b; Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2002b).

To give the reader a sense of the diversity regarding the definition of organisational identity, I present in the next section a table in which I have summarised definitions taken from the literature I have reviewed. Included here are all the authors who have in some way formulated their own definitions of organisational identity (in the literature I have reviewed). In addition to the definitions, I have also

included a brief summary highlighting key ideas from the definitions, to indicate the conceptual diversity (some would call it confusion) that is apparent. There is evidently considerable overlap between the definitions, as later authors are obviously drawing on previous literature.

### 2.2.1 Definitions of organisational identity

In the table below, I provide an overview of the definitions of organisational identity suggested by authors on the topic, to demonstrate the diversity in these.

**Table 2.1 Overview of definitions of organisational identity**

No	AUTHOR (S)	DEFINITION	KEY IDEA
1	Albert & Whetten (1985:265)	“Organisational identity refers to three aspects of an organisation “the criterion of claimed central character... the criterion of claimed distinctiveness...[and] the criterion of claimed temporal continuity”.	Central, distinctive and enduring character of an organisation
2	Fiol (1991:193)	“Identities reflect how individuals or subunit parts of an organization define what they do in relation to their understanding of what the organization is. Identities thus represent aspects of culture translated into a specific context”.	Understanding that guides action in specific contexts. Identity as an aspect of culture
3	Dutton & Dukerich (1991: 520)	“An organization’s identity...filters and molds an organization’s interpretation of and action on an issue”.	Filters interpretation of an issue Guides action on an issue.
4	Fiol & Huff (1992:278-279)	“... cognitions relating to identity are powerful filters through which people make sense of their surroundings. Moreover, they suggest that the forces defining identity are generally embedded in deeply-ingrained and hidden assumptions”.	Powerful cognitive filters Deeply-ingrained and hidden assumptions Sense-making (metaphor: a map)
5	Gustafson & Reger (1995:464)	Organizational identity is viewed as a “powerful cognitive schema”.	Identity as powerful cognitive schema
6	Sarason	“Organizational identity, like personal	Set of shared beliefs

	(1995:49)	identity, presumes reflexive awareness and focusses on a set of shared beliefs agents hold about their organization”.	Presumes reflexive awareness
7	Elsbach & Kramer (1996:442)	“An organization’s identity reflects its central and distinguishing attributes, including its core values, organizational culture, modes of performance, and products”.	Central and distinguishing attributes including core values, culture, modes of performance and products
8	Hatch and Schultz (1997:357-358)	“Organizational identity refers broadly to what members perceive, feel and think about their organizations. It is assumed to be a collective, commonly-shared understanding of the organization’s distinctive values and characteristics”... it “emerges from the ongoing interactions between organizational members (including middle level managers) as well as top management influence”.	Perceptions, feelings and cognitions Collective, commonly shared understanding of distinctive values and characteristics emerging from ongoing interaction (process)
9	Golden-Biddle & Rao (1997:594)	“Organization identity – the shared beliefs of members about the central, enduring and distinctive characteristics of the organization – constitutes part of the shared meaning held by members”.	Shared beliefs around central, distinctive and enduring characteristics Shared meaning
10	Van Tonder (1999)	Organisation identity as “a dynamic cognitive gestalt or integrative schema of the organisation’s features which reflect its uniqueness or distinctive, central/core and enduring character (in Van Tonder, 2003:24).	Dynamic cognitive, integrative schema reflecting distinctive, central and enduring character
11	Albert, Ashforth & Dutton (2000:13)	“it becomes important to have an internalized cognitive structure of what the organization stands for and where it intends to go – in short, a clear sense of the organization’s identity. A sense of identity serves as a rudder for navigating difficult	Internalized cognitive structure directing action (navigational rudder)



		waters”.	
12	Scott & Lane (2000b:44)	Organisational identity “as emerging from complex, dynamic, and reciprocal interactions among managers, organizational members, and other stakeholders.”... “best understood as contested and negotiated through iterative interactions”.	Emerging from organisational interaction Contested and negotiated
13	Fiol (2002:653)	“An organization’s identity creates a context for individual self-conceptions (or the breaking down of those self conceptions), and individual-level identity beliefs are building blocks of (or the source of resistance to changes in) collective organizational identities”.	Context for individual identity Built from individual identity
14	Humphreys & Brown (2002a:425)	“Organizational identities are power effects resulting from the complex interplay of politically-motivated individuals and groups”.	Power effects resulting from social processes
15	Brown & Humphreys (2002:142)	Organisational identities as “identity narratives participants construct in their efforts to make sense of their collective history and what is central, and enduring about them as a group”.	Sense-making narratives regarding collective history Constructed by participants
16	Whetten & Mackey (2002:397)	“Organizational identity is appropriately conceived of as a set of categorical identity claims (who or what we claim to be, categorically) in reference to a specified set of institutionally standardized social categories”.	Commonalities / differences wrt other organisations Identity claims wrt standardised social categories
17	Aust (2004:531)	“Organization identity is an organization’s distinctive character discernible by those communicated values manifest in its externally transmitted messages, represents an extension of the way organizational	Distinctive character represented by communicated values

		identity has been conceptualised thus far”.	
18	Corley (2004:1148)	“Organizational identity can be thought of as that which members of an organization use as a self-defining description of their collective based on those things perceived to be most central and distinctive about their continuing existence as an organization”.	Self-defining description of a shared collective
19	Coupland & Brown (2004:1325)	“We regard organizational identities as discursive achievements, and stakeholders in organizations as rhetors (persuaders) engaged in ongoing identity-centred debates”.	Discursive achievements that are constantly constructed and reconstructed
20	Empson (2004:760)	Organizational identity helps “to explain how members express and develop their self-concepts within the context of the organization and how the organization in turn is developed and expressed through members’ self concepts”.	Context for the development of individual self-concept Influenced by individual self-concepts
21	Brown, Humphreys & Gurney (2005:313)	“..the identities of organizations are constituted by continuously evolving shared narratives”.	Comprising continuously evolving narratives shared by members
22	Chreim (2005:569)	“...I consider organizational identity to be continually constituted in narrative texts that may be reflexively woven by organizational authors”.	Recurrently composed narrative texts developed reflexively by organisational members
23	Corley, Harquail, Pratt, Glynn, Fiol & Hatch (2006:87)	“At the organizational level, identity is about capturing that which provides meaning to a level above and beyond its individual members – a self referential meaning where the self is the collective”.	Self referential meaning for the collective
24	Brown (2006:1)	“From a narrative perspective, organizations’ identities are discursive (linguistic) constructs constituted by the	Discursive constructs constituted by multiple narratives

		multiple identity-relevant narratives that their participants author about them”.	Authored by participants
25	Whetten (2006:220)	“The concept of organizational identity is specified as the central and enduring attributes of an organization that distinguish it from other organizations. I refer to these as organizational identity claims, or referents, signifying an organization’s self-determined (and “self”-defining) unique social space and reflected in its unique pattern of binding commitments”.	Central, enduring and distinguishing attributes Identity claims signifying a unique social space for the organisation
26	Nag, Corley & Gioia (2007:824)	“..we take a social constructionist view that organizational identity entails members’ consensual understanding of ‘who we are as an organization’”	Members’ consensual understanding of who they are
27	Alvesson & Empson (2008:2)	“..the idea that organizational members construct a common perception of their organization as having certain key characteristics, as being distinctive from other organizations in some respects, and as showing a degree of continuity over a period of time...”.	Common perception constructed by members wrt key, distinctive and enduring characteristics
28	Sillince & Brown (2009:1832)	“Organizational identities are, thus, phenomenological, socially constructed, rhetorical constructs, concerned with what organizations stand for and what senior managers want them to become”.	Phenomenological, socially constructed rhetorical constructs regarding organisation, based on senior managers’ plans
29	King, Felin & Whetten (2010:295)	“.. identity makes possible coherent, predictable social interaction within and among organizations. More specifically, identity creates a set of expectations about appropriate behavior for a particular organization”.	Conditions for coherent, predictable, social interaction by providing guidelines for appropriate behavior

What emerges from the table above is, first, the considerable variety in the range of definitions of organisational identity. No wonder, then, that its validity as a construct has been questioned (Albert et al, 2000; Corley et al, 2006; Haslam et al, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Whetten, 2006). While multiplicity and pluralism in the study of a concept is desirable, clarity in the articulation of assumptions and definitions is equally critical in ensuring the construct's validity and thus its value as a phenomenon worthy of study (Corley et al, 2006; Whetten, 2006).

The second observation I would like to highlight is that the original definition of organisational identity is distinct from most others. While it refers to the character of the organisation, and its claimed centrality, distinctiveness and continuity, it does not attempt, as do later definitions of OI, to locate the latter, for example in, inter alia, cognitions, beliefs, feelings and narratives. There is thus a shift in the way OI is defined and, while Albert and Whetten's original definition is acknowledged in most of the subsequent literature sources, authors appear to want to move a step further and explain what constitutes the character of the OI. Only one author has deviated from accepting these as some form of parameter for OI, namely Van Tonder (1999; 2011), who added a fourth dimension, "unifying / solidarity". The definitional parameter of *central* features was not observed in his 1999 study, and he has suggested that the current conceptualisation of organisational identity in terms of central, distinctive and enduring features needs to be augmented to incorporate a *sense of unity* or solidarity, i.e. those features that tend to unify the organisation.

In the section that follows, I will attempt to identify several juxtapositions in the range of definitions of organisational identity listed above. These are derived from the definitions provided and are for this reason a simplification of a more complex phenomenon. A definition by nature attempts to summarise a concept and does not do justice to the complexity of the phenomenon it describes. This is however done for a specific purpose, namely to highlight the potential of various research designs to generate knowledge about organisation identity, a purpose which will become clearer in the chapter that follows (See specifically 3.10 Discussion).

### **2.2.2 Juxtapositions in defining Organisational Identity**

The original Albert and Whetten (1985) conception of organisational identity alluded to characteristics of the *organisation* that were central, distinctive and enduring (definition 1), thus locating identity as a property of the organisation as a whole. Reference is also made to organisational identity as a property

of the organisation in definitions 3, 7, 10, 11, 16, 17 and 25. However, as one begins to work through the definitions in Table 1, it soon becomes apparent that organisational members begin to feature quite prominently in the definitions and it is *their collective meaning-making* around elements of the organisation that is of key concern (see in particular definitions 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15, 18, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 28). In the first, identity is viewed as property of the organisation, and is one of those characteristics which make it distinctive because of its own classification and identification choices (as made by founders and leaders). In the second, organisational identity is viewed as a construction by organisational members, as they collectively make meaning with aspects of the organisation.<sup>2</sup> This contrast is depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure 2.1: Organisational Identity as property of the organisation OR collective meaning-making by members**

Whetten (2006), in reflecting on their (Albert & Whetten, 1985) original formulation, differentiates between three components of identity which they, as authors, had in mind (though never made

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<sup>2</sup> Collective meaning-making nevertheless describes something about the organisation, and is distinct from both *organisationally-based identity* which refers to “that part of the self-concept that defines one’s connection with the organization (Harquail, 2005)” (in Corley et al, 2006: 88) as well as *organisational identification*, which defines “the processes through which individuals come to attach their self-definition (or self-concept) to their perceptions of the organization” (Corley et al, 2006: 88).

explicit). I quote from Whetten directly (*italics in the original, the step by step layout is my own, as is the bold*):

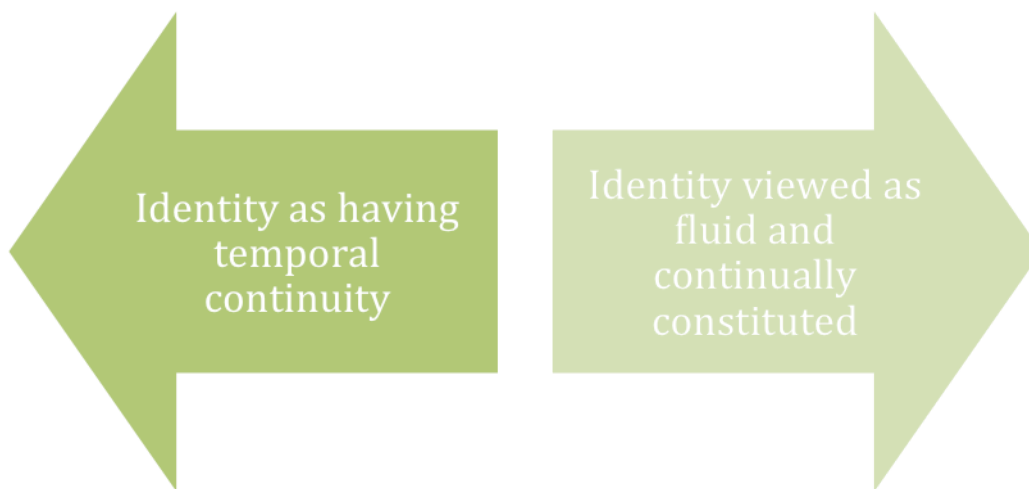
- “The *ideational* component equated organizational identity with **members’ shared beliefs** regarding the question, “Who are we as an organization?”;
- The *definitional* component proposed a specific conceptual domain for organizational identity, characterized as the CED (central, enduring and distinctive) **features of an organization**; and finally,
- the *phenomenological* component posited that **identity-related discourse** was most likely to be observed in conjunction with profound organizational experiences” (2006:220).

Over the years, the question that forms part of the ideational component (“Who are we, as an organization?”) has led to a question as to the nature of the phenomenological referent for the subject “we” (Whetten & Mackay, 2002). Does “we” refer to the collective members of the organisation or does it refer to the organisation as a set of institutionalised claims? Disagreement over the nature of the subject “we” has led to differing conceptions of organizational identity: identity in organisations as opposed to identity of organisations (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998; Whetten & Mackay, 2002).

“Identity of organisations”, as an approach, is most often linked to a social actor conception of organisations, of which Whetten is the most obvious proponent (Whetten & Mackey, 2002; Whetten, 2006; King et al, 2010). The “identity in organisations” approach views organisational identity as the relationship between the individual’s cognition and the collective, shared belief regarding the organisation’s identity (Corley et al, 2006). Associated with this approach are proponents of Social Identity Theory (associated with Tajfel), Organisation Identity Theory (articulated by Van Tonder and his colleagues) and theories of Narrative Identity (most often articulated in the work of Andrew Brown and his colleagues). While Brown and his colleagues prefer to locate identity in discourse and narratives, their conception of organisational identity as collectively constructed and negotiated is similar.

The second distinction highlighted in the definition concerns the “enduring” nature of organisational identity, and the extent to which it has temporal continuity (see also Corley et al, 2006; Whetten, 2006). Temporal continuity is described by Whetten and Mackey as the need “to be the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow” (2000:396). While originally conceived as having at least some temporal continuity

(see in particular definitions 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 17, 25, 27 & 29), some of the later formulations (especially those working from a narrative and rhetorical perspective) emphasise the fleeting nature of organisational identity. While many of the definitions do not refer specifically to the temporal continuity, the fact that they do refer to aspects such as deeply-ingrained assumptions, beliefs, values and internalized cognitive structures, all of which imply at least a measure of continuity, means that the latter can be inferred as having temporal continuity. On the other hand, organisational identity is viewed as “extremely fluid” and as “continually constituted” (see definitions 19, 21 and 24), emphasising a lack of temporal continuity. This contrast is depicted in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2.2: Organisational identity as having temporal continuity OR being continually constituted**

The final contrast apparent from the definitions, and literature from which they are drawn concerns the claimed central character of organisational identity. While most of the definitions do not refer specifically to centrality as a characteristic, we can infer that, where there is reference to “collective, commonly shared assumptions”, “shared beliefs” and “integrative schema”, some measure of centrality is assumed. Corley et al (2006) distinguish amongst three forms of centrality as *shared*, as *depth*, and as *structural*. Centrality can thus refer to a set of beliefs *shared* by members of the organisation (see also Pratt & Foreman, 2000). *Centrality as depth* implies that there is a range of identity characteristics, some of which are deeply rooted as part of identity and there are those that lie at a more superficial level (Corley et al, 2006). Centrality can also be viewed as *structural*, using the metaphor of a network, with a core characteristic at the centre, around which are clustered other characteristics which are dependent on the central one. If one of the central characteristics were to be removed, the others would

fall away. A similar concept is used in the degree to which a social identity is more or less central to personal identity, the degree of centrality determined by the number of situations in which the identity is salient (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006). In the context of organisational identity, one could argue that particular elements of organisational identity are more likely than others to be salient in a wider range of situations, and are thus more central to identity.

However, one of the issues challenging the notion of identity as central is that of multiple identities, which are fairly prevalent in the organisational identity literature (Corley, 2004; Fiol, 1991; Fiol, Pratt & O'Connor, 2009; Glynn, 2000; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Pratt & Foreman, 2000; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997; Ruud, 1995; Sillince & Brown, 2009). The idea of multiple identities poses a challenge to the idea of centrality, raising the question of whether it is possible to have several “centers”. However, even within Albert & Whetten’s (1985) original conception of identity as claimed centrality, there is space for “multiple” organisational identities, and these authors distinguish between complementary identities (holographic) or competing identities (ideographic). Their original study was in the university context, where two predominant “identities” were identified, namely a church and a business.

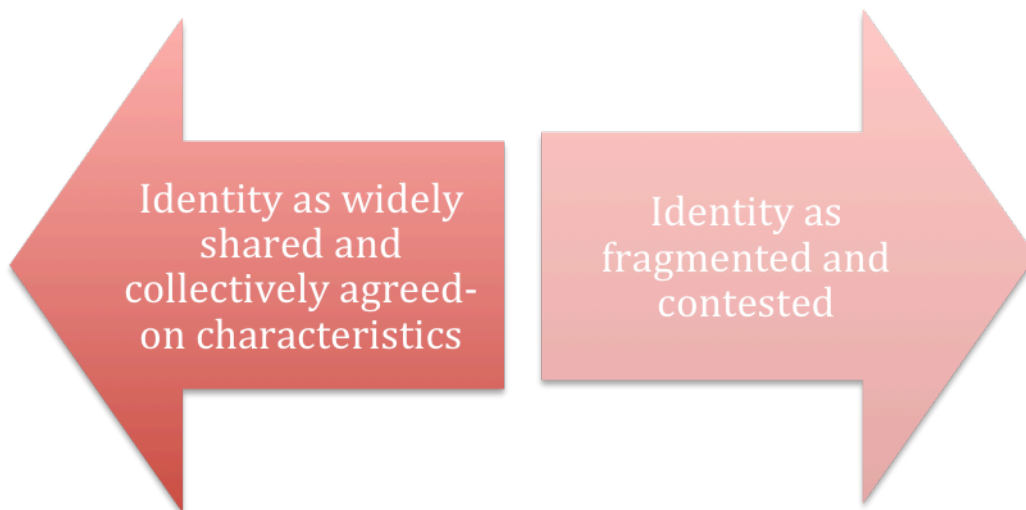
The phenomenon of multiple organisational identities has subsequently been addressed by several scholars in various contexts, such as nonprofit organisations (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997), healthcare (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) and agricultural cooperatives (Foreman & Whetten, 2002). Some of the reasons provided for multiple identities are business and client needs (Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), hierarchical differences (Corely, 2004) and differing professional identities and globalisation (Fiol et al, 2009). Multiple identities are even viewed as positive, as they allow the organisation to meet a wider range of demands, remain competitive and ensure continued creativity and learning (Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Fiol, 1994; Pratt & Foreman, 2000).

Because of the challenges associated with the notion of centrality, Van Tonder’s (1999, 2011) suggestion of “unifying” characteristics is particularly helpful. The emphasis should be on those characteristics that are widely shared and collectively agreed-on, that act as unifying forces in identity. Shared identities are a result of social processes like networking, dialogue and negotiation, in conjunction with the influence of socialisation and organisational leadership. These are considered necessary, as “some degree of shared story telling about the organisation’s identity is a prerequisite for



organised activity” (Brown, 2006). The idea of organisational identity as shared is reflected in definitions 6, 8, 9, 15, 18, 21, 23, 26, 27 and 28.

In contrast to the idea of widely shared characteristics is the possibility of plural, multi-vocal forms of identity suggested by post modern and narrative theorists of identity. From this perspective, an *organisation’s identities* are considered to be narrative power effects, “fragmented” and “heterogeneous” (see Coupland & Brown, 2004; Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Brown, 2006). Here organisational identity, is constituted by multiple members, from various perspectives with diverse power agendas, leading to fragmented, contested or contradictory identities. This perspective is captured in definitions 13, 19, 22 and 24. These authors do not necessarily presume that organisational identity is fragmented, only that this is a possibility, and that organisational identity is not *always* shared or agreed on.



**Figure 2.3: Organisational identity as being widely shared and collectively agreed on OR as fragmented and contested**

One aspect of the original definition not yet discussed is the criterion of distinctiveness. Distinctiveness refers to the similarity or difference of the organisation’s core or central features when compared with those of other similar organisations (Corley et al, 2006; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). The possibility of distinctiveness is questioned by some authors, given societal and institutional constraints on an organisation’s choices of identification. For example, one has to reasonably assume that a bank will loan money and provide the other services legally required and culturally expected of banks in general,

and that these will differ from the expectations and requirements of hospitals, charities or engineering firms (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). The question is, though, to what extent can a bank really differentiate itself with regard to identity, given the constraints and expectations required of banks in general? Can it really claim to be distinctive? If, however, one looks at Albert and Whetten's original (1985) formulation, the criterion of distinctiveness is met, not if every attribute is distinctive or unique, but where the organisation possesses a distinctive set of characteristics which sets it apart. It is suggested that distinctiveness thus resides in the unique *combination* of characteristics, rather than a completely different one, an issue I will address in more detail at the end of the chapter. The question of distinctiveness has, however, not been the subject of empirical investigation, and forms a key question in this study.

Having considered the definition of organisational identity, I will now turn to related concepts, namely corporate identity, organisational image and organisational culture, and a discussion of how these can be differentiated from organisational identity.

### **2.3 Differentiating Organisational Identity**

Organisational identity is a relational concept and if one is to make sense of it, it is important to consider it in relation to a network of other concepts (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). The conversational partners in Whetten & Godfrey (1998) refer to these as a “nomological net”, which includes terms such as “identity”, “image” and “culture”. An in-depth study of the terms corporate identity, image and culture are beyond the scope of this particular study. What I aim to present here is a brief overview of the key concepts of corporate identity, image and culture, with specific focus on how they relate to organisational identity, which is the focus of this study. I will begin by describing each of the related concepts briefly and thereafter will describe how each of them relates to organisational identity.

#### **2.3.1 Corporate identity**

Identity, as an attribute of organisations, first appeared in the form of corporate identity during the late 1950s (Van Tonder, 2011). According to Balmer and Geyser (2003), Martineau is credited with first coining the phrase, although the meaning of identity in this context is far removed from associations with personal identity (Van Tonder, 2011). Van Rekom defines corporate identity as “the set of meanings by which an object allows itself to be known and through which it allows people to describe, remember and relate to it” (1997:411). Corporate identity thus refers to the way in which an

organisation presents itself to its various stakeholders, distinguishing itself from other organisations (Markwick & Fill, 1997).

Corporate identity includes both the visual and non-visual representations of the organisation, and is usually a function of management (Abratt, 1989; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Leitch & Davenport, 2011). The emphasis is on the design and management of official corporate symbols (for example, corporate logos and interior decoration), with a focus on strategic, visual aspects of corporate identity (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Van Rekom, 1997).

### **2.3.1.1 Relationship to organisational identity**

While corporate identity, is communicated by management to organisational members, they interpret it according to organisational cultural patterns, work experiences and social influences from the environment (Hatch & Schultz, 1997:358). Corporate identity has been studied from many perspectives, which has led to some confusion, because the same term is sometimes used to mean different things (Leitch & Davenport, 2011; Moingeon & Ramanantsoa, 1997; Van Riel & Balmer, 1997). Some authors use the term corporate identity with a very similar meaning to that of organisational identity (Balmer, 2011; Gorb, 1992; Moingeon & Ramanantsoa, 1997; Van Rekom, 1997).

Podnar, Golob and Jančič (2011) propose that the confusion relates to the perspective from which these terms are viewed. When corporate and organisational identity are considered from a functionalist perspective, they can be viewed as synonymous. This is because, within this view, the organisation is considered an entity in its own right, with an identity separate from those of its members, owners or employees. As a consequence, organisational identity becomes synonymous with corporate identity. When viewed from an interpretive perspective, because its focus is on a group of individuals with a common goal, the organisation is not regarded as a uniform entity but rather as a coalition of cooperative individuals. As a result, organisational identity is no longer regarded as a uniform concept but as a collection of individual perceptions, so it can no longer be considered synonymous with corporate identity.

In addition to the perspective just described, several other differences can be highlighted, which will be discussed briefly. First, while both concepts are based on “what the organisation is” (Balmer, 1995: 25, see also Rindova & Schultz, 1998), organisational identity is something that originates from all

organisational members, while corporate identity is primarily a leadership function (Abratt, 1989; Leitch & Davenport, 2011). Secondly, organisational identity as a term originates in the social and management sciences, and represents internal beliefs expressed in words, while corporate identity has been developed by practitioners of graphic design as they sought to present the organisation visually in the marketplace, it is captured in symbolic fashion (Rindova & Schultz, 1998). Thirdly, organisational identity has its origin in identification with a community or group of people (an internal focus), whereas corporate identity entails identification with a brand or social entity (primarily external focus) (Rindova & Schultz, 1998; Podnar et al, 2011). It can thus be argued that organisational and corporate identity represent the internal and external aspects of identity and the tension between self-reflection and the symbolic expression thereof, and are in fact mutually dependent (Rindova & Schultz, 1998).

Perhaps the most descriptive way of depicting the relationship between the two is to use the metaphor described by Glover (1993) of a reversible raincoat (cited in Van Tonder & Lessing, 2003). Corporate identity is represented by the external surface of the raincoat, and alludes to the visual attributes associated with the latter. Organisational identity is akin to the inside of the raincoat, and represents the character of the organisation. The power of the metaphor lies in the way it is able to seamlessly bring these two elements together in comfortable alignment.

### **2.3.2 Organisational image**

Organisational image refers to those characteristics that members believe organisational outsiders use to distinguish and assess it (Dowling, 1993; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Markwick & Fill, 1997). It is defined by Hatch and Schultz as “a holistic and vivid impression held by an individual or particular group towards an organization and is a result of sense-making by the group *and* communication by the organization of a fabricated and projected image of itself” (1997:359). These perceptions may be the result of a deliberate effort on the part of the organisation, for example public relations activities or by chance, through remarks made by employees or the media (Dowling, 1993; Markwick & Fill, 1997). The implication of this is that, unlike corporate identity, which can be carefully managed, organisational image resides in the mind of each stakeholder and is less open to direct management, especially in an age when organisations have little control over the flow of information. Should management wish to influence organisational image, this must be done through corporate identity, thereby repositioning perceptions of the organisation in the minds of stakeholders (Markwick & Fill, 1997; Van Rekom, 1997).

New business practices like re-engineering, networking and an increased focus on customer service, as well as interactive websites and blogs, have redefined relations between insiders and outsiders of the organisation, exposing organisational members to a wide range of views (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). In addition, organisational members are members of other contexts as well and are thus faced with many contrasting views and differing perspectives of the organisation, which often conflict with their own perceptions of organisational identity.

### **2.3.2.1 Relationship between organisational identity and image**

Image, like organisational identity, acts as an “interpretive screen” through which issues facing a business are understood (Gioia & Thomas, 1996). Organisational image is, however, the interpretive screen through which external stakeholders view and evaluate the organisation, whereas identity refers to perceptions by internal stakeholders. The relationship between organisational image and identity is best illustrated in the study of the Port Authority of New York by Dutton & Dukerich (1991).

In this study, the Port Authority was faced with the issue of homelessness. The organisation’s initial response was governed by internal stakeholders, whose view of the organisation’s identity - “We are in the transport business” - excluded dealing with the problem of homelessness. However, external stakeholders interpreted “the problem” differently and believed that the Port Authority should do something to alleviate the situation. Their subsequent lack of response led to a very negative organisational image. This, in turn, was fed back to the organisation, through comments to staff and in negative media reports. The Port Authority was forced to review its perception of its own identity, and adjust this to accommodate a new focus on the community it served. Thus, organisational image forced the organisation into a reflexive exercise during which they reconsidered and reconstructed their own sense of organisational identity. In this way image shapes identity (Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

### **2.3.3 Organisational culture**

Schein defines culture as “[the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to these problems” (1985:9). Schein has argued that culture consists of three elements, assumptions, values and artefacts. Assumptions are widely-held, taken-for-granted subconscious views of human nature and social relationships. Values are preferences for particular outcomes and include preferences for obtaining

these outcomes. Artefacts are the more visible, tangible elements of culture manifested in rituals, slogans, traditions and myths (Parker & Bradley, 2000). Hatch (1993) suggests that, while these elements are important, they fail to reflect the dynamics inherent in organisational culture, and she supplements these with four dynamic processes, namely manifestation, realization, symbolization and interpretation (into what she terms a Cultural dynamics model). She also adds a fourth element to the existing three, namely symbols.

Culture may be influenced by organisational members at all levels of the hierarchy but particularly by the founders and key members, as well as by critical incidents in the organisation's history and life-cycle shifts (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). It consists of underlying beliefs and assumptions and surface-level behaviours and is realised in the material aspects (or artefacts) of the organisation (e.g. its name, products, buildings, logos and other symbols, including its top managers) (Fiol, 1991; Hatch & Schultz, 1997).

### **2.3.3.1 Relationship between organisational identity and culture**

Hatch & Schultz (1997) regard culture as the internal symbolic context within which organisational identity is embedded and interpreted. It is necessary for the development and maintenance of identity. Alvesson and Empson suggest that culture belongs in the abstract realms of the “contextual, tacit and emergent”, whereas identity “appears to be more textual, explicit and instrumental” (2008:1). Furthermore, identity has to do with distinctive and unique organisational qualities, and is self-referential (“Who are we?”) (Corley et al, 2006). Culture, on the other hand, includes meanings and beliefs about a wide range of issues, such as gender, age, technology, customers, products, authority and knowledge.

The relationship between culture and identity also has implications for organisational image. Hatch and Schultz suggest that culture, identity and image “form three interrelated parts of a system of meaning and sense-making that defines an organization to its various constituencies” (1997:357). They suggest that, when expressing organisational identity, members use cultural material symbolically to communicate an image that is in turn understood by others. While the projected image is interpreted in light of the organisation's cultural heritage, the readings given to it by others are contextualised by their own cultural heritage. Organisational images are in turn assimilated into the cultural system of meaning and influence both culture and identity (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Hatch & Schultz, 1997). From a

more practical viewpoint, organisational culture has been used in accessing organisational identity as part of studies in this regard (Empson, 2004; Alvesson & Empson, 2008).

Having differentiated OI from related concepts, I will now turn to exploring the concept of organisational identity in more detail, with specific focus on various perspectives regarding the origin and nature of OI.

## **2.4 The origins and nature of Organisational Identity**

When describing their work, some authors place it within a particular theoretical tradition. An example is Brown and his various colleagues, who often describe their studies as “an interpretive study of...”. Others, however, simply proceed with very little indication of their underlying assumptions. There are several meta-theoretical classifications of organisational identity, although there are very few that describe these orientations in much detail. In the conversations that form the basis of Whetten and Godfrey’s (1998) work, three meta-theoretical perspectives on organisational identity come to the fore, namely functionalist, interpretivist and post-modern. Van Tonder and Lessing (2003) highlight four, which they term “streams” or “paradigms” in studying organisational identity. These are the psychoanalytic, social identity theory, the communication and the classical approaches (under which they include Albert and Whetten’s original conception of identity). Van Tonder (2006) narrows these down to three: Psychoanalytic, Social Identity and classical approaches which include Organisational Identity Theory. Brown (2006) concurs with Whetten and Godfrey (1998), highlighting functionalist, interpretive, and postmodern perspectives on identity issues, but, like Van Tonder and Lessing (2003) and Van Tonder (2006), he adds a fourth, the psychodynamic approach. However, he does not describe any of these approaches in detail, but simply highlights their weaknesses. The final classification presented here is by Corley et al (2006), in which they present an overview of organisational identity scholarship. I will work with this classification, as it is echoed in other organisational identity literature (see also Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Whetten, 2006), part of which emerges from my own analysis of the OI definitions (see in particular Figure 1).

### **2.4.1 Nature of identity**

The first distinction Corley et al make is between the view of organisational identity as a *metaphor*, as opposed to a “real, lived, actual *organizational phenomenon*” (2006:89). A view of organisational identity as a metaphor implies using it as a figure of speech, playing on the resemblance between characteristics of individuals and those of collectives, similar to the use of machines, open-systems and

other organisational metaphors (Cornelissen, 2002a).<sup>3</sup> Metaphors, by supplying evocative language, allow participants to articulate common, or differing, conceptions of their organisation and explain these implications (Young, 2001). This approach is often preferred by functionalists (Oliver & Roos, 2007). Alternatively, identity can be viewed as a real phenomenon (King et al, 2010; Sillince & Brown, 2009), captured most clearly by Haslam et al as aspects of organisations “that can be perceived to be more or less real both by those who are members of them and by others who come into contact with them” (2003:359). According to this view, social identities are regarded as distinct from personal identities, and although conceptually related, can be studied in their own right. It is on this basis that much organisational identity research has been conducted, including the original Albert and Whetten conceptualisation (Corley et al, 2006).

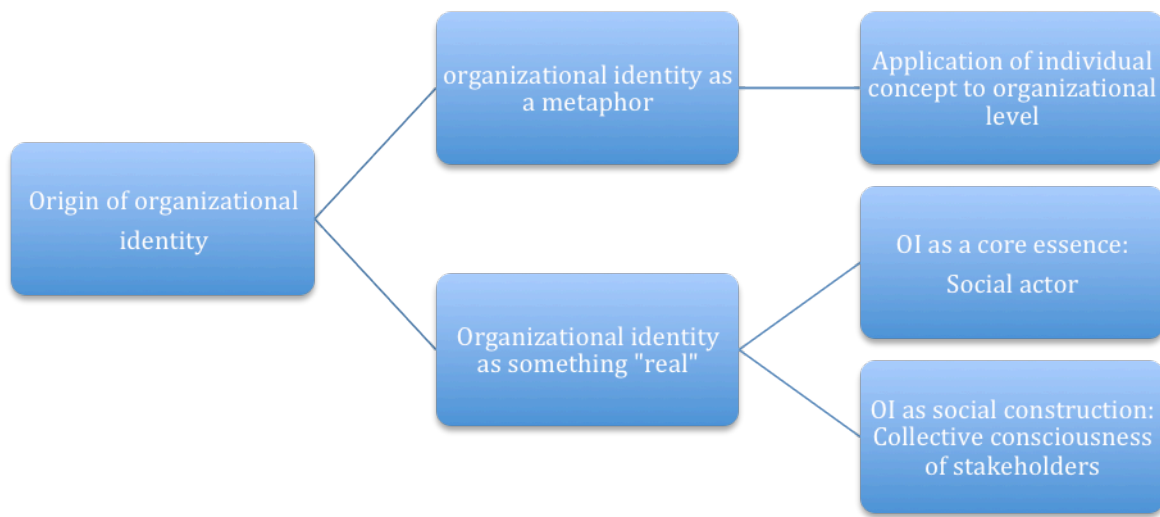
Within the conception of organisational identity as a real phenomenon, the question must be asked: In what way is the organisation real? Is it the result of processes of social construction, or does it reside in the properties of organisations (Corley et al, 2006; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Scott & Lane, 2000b). Whetten & Mackey (2002) make a similar distinction and differentiate these positions as “identity of organisations” and “identity in organisations” (as context for identity construction). In the first, organisational identity is viewed as a set of institutionalised claims available to members, and rests on a social actor view of organisations. In the second, organisational identity is viewed as shared perceptions, beliefs and interpretive schemes between members. This contrast is highlighted in Figure 4.

The figure below provides a pictorial summary of the views regarding the nature and origin of organisational identity, either as a metaphor or as something “real”. And if it is the latter, is it a social actor in its own right or a social construction, relying on the collective consciousness of members and interested stakeholders?

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<sup>3</sup> There was, in 2002, a fairly animated exchange in the *British Journal of Management* between Cornelissen on one hand, and Gioia, Schultz and Corley on the other, regarding the nature of organisational identity and whether or not it can be regarded in metaphorical terms (Cornelissen, 2002a; Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2002a; Cornelissen, 2002b; Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2002b).





**Figure 2.4: Origin of organisational identity – summary of key arguments from Corley et al (2006).**

Most researchers in the area of OI assume organisational identity to be something real, and work within either a social actor perspective or a social constructionist perspective. The social actor perspective originates in institutional theory, and organisational identity is considered to reside in institutional claims about those elements of the organisation considered to be central, enduring and distinctive (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). The institutional claims are driven by organisational leadership, as they aim to influence organisational members' interpretations of OI within a set of legitimate, prescribed categories. Identity claims are assumed to be enduring and fairly resistant to change (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

From the social constructionist perspective, on the other hand, organisational identity is assumed to reside in organisational members' collectively shared beliefs and understandings about those central and fairly consistent features of their organisation (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). These understandings reside in shared interpretive schemas, and are renegotiated periodically amongst organisational members. Within this perspective, the institutional claims or organisational self-definitions presented by leaders are assumed to provide a sense-giving function on which members collectively draw as the basis of their meaning-making processes (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). The emphasis here is on the way

organisational members interpret or reject formal organisational claims in a process of sense-making. I will now discuss each of the perspectives in greater depth.

#### **2.4.2 A social actor perspective of organisational identity**

King et al (2010) argue for a conception of an organisation as a particular kind of social actor, functioning in a decided and deliberate manner. This means that organisations are more than social collectives or aggregations of individuals, but in modern society they have rights and responsibilities similar to those of individuals (King et al, 2010). They can thus be regarded as independent social and legal entities (Czarniawska, 1997<sup>4</sup>; Whetten & Mackey, 2002, Whetten, 2006; King et al, 2010; Robichaud, Giroux & Taylor, 2004). Scott highlights the importance of this view as follows: “We will fail to perceive the importance of organisations for our lives if we view them only as contexts – as arrangements influencing the activities of individual actors. Organisations must also be viewed as actors in their own right, as “collective social actors”. They can take actions, utilize resources, enter into contracts, and own property” (2003:7). Van Tonder also argues that organisations are “a special class of purposive social collectives on the basis of universal features such as structure, purpose, resources, technology, organisation and coordination” (2011:632).

It was noted earlier that organisations are located in particular institutional arrangements with regard to their sphere of activities for a field or industry. From the social actor perspective, the emphasis when it comes to identity is on locating the organisation in terms of an established set of criteria, for example, an industry, a social network or a labour market rather than a collection of essential features (Corley et al, 2006). Much like the categorisation that takes place on the individual level (as described in Social Identity Theory), the organisation is involved in a similar process, choosing memberships (categorisations) in identity groups and categories, thus determining a particular type of social actor (Whetten & Mackey, 2002). The organisation will be defined in terms of what is central, distinctive and enduring, but this relates more to its market position and broader commitments than to its members’ commonly-held beliefs (Corley et al, 2006; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> Although Czarniawska (1997) is included by these authors as arguing from a social actor viewpoint, I believe this is a misunderstanding of her position and that she is more accurately classified as promoting a narrative view of OI (see section 4.3.4.1). Interestingly, Czarniawska (1997) classifies Albert & Whetten (1985) and Dutton & Dukerich (1991) as representing a view of the “essential self”, in direct contrast to the constructionist viewpoint from which she herself claims to work. No wonder there is such conceptual confusion in the field!

King et al (2010) propose two theoretical assumptions that underlie social actor status, the external attribution assumption and the intentionality assumption.

*External attribution status* refers to the fact that organisations are attributed with social actor status by primary stakeholders and audiences legally, practically and linguistically (Czarniawska, 1997; King et al, 2010; Robichaud et al, 2004; Whetten & Mackey, 2002). We “talk” about organisations as though they are social actors, for example, newspapers report on organisational activities in the following manner: “Absa insists no larger-scale retrenchments”; “Goliath back in black” and “Court rules in favour of MTN in Swaziland” (*Business Day*, Friday 30 March 2012:17<sup>5</sup>). Linguistically, we refer to organisations as independent actors, so language thus bestows social actor status, constituting and reproducing a reality in which organisations have some sense of unique self (King et al, 2010). The last extract also underlies their status as legal persons in the eyes of the law and the state and other stakeholders who monitor organisational activities and hold them accountable for their actions (Czarniawska, 1997; King et al, 2010). An organisation’s external attribution status rests on two factors, namely the sovereignty and responsibility of the organisation.

The organisation as we know it today has come to be regarded as a *sovereign entity*, with rights and responsibilities bestowed on it by an outside legitimate authority in the form of the state. The state views the organisation as a unitary actor and gives it authority to regulate membership and exercise control over the behaviour in its domain (King et al, 2010). Sovereignty is a source of power, and the organisation exercises this by determining membership, setting rules and managing (controlling) behaviour by rewarding and sanctioning behaviour. The organisational structure allows for the development of roles, the incumbents of which are chosen by the organisation, and the exercise thereof, shaped by organisational requirements. Organisational members thus become member-agents, representing the organisation and creating the expectation of the joint obligation of all organisational members (King et al, 2010). While organisational members arguably do have an influence on the organisation (structure-agency debate), this in no way detracts from the social actor status of the organisation.

However, because of their sovereignty and rights to make choices, organisations have a concomitant *responsibility* for their choices, which are legally enforceable (for example, the payment of damages,

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<sup>5</sup> These were all taken from the front page of the “Companies & Markets” section.

finances in the case of price-fixing) (Czarniawska, 1997; King et al, 2010). In addition, terms such as image and reputation infer that organisations are also held “informally” responsible for their choices and actions (Fombrum & Shanely, 1990). Organisations, in pursuit of their goals, set strategy and pursue policies which have particular consequences, and there is an expectation, legally and normatively, that they will be held accountable for these. The normative regulation of organisational activities is demonstrated in the case of Shell and the public response to the impact of many of their business decisions and ventures, which in turn have had implications for their identity.

*The intentionality assumption* refers to the fact that organisations have intentionality that is autonomous from the beliefs, values, desires and aims of their members (King et al, 2010). Tollefson (2002) argues that organisations can be regarded as intentional, as they are designed to operate from a particular viewpoint. This “point of view” occupies the mindset of the member-agent, allowing them to act on behalf of the organisation, making decisions in a fairly predictable manner, as though the organisation were “willing the action to be so” (King et al, 2010:295). Critical to understanding the organisation’s “point of view” is the identity of the organisation, as well as its goals. Identity is critical when considering intentionality, as it is from this basis that the actions of organisational agents are guided by “irreversible commitments”, either explicitly or implicitly (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997). Goals, on the other hand, provide criteria against which appropriate behaviour and strategies can be judged (King et al, 2010).

According to King et al, organisational identity is critical in accounting for the uniqueness of the organisation’s status, as, “once formed, an organization has its own unique properties” (2010:290). Identity allows for “coherent, predictable social interaction within and among organisations. More specifically, identity creates a set of expectations about appropriate behavior for a particular organisation. As identity claims become expressed as institutionalised mission statements, policies, and routines, they operate as the organisation’s social context, providing members and informed outsiders with a common set of phenomenological points of reference that guide consequential deliberation and organizational decision making” (King et al, 2010:295). As a result, organisational members, rather than relying on their own personal judgement, are directed by identity claims when making decisions and acting on the organisation’s behalf.

Just as organisational identity makes possible the intentionality of organisations by providing a (more-or-less) coherent framework for member action, so do *organisational goals*. By providing direction for

decision-making and action, members are able to act intentionally, on behalf of the organisation. Furthermore, goals provide criteria against which behaviour can be judged as appropriate or not, and allow for organisational performance to be assessed (King et al, 2010).

What emerges from this discussion is the explicit nature of organisational identity claims and the institutional origin thereof, often viewed as originating with organisational leadership. Because of its grounding in institutional claims, it is this perspective of organisational identity that is often associated with the central, distinctive and enduring nature of OI. If one considers the figures depicting the tensions in organisational identity discussed earlier, the social actor perspective would be associated with the left hand side arrows, that is:

- A property of the organisation;
- As having temporal continuity;
- As having central, collectively agreed characteristics.

However, the institutional origin is only one aspect of organisational identity and does not allow for the inherent sense-making capabilities of human beings. It is to the discussion of identity as context that we now turn.

### **2.4.3 A social constructionist perspective of organisational identity**

In Albert and Whetten's (1985) original definition of organisational identity, they refer to each of the characteristics - central character, distinctiveness and temporal continuity - as "claimed". This raises the important question of by whom is it claimed? It is a question that highlights two important assumptions about their own view of organisational identity: identity is constructed variably at different times for different purposes, and is "more a political-strategic act than an intentional construction of scientific taxonomy" (1985:268). From this perspective, organisational identity is constructed through social processes, and while management have a privileged role in shaping identity, all the members can be engaged in negotiating it. This is phrased by Scott and Lane (2000a:143) as "trade in images" (see also Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Brown & Humphreys, 2002; Brown et al, 2005; Coupland & Brown, 2004; Empson, 2004; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Humphreys & Brown, 2002a; Sillince & Brown, 2009). There is, furthermore, a reciprocal influence between individual and organisational identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). The organisation's identity creates a context for the development of the individual self-concept, and at the same time individual identity beliefs can provide building blocks for collective organisational identities. It is identification processes that form

the critical links between two mutually dependent levels of identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Empson, 2004; Fiol, 2002; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997).

These processes are located in the members' collective conscience, which, according to the literature reviewed, is variously termed beliefs (Sarason, 1995; Fiol & Huff, 1992; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997), cognitive schemas or images (Fiol & Huff, 1992; Gustafson & Reger, 1995; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Van Tonder & Lessing, 2003; Albert et al, 2000), perceptions (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Haslam et al, 2003; Alvesson & Empson, 2008); values (Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Aust, 2004) and narratives (Brown, 2006).

As indicated, Ravasi and Schultz (2006) refer to this as the *sense-making* function of identity, the aim being to understand how employee members "interpret" formal identity claims and collectively construct meaning in their experience of these (Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Corley et al, 2006; Nag et al, 2007). Meanings are shaped by powerful organisational members and are produced and reproduced to serve their interests (Gioia, 1998). Organisational identity is thus a power effect and, if contested by other members, may become the site for a struggle for power (Humphreys & Brown, 2002a; Brown, 2006; Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002).

#### **2.4.3.1 Critique of a constructed view**

The view of organisational identity as social construction, is, however, not without its problems, and Corley et al (2006) highlight two aspects of concern. The first issue is that of who is included in the collective. Is it only organisational members or does it include a broader range of stakeholders? For example, Scott and Lane (2000b), have developed a stakeholder model of organisational identity. Secondly, what is meant by the idea of "shared"? Is it "an aggregate property (that is, a summary of members' understandings and beliefs about the organisation's identity), or some sort of "gestalt" property arising from group dynamics" (Corley et al, 2006:87). The problem with viewing OI as a set of shared characteristics is that it becomes hard to differentiate it from similar concepts such as culture and climate (Brown, 2006).

In the discussion that follows, I will consider three theoretical positions that fall within the view of organisational identity as being some form of construction. While these do not represent the entire domain of OI as construction and context, they are three perspectives that at least have each been carefully developed to form a coherent theoretical position. The first is Social Identity Theory, which

differs from the others in that it locates organisational identity in the identification by individual members with the organisation. The unit of analysis is thus the individual rather than the organisation per se. While this theory was applied to the organisation as a social actor (see earlier discussion) in its original conception, it was applied to the individual and his or her identification with the group and organisation. In the discussion that follows, this will be my focus.

The second theoretical position is that of Organisational Identity Theory, which originated in the work by Van Tonder and his colleagues. This theory is psychological in origin and has the organisation as its unit of analysis. Finally, a narrative approach to organisational identity will be discussed. This approach locates organisational identity in language or discourse, and, more specifically, in the narratives shared by organisational members as they make sense of and share meaning around the identity of their organisation. This approach is most succinctly articulated by two authors, Czarniawska and Brown, whom I will discuss separately and briefly.

#### **2.4.3.2 Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory (SIT) has its origins in the work of Henri Tajel but it was developed and more clearly formulated in collaboration with John Turner and others. Closely related to social identity theory is self-categorisation theory (discussed in the next paragraph). This was developed by John Turner as an extension to social identity theory with similar theoretical and metatheoretical underpinnings (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995, Hogg & Terry, 2000). These two theories together explain how various social identity processes work. The key idea of social identity theory is that people identify themselves with multiple social categories in response to the statement “I am”. Each social category of which a person is part provides a set of defining characteristics which become part of their self-concept (Abrams, 1996; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg et al, 1995; Pratt, 1998; Rink & Ellemers, 2007). The individual may identify with various groups, membership of which provides them with a social identity, along with guidelines governing how one should think, feel and behave within the group context (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg et al, 1995; Pratt, 1998). For this reason, social identities are considered descriptive, prescriptive and evaluative (Hogg et al, 1995).

Self-categorisation theory (SCT) describes the categorisation process (critical to SIT) in more detail, including the circumstances in which particular social identities become salient as well as their consequences for perception and action (Abrams, 1996; Cornelissen, Haslam & Balmer, 2007; Hogg et al, 1995; Pratt, 1998). Groups, in this context, are regarded as prototypes, described by Hogg and Terry

(2000:123) as “fuzzy sets that capture the context-dependent features of group membership, often in the form of representations of exemplary members (actual group members who best embody the group) or ideal types (an abstraction of group features). Prototypes embody all the attributes that characterize groups and distinguish them from other groups, including beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behaviours”. It is according to these perceived group prototypes that individuals classify themselves and others into social categories, a process governed by contextual factors (Pratt, 1998). By emphasising prototypical rather than individual attributes, group members become “depersonalized”, a process in which a contextual change in the level of identity takes place (Hogg et al, 1995). This process is not the same as “dehumanization” or “depersonalization”, both of which imply a loss of personal identity. In this case, the words imply merely a shift in focus from individual to group identity.

#### **2.4.3.2.1 Social identification and organisation identity**

While it is not a theory of organisational identity per se, social identity theory is often applied to the study of organisational identity, as the organisation is one social identity with which the individual can identify (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Cornelissen et al, 2007; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Rink & Ellemers, 2007). In addition, employees may identify with the subgroups in an organisation, for example, a work group, a department, a union or a fast-track group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Foreman & Whetten, 2002). Identification with the organisation and any sub-groups provides the individual with enhanced self-esteem, meaning and connectedness, and it is this investment in the organisation and the subsequent benefits the person derives that make organisational identity difficult to change (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

There are two processes of SIT that are important in understanding the process of organisational identification, *categorisation* and *self-enhancement* (Hogg et al, 1995; Pratt, 1998). *Categorisation* is a cognitive process which involves setting in-group/out-group boundaries and assigning people (including the self) to contextually relevant categories. The categorisation process produces group-distinctive stereotypes and normative perceptions critical to the process of self enhancement. *Self-enhancement* governs the categorisation process, ensuring that in-group norms and stereotypes are in favour of the in-group. These sociocognitive processes form part of an individual’s subjective belief structures, which influence members’ behaviours as they struggle to ensure self-enhancement through a positive organisational identity (Hogg et al, 1995; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). The above-mentioned discussion makes clear the emphasis on the cognitions and cognitive structures highlighted in the definitions of organisational identity.



When considering the implications of SIT for organisational identity, Pratt (1998) identifies six antecedents to identification identified by organisational scholars, three pertaining to categorisation and three to self-enhancement.

*Categorisation* is important, as it has implications for the clarity of ingroup-outgroup boundaries, and organisational identification is more likely to occur:

- In an organisation that is distinctive (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, Dutton et al, 1994);
- In the presence of salient out-groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989);
- Where intra-organisational competition is absent (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, cited in Pratt, 1998).

*Self-enhancement* leads to identification, because a positive organisational identity will enhance members' self-esteem as a result of their association with it. Organisational identification will more likely be present:

- In a high prestige organisation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996);
- In organisations with an attractive image (Dutton et al, 1994; Elsbach & Karmer, 1996);
- Where the members' own esteem is linked to organisational identity (Dutton et al, 1994; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996).

While originally intended as theory about the individual's identification with the group and subsequent intergroup behaviour, theorists have extended the conceptual and empirical focus to explain organisational identity as a process of organisational identification (Rao, Davis & Ward, 2000; Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

Just as individuals populate the self with various identities, so the organisation chooses various categories of membership, including the industry of which they are part and the organisational form they use, for example, "We are an engineering firm – furthermore, we are a professional engineering firm (as opposed to a manufacturing engineering firm)" (Whetten & Mackey, 2002; Rao et al, 2000). Thus organisations derive identity from various groups, both formal and informal, for example, membership of accrediting bodies (Sarason, 1998), as well as the meanings that are associated with these groups (Rao et al, 2000). Benchmarking is an example of a process whereby organisations derive positive organisational identities (Gioia, 1998).

### 2.4.3.3 Organisational Identity Theory

Organisational identity theory has its origins in the work of Erikson and presents a specifically psychological approach to the identity of groups and organisations. It was initially developed as a framework for the identity of small groups by Van Tonder (1987), who suggested that this could be applied as a theoretical framework for organisations as well (Van Tonder, 1999, 2011; Van Tonder & Lessing, 2003). Organisational identity is defined as “a dynamic, self-referential cognitive schema or meaning frame about the organisation, held tacitly by the organisation as social system, i.e. its members” (Van Tonder, 2011:637). The role of identity is to continually “define and separate the organisation from its environment through the sampling of information across the organisation-environment interface (through social comparison and self categorisation processes) and integrating this information into an evolving cognitive schema or framework (a gestalt) of the organisation” (Van Tonder, 1999: 203).

While the framework is individually held, where these individual notions of organisational identity converge and correspond, the organisation can be said to have a clear identity, either positive or negative (Van Tonder, 2011). Shared perceptions of organisational identity grow and develop as organisational members engage and interact in collective endeavours like meetings, social gatherings, workshops and planning sessions (Van Tonder, 2006, 2011). Importantly in this theory, it is the organisation that is the unit of analysis.

Identity is viewed as having both an objective and a subjective component (Van Tonder, 1999). The objective component refers to “an integrated perspective (cognitive gestalt) of those features of an organism (individual, group) that demonstrates its uniqueness, consistency, and endurance over time” (1999:194). The subjective component is defined as “the organism’s (individual / group) sense of having an identity – essentially the organism’s degree of awareness of its identity” (1999:194). This translates into two interconnected components of identity, the “fact of identity” (FoI) and the “sense of identity” (SoI).

The fact of identity (the objective component) “is embedded in empirically discernable dimensions of the organisation which convey its persistently distinctive character, i.e. those features that portray the organisation as unique and enduring, as well as those that are considered core and unifying” (Van Tonder, 2011:638). The FoI is often tacit and comprises the descriptive component of the self-

referential organisational schema. It is grounded in observable features of the organisation and is equated with “an outsider –looking on” (2011:638). Examples include leadership, strategy, culture or market position (Van Tonder, 2011). The focus on the tangibles of the organisation is distinctly reminiscent of the social actor approach, yet, if one considers the theory as a whole, it becomes apparent that it is more closely aligned with the identity as shared meaning, a matter I will discuss in more detail at the end of this section.

The subjective component of identity, sense of identity, refers to “a collective awareness among members of the organisation’s identity status, for example, experiencing an identity crisis” (2011:638). Identity crises occur in the absence of identity or where identity diffusion, in the form of an inappropriate or incongruent identity, is present (Van Tonder, 1999).

When it comes to classifying OIT, Van Tonder (2011) views this as distinct from applications of social identity approaches, based on different units of analysis. SIT (in its original formulation) has the individual as the unit of analysis, while OIT focusses on the organisation as a whole. Van Tonder (2003) suggests that the work of Albert and Whetten (1985), Dutton and Dukerich (1991) and Dutton et al (1994) can be grouped along with his own in what he terms the classical approach to OI. This is based on a commonality of belief in the distinctive character of the organisation manifesting in features considered to be core, distinctive and enduring, as well as being based on a more psychological approach to identity (Van Tonder & Lessing, 2003; Van Tonder, 2004). Other classifications of organisational identity, unfamiliar with work by Van Tonder and his colleagues, classify the aforementioned differently.

In some respects, OIT is like no other conception of OI, and one could argue that it should be discussed or classified as a unique approach. However, in my view, there is sufficient reason to classify it as part of the “identity as shared meaning” perspective, based on three characteristics it has in common with the other approaches mentioned in the section:

1. OI is not merely the prerogative of leadership and management, but “belongs” to all organisational members.
2. These theories “locate” identity in the same form of cognitive structure or schema or in narratives (as we will see when we discuss narrative identity).
3. Identity is the result of a collective construction process as members engage in organisational activities and routines.

#### 2.4.3.4 Narrative Identity

Narratives as a metaphor or approach to the study of personal identity is firmly rooted in philosophy (Bruner, 1991; Craig 1995) and psychology (Sarbin, 1986). Sarbin suggests that “human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (1986:8) and for this reason, the narrative serves as a useful root metaphor for psychology. Because narratives ground human action in their context, they serve as a useful organising principle for understanding human action (Sarbin, 1986), the basis of psychological endeavour.

Narratives are considered helpful for studying identity as story telling, and sharing experiences with others is considered an integral part of being human (Sarbin, 1986; Landau, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988). Narratives serve as “interpretive devices” helping organise and giving meaning to life. In so doing, they constitute life and experience, as well as the interpretation of it (Bruner, 1997; Czarnaiwksa, 2004; Kohler Riessman, 1993, 2008; Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2008). Furthermore, narratives are co-constructed and are thus useful in understanding processes of organising (Brown, 2006; Kohler Riessman, 2008).

Boje (1995) defines a storytelling organisation as a “collective storytelling system in which the performance of stories is a key part of members’ sense-making and a means of allowing them to supplement individual memories with institutional memory” (Boje, 1991:106). On the one hand, the “grand organisational narrative” can suppress individual ones by collapsing them into one, while, on the other, an organisation may also be considered a “pluralistic construction of a multiplicity of stories, storytellers, and story performance” (Boje, 1995:1000). Thus, instead of one dominant narrative, there are multiple stories told by various storytellers. In addition to the multiplicity of stories, stories themselves may have multiple meanings, captured in the the notion of “plurivocity” (Boje, 1995). For this reason, narrative identity in organisations is assumed to be “a plurality of stories and story interpretations in struggle with one another” (Boje, 1995:1001).

##### 2.4.3.4.1 Czarniawska: Dramas of organisational identity

According to Table 1 at the beginning of this section, Czarniawska is classified as promoting a social actor perspective of the organisation. However, in her book *Narrating the organisation: Dramas of institutional identity*, she goes to some lengths to carefully explain her position. She describes herself as a constructionist, though not from an idealist perspective, holding a firm belief in an objective

reality but accepting that this reality cannot be tested except through subjectivity and intersubjectivity. She argues for a view of organisations as *nets of collective action*, with an emphasis on the process of organisation rather than the resulting object “the organisation”. She acknowledges, however, that the metaphor of the organisation as super-person is firmly entrenched in people’s minds and in the way they talk about organisations as “producing”, “learning” and “structuring”, much as they would of other individuals. She traces this to the invention of the “legal person” status attached to an organisation, and the associated accountability to both the state and consumers which is then “*reflected* in everyday language” (1997:46). However, she reminds us that these “institutions” are products of modernity and are neither essential nor given.

She argues that both personal and organisational identity are narratives within the greater modern narrative and are constructed in similar fashion. In fact, more than a narrative, identity is more accurately viewed as “a continuous process of narration in which both the narrator and the audience are involved in formulating, editing, applauding and refusing various elements of the ever-produced narrative” (1997:49). She suggests that autobiography, which is considered non-fictional literature, to be the most appropriate narrative genre for identity construction.

#### **2.4.3.4.2 Brown: A Narrative Approach to Collective Identities**

Based on his own and his colleagues’ work (Brown, 2006) provides a framework within which a collective narrative identity can be conceptualised and studied, suggesting that this could overcome critique leveled against the other approaches. His thinking is grounded in the assumptions discussed above, but the following key points are highlighted:

First, the term organisation is viewed as “a rallying point, or spatial metaphor, that refers neither to a concrete set of social assumptions nor a fixed geographic location, but a discursive space” (Brown, 2006:742). OI narratives are the stories members tell in the process of making sense of their organisation. OI is thus a discursive construct rather than a psychological one, and is present in collective identity stories, shared and negotiated through dialogue and networking, influenced by processes of socialisation and leadership. Because organisations do not begin telling new stories every day, there is continuity in OI, enabling the identification of distinct themes or dimensions. However, identity narratives are also not static and have the capacity to evolve and change as meanings shift and change. There is thus no reason to see OI in polar-terms, as always shared or always fragmented, as

always temporary or always enduring, but depending on context, characterised by narrative consensus or dissensus (characterised by contradictions).

Brown (2006) proposes five issues which together form a conceptual model for investigating collective identities, these being reflexivity, voice, plurivocity, temporality and fictionality. Each of these will be discussed below:

**Table 2.2 Dimensions of Narrative Identity**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Description of dimension</b>
<b>Reflexivity</b>	Reflexivity allows organisational members to understand, explain and define themselves through a process of imposing order and meaning on experience (Brown, 2006; Gioia et al, 2000; Harré & Secord, 1972; Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997; Holland, 1999). It is an inherently social process, always carried out with others (and if not, with them in mind) and is implicitly collective (Parker, 2005). Reflexivity allows for change in identity as others' views of the organisation are taken into account (Brown, 2006; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991).
<b>Voice</b>	The crux of voice as a characteristic of narrative identity has to do with the fact that a narrative is always “voiced” (either verbally or in written form) from a particular standpoint for a specific audience, and is thus never neutral (Brown, 2006; Coupland & Brown, 2004; Anataki & Widdicombe, 1998). Organisational identity, while it is a narrative accomplishment, serves the purpose of agency in achieving particular ends (Brown, 2006; Coupland & Brown, 2004). Approaching the study of organisational identity from a narrative perspective thus allows us to consider how employees “perform” a version of their organisation’s identity, drawing on available cultural resources (Parker, 2005). Where meanings become fixed or reified in the production of practices, agents or relations, this forms the basis of power (Clegg, 1989).
<b>Plurivocity</b>	Plurivocity refers to the fact that organisations tend to have multiple identities (Pratt & Foreman, 2000), and a narrative approach to organisational identity allows for the plurality of stories members of a collective have to tell about themselves (Hinchman & Hinchman, 1997). This serves several important functions. First, it permits organisational members to interpret events in their own way, which provides a sense of empowerment. Secondly, narratives that permit

	multiple interpretations allow the expectations of various stakeholders to be met (Backer, 2008; Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Plurivocity does not necessarily imply fragmentation, but means that organisations are characterised by “sets of stories that have certain commonalities, such as key themes, core events and imposing personalities” (Brown, 2006).
<b>Temporality</b>	Temporality refers to “an account of events occurring over time” (Bruner, 1991:6) and is important in that time gains meaning through its narrative organisation (Ricoeur, 1984). Collective identity will most often involve an account of how the organisation has evolved, even though changes may be incremental. Narratives are, however, not neutral and the way in which an account is produced bears traces of authorial imposition. In this regard, “time” becomes flexible, and can be adjusted according to the needs of the author, and beginnings and endings can be chosen to suit the latter’s purposes.
<b>Fictionality</b>	While narratives are constructed from experience and what is ostensibly historical data, they “tend not to be comprehensive, consistent and precise but contain lacunae, imprecisions and non-sequiturs” (Brown, 2006:741). Nevertheless, while OI narratives are characterised by imprecision, there are limits to which fictionality can be pushed and they will always be constrained by the presumptions and conflicting stories of co-authors and audiences. This is demonstrated quite powerfully by Humphreys and Brown (2002a). The authors describe a management team attempting to narrate an identity that is out of keeping with the legal and social status of the organisation. Senior management, of the organisation, “Westville Institute”, a multi-faculty college, was engaged in a campaign to obtain University status. The campaign by senior management “sought to author an organizational identity narrative that emphasized the importance of attaining university status” (2002:428). This narrative was consistently rejected by UK higher education authorities despite which, staff received a letter informing them that the Board of Governors had “agreed in principle to change the name of the Institute so as to incorporate the word ‘university’” (2002:433). Employees of the Westville Institute regarded this as a denial of reality and rejected the validity of the narrative.

Brown (2006) highlights some critique of the narrative approach, the main aspects of which are shown below.

1. Despite being grounded in philosophy and psychology, the concepts “narrative” and “story” are contested to the extent that some theorists question whether a narrative approach is possible at all.
2. The meanings associated with these terms locate them in the realm of fiction and fantasy, and they are thus viewed sceptically as a model for serious “scientific” work.
3. A narrative approach means that the use of survey methods in identity research is limited. It is this constraint that serves as the basis for one of the research questions forming the basis of this study, namely using a qualitative survey to access organisational identity.

In the discussion of narrative identity, we find a completely different “location” for OI, that is, in the narratives’ organisational members share as they make sense of their organisation. While this may seem quite far removed from the everyday realities of the organisation as a social actor, these theorists have explored the use of some fairly “concrete” aspects in their narratives, namely dress and place (Brown & Humphreys, 2006; Humphreys & Brown, 2002b).

While the narrative approach differs somewhat from the location of identity in cognitive structures and shared interpretive schemas, as proposed by SIT and OIT, the underlying assumptions of OI are similar, in the sense that OI resides in claims made by all organisational members, and involves a collective process of construction and contestation as members engage in organisational activities and routines. Where the narrative approach differs from the rest, its emphasis on identity as a power effect, an element generally ignored by other theorists.

### **2.5. Conceptualising Organisational Identity for this study**

To summarise, I have considered various definitions of organisational identity and the various perspectives from which organisational identity is conceptualised. At this point I will explain the framework of organisational identity that will serve as a basis for my own study, and from this highlight the challenge that is posed for the possibility of distinctiveness.

In an overview of the theories, I classified existing theories into two broad approaches (Corley et al, 2006). Firstly the social actor approach which locates identity as a property of the organisation which is then internalised by members, and, allows for “coherent, predictable social interaction within and among organisations” (King et al, 2010:295). Furthermore, it provides a collection of mutual expectations regarding acceptable behavior for the organisation and provides members with a familiar



set of reference points for deliberation and decision making. The assumption here is that organisational identity originates in the specifics of the organisation providing guidelines for members as they act in the interest of the organisation. It also suggests a strong measure of control as members are socialised into a particular way of being, suspending their own judgement and are instead directed by the organisational identity claims of the organisation.

Secondly I classified a group of theories who correspond with what Corley et al (2006) refer to as the social constructionist approaches, in which organisational identity is viewed as the outcome of collective meaning making by members. The various theorists I have classified in this approach include Social Identity Theory, Organisation Identity Theory and the Narratives approaches to organisational identity.

Some theorists have suggested an attempt to reconcile both the social actor and the constructionist approaches in understanding organisational identity (Corley et al, 2006; Hamilton & Gioia, 2009; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Corley et al (2006) suggest that the relationships between essentialist approaches and shared notions of identity can be likened to the relationships between self-concept and a working identity, at the level of individual identity. These distinctive facets may serve different but equally important functions. Working identity in this context refers to the identity that is immediately available to the person at a given moment, though in no way fully captures (or is even intended to) a comprehensive understanding of who they are. In the same way, constructionist notions of organisational identity allow for immediately accessible notions of organisational identity whilst “deeper, essential organizational identity” may or may not be immediately salient to organisational members. (2006:96). Ravasi and Schultz (2006) also suggest that both approaches have something to add to our understanding of organisational identity, though differ slightly on the nature of the respective contributions. Based on their longitudinal study of Bang & Olufsen, they propose: “...although both perspectives may be correct in their own right, their advocates may have respectively underestimated the generative potential of institutional claims and the resilience of shared understandings under environmental pressures” (2006:453).

Whilst in this study, I will be guided by the constructionist approach to organisational identity, there are two significant aspects of the afore-mentioned, that will inform my perspective. Firstly, is the importance of institutional claims originating from the social actor, and secondly that these claims, much like the working identity on an individual level, represent salient elements of organisational identity at a particular moment in time.

### 2.5.1 The social actor as source of material in constructing identity

Organisational identity relies on the social actor's identification with various aspects of its external environment, resulting from choices made by founders and subsequent organisational leaders. By choosing memberships in particular categories as opposed to others, founders<sup>6</sup> call into being a particular type of organisation or social actor. When using this term, I am fully aware that the organisation as social actor is itself a socially constructed notion, but as Czarniawska reminds us, the metaphor of the organisation as super-person is firmly entrenched in the minds of people and the language we use to talk about organisations. Whilst referring to the organisation as social actor, I do so under the assumption that organisations are products of modernity and are neither essential nor given. However the term social actor, in the context of organisational identity provides a useful term for referring to elements of the organisation which more or less provide parameters for organisational functioning for example, the nature of the business, the subsequent geographical locations, the skills, routines and decision-making associated with the business. In this term I try to capture those elements which provide "material" in the process of organisational identity construction, as members engage in a process of signification and sense-making (Craig, 1995).

Having called a particular type of social actor into being, there are implications for the geographical context, the nature of work that is necessary, and may have an influence on organisational structure and processes, as well as the types of organisational members who are recruited. It places the organisation in a particular industry with associated regulations, expectations and contextual challenges, and, importantly, particular legal and moral contexts which provide critical constraints regarding identity (Craig, 1995). It is on the basis of this set of identifications that we locate the organisation within the political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal (the so-called PESTEL factors) that the similarity (or "sameness") of identity originates (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). The underlying assumption is that similar organisations will by the nature of their identifications be similar and the capacity to be truly unique is questioned (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009).

The importance of the nature of business was highlighted in the Nag et al (2007:833) study, which found that the most common informant statement was "We are a technology company". The identity of

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<sup>6</sup> In the beginning stages of the organisation, the founders would play this role. Depending on the nature of the organisation, this role may, in later stages of the organisation's life cycle, be taken over by the management structures that exist in the organisation.

the organisation was linked to the nature of the business. They highlight that too often organisational identity is considered from a cognitive perspective and is treated (only) as something residing in the minds of members, when the nature of the business and its constraints are vital. The importance of the social actor and the nature of the business is illustrated by Humphreys and Brown in their 2002a study of Westville Institute. Westville Institute was a UK-based higher education institution, though not a university. Senior managers of the institution were promoting the idea of the institution gaining university status, a process which was (at the time of publication) unsuccessful and ultimately led to an identity crisis amongst many staff members. By ignoring existing organisational identity narratives, management of Westville Institute sought to delete them (Pratt & Foreman 2000), ignoring their origin in the realities of the social actor. Westville Institute, as social actor, was defined in particular ways and subject to the constraints and limitations associated with its particular actor status within a specific social context. Narrating an alternative identity was insufficient to counter these limitations.

In addition to the emphasis on the nature of the business, various authors have highlighted the role of organisational routines, skills and decision-making in organisational identity. Dutton and Dukerich (1991) with Robichaud et al (2004), argue that identities emerge from the unfolding of activities in a community of practice. Ravasi and Schultz (2006) found that product design and development, and the originality of these, were integral to identity-related reflections, as they were central to the B & O culture, and constituted a distinctive trait of their organisation.

The importance of the physical context is further highlighted in the Brown and Humphreys (2006) study, in which an ethnographic account of the working lives of college staff increasingly revolved around issues of place. The physical and geographical context affected the way in which the organisation was perceived and provided an abundance of symbols with which staff could construct versions of organisational identity. The senior management team, from the only refurbished corridor in an otherwise dilapidated and old fashioned building, promoted the idea of the college as a business, hampered in its progress by the unattractiveness of the site, as basic resource. Employees rejected the notion of the college as a business, opting rather to focus on it as an educational institution, whose pedagogic purposes were hindered by the carceral and asylum-like properties they associated with the building. Place was thus used to author competing versions of the organisation, and remained a hindering factor in successfully constructing the organisation as both a business and educational institution. The geographical location and physical properties provided an important source of material

used by organisational members in the process of signification so critical to sense-making in organisational identity.

Based on discussion above, it would appear that elements of the social actor play a crucial part in constructing identity. However, given the role of the social actor in constructing identity, and the limitations which are placed on the social actor by the broader environment, the possibility of distinctiveness in organisational identity becomes challenge (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). As I have already indicated organisations operating in similar environments will be subject to the same constraints and limitations, and will thus find it difficult to “rescue” a sense of uniqueness or distinctiveness (Craig, 1995).

### **2.5.2 Constructing sense of the social actor**

In the process of engaging with an organisation, members are faced with the choices made by founders and leaders on behalf of the social actor, as well as the consequences thereof. In response to these, they assign meaning individually and collectively, and engage in a process of making sense of the organisation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Cornelissen et al, 2007; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Rink & Ellemers, 2007). The importance of the social actor is that it provides material for a process of signification so critical in the negotiation of identity (Craig, 1995). In the process of meaning making and identification, members assign meaning to those elements of the social actor that are salient at a given moment in time (Corley et al, 2006). In this way, members develop a working identity of the organisation, that is those elements of the organisation’s identity that are immediately available to the person at a given moment. These elements are salient for the person at that moment in time, and do not necessarily capture a comprehensive understanding of organisational identity.

The relationship between the elements of the social actor and signification attached by members was clearly illustrated in the Port Authority of New York study (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), described earlier in the chapter. Organisational members (at least) defined their identity as “we are in the transport business” (an institutional claim originating in the social actor). This had a profound influence on the signification and meaning attached by organisational members in response to the homeless problem and their initial lack of response, “this is not our core business”. Nevertheless, non-members attached an alternative meaning to their identity based on their geographical location and the associated challenges of their location. For this reason, the Port Authority was held morally responsible for finding a solution to the problem, even though the problem was not associated with their core business.

I propose that it is within the signification processes that members engage in that the capacity for the uniqueness associated with organisational identity lies. As members engage in a process of signification, and attempt to make sense of the social actor of which they become part, they “make meaning” and engage with the various “similar” dimensions in very specific ways. As a result, it is possible that two “similar” social actors may end up with relatively distinctive identities.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide an overview of the now fairly vast domain of organisational identity literature. I began by considering broad themes in the concept of identity, both personal and organisational. Thereafter, I considered the lack of clarity in definitions of organisational identity and highlighted key themes emerging from these. I provided an overview of identity and commonly associated terms, namely, organisational culture, organisational image and corporate identity. After this, I considered theoretical perspectives of organisational identity, highlighting both the social actor approach and the socially constructed views. Finally, I explained how these informed the basis for the approach followed in my study.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS FOR STUDYING ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY

*“Methodology provides a language for talking about the process of research, not about subject matter”  
(Krippendorff, 2004: xxi).*

### 3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the types of research design used to study organisational identity. As the quotation above describes, the aim of this chapter is not to discuss the subject matter, namely organisational identity, but rather the *process* by which it is studied, and what this implies (if anything) for knowledge of organisational identity. Some authors have lamented the state of empirical research in the field of organisational identity, for example Van Tonder and Lessing (2003) and Van Tonder (2004), highlighting the point that most studies conducted are case study designs. However, an overview of studies<sup>7</sup> suggests that perhaps the state of research in the field is perhaps not as lamentable as initially thought, and the aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which various research designs have contributed positively to knowledge about organisational identity.

To achieve this goal, I followed the process described below. Firstly I summarised all the articles which contain some form of empirical research on organisational identity according to a clear set of guidelines, namely the aim of the study; theoretical framework; research design and methodological choices including data gathering and analysis; and key findings. Thereafter, I conducted a literature review of the various design types suggested by these studies with the aim of highlighting the distinguishing characteristics of each design. Subsequently, I classified each study according to design type, taking into account both the author’s stated design and the distinguishing characteristics outlined for each design type. While it is not possible to review all empirical studies of organisational identity, this chapter represents an overview of the design types with selected examples of each.

The outline of the chapter is as follows: first, I discuss the notion of “research design” briefly and consider three sets of logic according to which they can be classified. Second, an overview of key empirical studies of organisational identity is presented in Table 3.1. In the subsequent sections, each of the design types is discussed with key examples of each one analysed according to the distinguishing characteristics identified. In the final section, I consider each of the research designs in the light of the

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<sup>7</sup> In the overview I present here, I do not claim to have captured all empirical studies of organisational identity. The work of Van Tonder and colleagues are a notable omission for the simple reason that most of these studies were only brought to my attention once the review for this chapter had been completed. I have tried however to ensure that each type of design is represented in the following discussion.

three potential juxtapositions in the perspectives of organisational identity discussed in Chapter 2, exploring the likelihood of a particular design giving rise to a specific type of knowledge about OI.

### 3.2 Research design

The aim of research design<sup>8</sup> is to “enable the researcher to plan critically the logic, composition, and protocols of research methods; to evaluate the performance of individual techniques; and to estimate the likelihood of particular research designs to contribute to knowledge” (Krippendorf, 2004, xxi). As indicated above, research design contributes significantly to our understanding of the subject matter, in this case organisational identity, and for this reason, deserves closer examination. Yin (2009) contends that research design is the logic linking a study’s initial questions to the empirical data and ultimately, to the conclusions of the study. Research design is often likened to the architectural term “blueprint” as it provides an indication of the type of study being constructed and is guided by the nature of the question and the type of evidence required to answer it (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Yin, 2009).

The metaphor of an architectural blueprint is a useful one because just as the “blueprint” of a proposed dwelling would specify whether it is single or double storey, indicate the number of rooms, their function and how they flow together, so research design provides guidance on various elements of the study, and how they relate. Furthermore, the blueprint allows for agreement before the time on the nature of the end product, ensuring a measure of certainty that it will be as required. Just so, a research design provides a measure of certainty that by taking a particular path a researcher can arrive at the right “type” of conclusions (as envisaged by the researcher) in response to the question(s) he or she is asking. I will highlight some these briefly.

Research design provides guidance on the ideal number of participants constituting a sample, with quantitative surveys tending to larger groups whereas designs such as ethnography and narrative analysis, that emphasise the depth of data gathered, require a smaller number of participants. In addition, research design indicates the nature of the data that should be gathered. This could take the form of a number on a Likert scale, indicating the degree of agreement or lack thereof in response to a question. Alternatively it could take the form of a story or narrative told by a participant or the attentive eye of the researcher’s observations. Each of these data tell a different story, allowing for varying

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<sup>8</sup> When using the term “design”, I include other related terms such as “methodology” and “method” (where this is used to describe the nature of a study). I have chosen to use the word “design” as it highlights the importance of “designing” a study with a particular purpose in mind, understanding that this leads to a particular structure of knowledge in a field.

degrees of insight into a topic. Furthermore, a research design will specify the degree of structure surrounding the data gathered for example some forms of survey design and content analysis require a greater degree of structure beforehand as opposed to the relative lack of structure or openness in questioning, present in ethnography and narrative designs.

The format of the data has implications for the way it is analysed. Data gathered in the form of responses to a Likert scale is best analysed using statistical formulas whilst stories and observations require the input of the researcher to structure and make sense of these. Because the nature of the data differs, depending on the design, so the nature of the conclusions vary, allowing for broad generalisation or more detailed description of a phenomenon. The source of the data, and the degree to which this is verified, also have important consequences for conclusions drawn from a study.

Because of the impact of research design, the choice thereof has to be taken into account when reflexively accounting for the results of a study. Hatch and Cunliffe (2006:47) advise that three aspects be addressed:

- What are the assumptions underlying my research design?
- How do they influence the way I see the world and carry out my research?
- What impact does this have on knowledge in general and on the people whose lives are studied?

Important in the above list is the role of research design in “constructing knowledge”. Research design is neither neutral nor without effect and is influenced by the researcher’s own assumptions which in turn influence the nature of knowledge and the participants involved.

### **3.2.1 Classifying research designs**

When considering the design of a study, Mouton (2012) proposes that there are three dimensions, each representing a fairly *mutually-exclusive* choice between two modes of reasoning or “logics” that must be considered, each with implications for the production of evidence that emerges. These logics are essentially modes of reasoning about the phenomenon and lead to different ways of “knowing” about that which is studied, as well as the use to which this knowledge can be put. The three modes of reasoning are:

- The logic of contextualisation vs. the logic of generalisation;
- The logic of discovery vs. the logic of validation;
- The logic of diachronicity vs. the logic of synchronicity.



Each of these three modes of reasoning is discussed below.

The first distinction, *the logic of generalisation versus the logic of contextualisation*, refers to the general question of whether researchers / scholars study a particular case or selection of cases (a) either as representing a larger population to which the findings have to be generalised (this then involves drawing representative samples of the target group); or (b) as an object of intrinsic interest (where there is no need or intent to generalise).

In studies where the logic of generalisation predominates, the aim is to generalise statistically from a small group of relatively homogenous people (or other cases) to a larger population, where the smaller is shown to be a representative sample of the larger one. Here the influence of context is relatively unimportant and the emphasis on large numbers is assumed to minimise the influence of contextual factors. The cases are of interest because they *represent* a larger population of similar cases, and not for their own sake.

In studies where the logic of contextualisation predominates, such as when we study single or smaller numbers of cases of individuals, groups or organisations, we are interested in the unique, the specific and the contextual. The case is studied, not because it represents a larger group but for its own sake. The aim is to make sense of the phenomenon within its context, providing an in-depth understanding thereof. Generalisation is not relevant in this context though the process may culminate in theory building through a process of analytic induction or grounded theory (or a similar process).

### ***FOCUS: cases versus case***

Coming now to the second of Mouton's logics, *the logic of validation versus the logic of discovery* refers to the choice between validating existing theories, models and hypotheses and the development of these as part of a study. The logic of validation typically involves deductive reasoning and involves *testing* propositions and hypotheses derived from existing theories or models. The logic of discovery aims to generate and construct typologies, theories and models, and utilises retroductive or abductive reasoning that aims to find plausible and imaginative explanations for the data at hand (Schwandt, 2007).

### ***GOAL: testing versus developing***

The third logic, *that of diachronicity versus the logic of synchronicity (time period)*, is the form of reasoning logic which refers to the temporal dimension of the study and the researcher's purpose in this regard. The logic of synchronicity refers to the study of a phenomenon at a specific moment in time and can be likened to cross-sectional research. Synchronic studies may track changes within phenomena over a period of time, but this will be from a particular moment in time, and will occur retrospectively (Gerring, 2007). The logic of diachronicity refers to the study of a phenomenon and its development over a protracted time period and is similar to longitudinal research.

### ***TIME PERIOD: slice of life versus duration***

The logics as described by Mouton (2012) give rise to different ways of knowing and whilst these in some instances can be linked to specific designs, they also provide for potential diversity in the way designs are constructed, and are thus useful for guiding researchers in making decisions of how to apply a specific design in answering a particular question.

I will illustrate using the example of a case study, as this provides an example of a design with a fair amount of flexibility. The case study, as design, is based on a *logic of contextualisation*, as the crux of the design is to study “a case in context” (this will be explored in more detail in the discussion of case study design). For this reason it is difficult to conceptualise a case study based on the logic of generalisation. However, in studying the case, a *logic of validation* or a *logic discovery* may apply, depending on the intention of the researcher. If he or she chooses to validate an existing theory in exploring “the case”, a *logic of validation* is applied. On the other hand, if the aim of the study is to develop a model or theory, the *logic of discovery* is evident. Similarly, a case can be studied at one moment in time, employing a *logic of synchronicity*. Alternatively, if the aim is study a case over a period of time, tracking for example changes in processes, a *logic of diachronicity* is evident.

Thus in addition to the guidelines set by various research designs, these dimensions provide a useful tool for clarifying the nature of the research question being asked and the specific direction a design will take. In the sections that follow, I will discuss each of the designs used to study organisational identity, highlighting specific characteristics of each. In addition, I will consider how the dimensions discussed above have been applied to provide flexibility within the research design. I will however

begin, in the next section, with an overview of studies used to explore the topic of organisational identity, considering the nature of the research design employed.

### 3.3 Range of research designs in studying OI

In the table below I have provided an outline of each of the articles according to the research question, the authors' own classification of their design or at least a description thereof, as well as my own classification for the purpose of this study. In the table, the studies are presented in chronological order, whereafter, a selection of these are discussed in more detail according to their research design.

**Table 3.1: List of articles surveyed for the methodological component of the study**

<b>Author and Title</b>	<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Authors' classification</b>	<b>My classification</b>	<b>Theoretical contribution</b>
Dutton & Dukerich (1991) Keeping an eye on the mirror: Image and identity in organizational adaptation.	"The study was designed to generate new theory on how individual interpretations and organisational action on an issue are related over time" (1991:519-520).	A case study methodology aimed at generating and building theory. Classified as an extreme case. Data gathered by means of interviews, organisational documentation, media articles and reports.	Case study	Detailed analysis of the process as it unfolded. Identify characteristics of the model of the role of OI and image and their relationship.
Ruud (1995) The symbolic construction of organizational identities and community in a regional symphony.	An ethnographic account that documents the way in which various groups in a regional symphony orchestra construct a sense of identity symbolically and discursively.	Apart from the "ethnographic account", there is no description of design, except to say that data-gathering included 400 hours of fieldwork, including interviews, informal conversations, observation and documentation.	Ethnography	Identification with a group (within the orchestra) provided members with a sense of solidarity but created division between groups.
Elsbach & Kramer (1996) Members' responses to organizational identity threats: Encountering and countering the Business Weeks	A qualitative examination of US Business Schools' responses to Business Week survey rankings viewed as a significant threat to organisational identity.	No specific design given but they drew on interview and records data which included MBA program catalogues and newspapers, Business Week's 1991 edition of "The	Multiple case study design.	The identification of various tactics used by organisational members in responding to organisation identity threats emphasised by the rankings.

rankings.		Best Business Schools". Alumni magazines, and media reports.		
Czarniawska & Wolff (1998) Constructing new identities in established organizational fields.	An analysis of two new universities trying to establish themselves in a traditionally well-established field – higher education.	No specific design is provided, merely reference to “our cases illustrate”. Cases are written up as case narratives.	Multiple case study design.	Understanding what enables a new organisational identity to survive when entering an established context.
Rao, Davis & Ward (2000) Embeddedness, social identity and mobility: Why firms leave the NASDAQ and join the New York Stock Exchange.	Tested three hypotheses surrounding the likelihood of a firm to defect to a rival stock exchange based on their in-group and out-group ties.	No specific design was mentioned. Used continuous-time event-history models to analyse the defection of firms during the sample period.	Analytical survey design.	Social ties influence an organisation’s response to identity-discrepant cues.
Foreman & Whetten (2002) Member’s identification with multiple-identity organization.	Operationalise and test a model of organisational identification.	Survey using focus groups to develop items.	Survey with the aim of theory building and testing.	Provided support for: 1. Gaps between perceived and ideal identities influence identification. 2. Members identify in varying degrees with multiple identities. 3. Members identify at various levels with an organisation.
Brown & Humphreys (2002) Nostalgia and the narrativization of identity: A Turkish case study.	An analysis of the role of nostalgia in creating both individual and organisational identity.	They make reference to producing an ethnographic account of faculty members of Hero University. Data gathered by means of interviews, participant observation, documentation and physical aspects.	Ethnography	Nostalgia plays an important part in the construction of identity by providing socio—historic continuity, permitting the resistance of hegemonic control and combatting anxiety.
Humphreys & Brown (2002a) Narratives of organizational identity and identification: A case study of	To track the evolution of OI in an institution of higher education, make a theoretical contribution regarding the dynamics of	They aim to produce an ethnographic account of the working lives of faculty members in the Faculty of Arts, Science and	Ethnography because they speak specifically of “our participant observation methodology”	They trace the evolution of identity and how in the face of senior management’s failure to attain university status for

hegemony and resistance.	individuals' collective identification and identity construction and consider the role of senior managers in attempting to control identity construction.	Education at Westville Institute. Data gathered by means of interviews (semi-structured and informal), observation and documentation.	(2002a:427).	their college, various identification responses emerge, as described by Elsbach (1999).
Humphreys & Brown (2002b) Dress and identity: A Turkish case study.	Explore the role of dress (the Muslim headscarf) in resisting attempts at hegemonic identity construction.	They make reference to producing an ethnographic account of faculty members at Hero University. Data gathered by means of formal interviews, informal conversations, documentation and observation of locale (buildings) and attire.	Ethnography based on the criteria of participant observation.	Dress plays a significant role in debates over organisation-level politics and identity.
Coupland & Brown (2004) Constructing organizational identities on the web: A case study of Royal Dutch / Shell.	The authors consider how organisational identities are constructed by means of interaction between an organisation's insiders and outsiders.	A case study approach using a discourse analytic methodology. They subject texts to discourse analysis, drawn from a website which allows for exchanges between Shell insiders and outsiders.	Discourse analysis.	Demonstrates various strategies people use in persuading as well as the role of plurality in constructions of identity.
Corley (2004) Defined by our strategy or our culture? Hierarchical differences in perceptions of organizational identity and change.	How identity differentiation emerges in organisations and the implications of thereof.	An embedded, explanatory case study with a view to extending these findings to other organisational contexts. Gathered data using interviews, non-participant observation and documentation.	Case study - explanatory.	This study provides evidence of multiple organisational identities, differentiated along hierarchical lines. Higher levels saw identity as linked to organisational strategy whilst lower ranks saw it as linked to culture.
Empson (2004) Organizational identity change: Managerial regulation and member identification in an accounting firm acquisition.	Two questions: 1. By what process does organisational identity change following an acquisition? 2. In what way do changes in an accountant's	A case study in which an acquisition process is tracked. The identity of each is gauged and then the impact of the acquisition on both organisations is studied. Makes the	Case study – critical / longitudinal.	Detailed description of the process of de-identification and re-identification during the acquisition, highlighting specific interventions and their impact on the success of the

	organisational identity influence his or her professional identity?	point that empirical studies of organisational identity are usually case studies.		process.
Aust (2004) Communicated values as indicators of organizational identity: A method for organizational assessment and its application in a case study.	The aim of the study was to consider communicated values as indicators of organisational identity.	A case study approach with a content analytic methodology.	Content analysis.	Values of the case organisation as these manifested over time.
Chreim (2005) The continuity-change duality in narrative texts of organizational identity.	The focus of the study was to investigate how continuity and change are managed discursively in texts of organisational identity.	Narrative analysis was used to analyse textual data that included annual reports and messages to shareholders.	Narrative analysis based on the use of documents only and not on multiple methods of data-gathering.	Discursive strategies include the selective reporting of elements from the past, present and future, the juxtaposition of the “modern and attractive” with the “outdated and undesirable”, use of expansive labels allowing the addition and subtraction of meanings and the importation of selected themes from wider macro-discourses.
Brown, Humphreys, & Gurney (2005) Narrative, identity and change: A case study of Laskarina Holidays.	The aim was to analyse shared identity narratives at the UK-based specialist tour operator Laskarina Holidays.	Described as authoring an ethnographic account of the working lives of employees of the UK-based tour operator Laskarina Holidays. Data was gathered by means of interviews, observations, photographs and documentation.	Case study because the main source of data was interviews: observations appear to be informal and not part of a process of participant observation per se.	Identification of three distinctive but interwoven collective identity narratives. Shows how organisational identities are theorised as constituted within discursive regimes.
Brickson (2005) Organizational identity orientation: Forging a link	To uncover properties of organisation identity orientation, and	Survey design using open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires, Ten	Survey design: Qualitative data coded and then analysed	Five identity orientation types identified; professional firms

between organizational identity and organizations' relations with stakeholders.	to identify determinants of identity orientation.	Statements Test (TST) (derived from Kuhn and McPortland's (1954) Twenty Statements Test), troubling event, organisation as person question, accurate motto question, Kashima and Hardie's (2000) Relational, Individual, Collective Self-Aspects Scale (RIC).	quantitatively using multilevel modelling.	exhibited a higher relational identity; types of clients predicted differences in identity orientation; production-based companies structured as co-ops had a more collectivistic orientation.
Brown & Humphreys (2006) Organizational identity and place: A discursive exploration of hegemony and resistance.	To consider how members draw on "place" as one discursive resource as they author various accounts of their organisation's identity, and how these are constructed.	They make reference to "producing an ethnographic account" and "field research". Data gathered using semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, observations and a range of documentation.	Ethnography: they mention "as the field research progressed" (2006:236).	Highlight the importance of place in accounts of organisational identity and show how significations around place are used to resist hegemonic control in the organisation.
Ravasi & Schultz (2006) Responding to organizational identity threats: Exploring the role of organizational culture.	How do identity, image, and culture interact in organisational responses to identity threats?	Longitudinal study which included interviews, identity seminars, house magazines and internal communication, annual reports and external communications, corporate histories and archival material.	Case study (Longitudinal comparison - Gerring)	Identity threats viewed as emerging from construed / desired external images. Highlights the role of cultural practices and artefacts in sense-making and sense-giving in re-evaluating organisational identity.
Van Tonder (2006) Exploring the identity and "sense of identity" of organisations.	A study aimed at the "initial empirical exploration of the organisation identity phenomenon" (2006:14).	No specific design is highlighted though he refers to an exploratory investigation. Data gathered via in-depth interviews incorporating the "Twenty Statements Test" (TST) (Rees & Nicholson, 1994).	Survey design. Qualitative data coded and analysed statistically using cluster analysis.	Provided evidence for organisation's having a "collective, yet largely tacit sense of who and what they are and how they differ from similar organisations" (2006:22). Relationship between strong identity and superior performance

				suggested.
Cole & Bruch (2006) Organizational identity strength, identification, and commitment and their relationships to turnover intention: Does organizational hierarchy matter?	To determine functional distinctions between organisation identity strength, organisational identification and organisational commitment.	Data gathered using questionnaires of organisational identity strength, organisational identification and organisational commitment. Statistical analyses included confirmatory factor analysis, multi-group confirmatory factor analysis, multi-group structural equation modelling, discriminant validity tests, measurement equivalence tests, correlations to turnover intentions.	Survey design but aimed at clarification of concepts and links between constructs.	Findings suggest measures are conceptually distinct, focal constructs are conceptually equivalent, hierarchy and correlations with turnover intention are linked to management hierarchy. Each of these concepts affects turnover in unique ways.
Voss, Cable & Voss (2006) Organizational identity and firm performance: What happens when leaders disagree about “who we are?”	To determine whether organisational performance is related to identity disagreement between organisational leaders with different responsibilities?	Survey design aimed at testing hypotheses. Data gathered by means of questionnaires. Performed confirmatory cluster analysis, cluster analysis and anova.	Survey design aimed at testing hypotheses.	Results suggest moderate to strong support for the idea that when leaders disagree about identity, organisations perform less well than when leaders agree about identity.
Bronn, Engell & Martinsen (2006) A reflective approach to uncovering actual identity.	To find core values of the firm from an individual’s perspective.	Described as a case study by authors. Used an intervention known as a Value funnel to derive values. Data collection took place in an email survey, and a variety of workshops.	Case study.	Provides a method uncovering identity, giving insight into its human element (uncovering identity).
Nag, Corley & Gioia (2007) The intersection of organizational identity, knowledge, and practice: Attempting strategic change via	Investigating an attempt at organisational transformation that allowed for the exploration of the relationship between organisational identity and	Exploratory case-study based research design (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). Data was gathered using interviews, observation and archival sources.	Case study design.	Highlights the importance of recursive relationships between organisational knowledge, identity and practice.



knowledge grafting.	organisational knowledge so as to further understand strategic transformation.			
Oliver & Roos (2007) Beyond text: Constructing organizational identity multimodally	Using a review of methodological approaches to study identity, they propose a novel method using structured interventions. Using individual and organisational data they hoped to produce a “sharedness” in identity which would in turn lead to change.	Describe the study as an exploratory multiple case study making use of participant observation and interviews. Three organisations used. Basis of the data collection was an intervention during which participants were asked to construct a representation of the organisation’s identity.	Multiple case study.	Process implications: use of multiple intelligence led to innovative representations, allowed for freer expression of emotion and individual and group constructions of OI. Content implications: OI representations integrated tacit understandings, and these contributed to organisational change.
Backer (2008) Narrating organisational identities by way of evolutionary tales – Talking Shell from an oil to an energy company.	Explore the micro processes by which organisational narrators use evolutionary tales to advance or delay external stakeholder pressure on their organisational identity.	Provides “a rich description of the micro-processes whereby individual management actors seek to get the larger corporate actor (organisational identity) to adapt to, or manage, external social structures” (2008:34).	Narrative analysis.	Identified two evolutionary tales - adaptive and agentic -used to adapt organisational identity to socially constructed pressure or to protect organisational identity from external social pressure.
Alvesson & Empson (2008) The construction of organizational identity: Comparative case studies of consulting firms.	To identify themes around which identity (as distinctive, coherent and enduring) clusters.	Multi-case comparative analysis of the construction of identity in four consulting firms working in related yet distinct fields. Data gathered by means of semi-structured interviews, archival and observation.	Multiple case study.	The identification of four common dimensions of organisational identity (in consulting firms at least) namely knowledge and work, management and membership, personal orientation and external interface.
Surgreen (2010) The relationship between organisation	To explore the relationship between organisation identity (both SoI and FoI)	A survey design - a post-hoc field study design that was essentially	Survey design.	Both SoI and FoI differentiate among participating organisations: SoI

identity and organisation performance.	and organisational performance, as well as the influence of each on the latter.	correlational. Data gathered using SoI and FoI questionnaire and a measure of organisational performance. Data analysed using correlational, factor and multiple regression analyses.		and FoI individually and collectively predict performance.
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When considering Table 3.1 the following becomes apparent: there are twenty-seven articles in total, representing the diverse spread of designs used to study organisational identity. The analysis highlights six research designs, namely surveys, a content analytic study, case studies, ethnographic studies, narrative analysis and discourse analysis. There are seven surveys, one content analytic study, eleven case studies, five ethnographic studies, two narrative analyses, and one discourse analytic study.

Each of the design types and exemplar articles will be discussed in more detail below. It is important to note that these exemplars serve to illustrate specific design types and the analysis is based on my own (sometimes) limited interpretation of the authors intentions. As one of my external examiners pointed out, many journal articles are based on more extensive masters or doctoral theses, in which the researcher has the space to more fully describe the details of their research. The space allocated in a journal article does limit the author's capacity to do justice to the intricacies of the research process. The section below is not intended as an evaluation of the articles but rather serves to illustrate the variations in research design types as well as the implications of these choices.

### 3.4 Survey design

Surveys rely on questioning people to gather data and explore patterns among facts, values, and behaviours, and to make generalisations to the broader population from which a smaller group of people are surveyed (Simsek & Veiga, 2000). Surveys are a useful data-gathering tool and are widely used by policymakers, program planners, evaluators, and researchers to gather data for describing aspects of a large population they are unable to observe directly (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fink, 2009).

Fink (2009:1) defines surveys as “information-collection methods used to describe, compare, or explain individual and societal knowledge, feelings, values, preferences and behaviour”. According to Czaja and Blair surveys are “based on the desire to collect information (usually by questionnaire) from a

sample of respondents from a well-defined population. The questionnaire, alternatively referred to as the instrument, typically contains a series of related questions for the respondent to answer. The questions are most often, but not always, in a closed format in which a set of numbered response alternatives is specified. The resulting numerical, or quantitative, data are then entered into a data file for statistical analysis” (2005:3).

Survey research is most often characterised by the following design choices: (Mouton, 2012):

1. *Probability sampling*: The collection of data from a large number of people, sampled representatively from a larger population, according to well-defined sampling methods, (simple random, systematic, stratified, etc. sampling) (see also Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Czaja & Blair, 2005; Fink 2003).
2. *Structured measurement*: Gathering data by means of highly structured items and limited response options, for example Likert-type scales (see also Czaja & Blair, 2005).
3. *Standardised data-collection*: Data is gathered in a standardised manner, using the same questionnaire/ test/ schedule to collect data across all cases and sites of administration. Traditionally data has been gathered via post, interviews or telephone interviews though more recently there has been a shift to the use of computers, email and the Internet (Czaja & Blair, 2005, Fink, 2009; Fleming & Bowden, 2009).
4. *Testing hypotheses using descriptive and inferential statistics*: Where sophisticated statistical methods such as multiple regression and analysis of variance are used, survey data can be used to test hypotheses and study causal relationships between variables (see also Czaja & Blair, 2005).

The dominant logic of survey design is *generalisation*, drawing inferences about a population based on the responses of a representative sample of the same population (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). According to Yin survey design follows a sampling logic in which: “a number of respondents (or subjects) are assumed to ‘represent’ a larger pool of respondents (or subjects), so that data from a smaller number of persons are assumed to represent the data that might have been collected from the entire pool...The resulting data from the sample that are actually surveyed are assumed to reflect the entire universe or pool, with inferential statistics used to establish the confidence interval for which this representation is

actually accurate” (1994:47). However, in aiming to provide a general picture of a group or population, the details of the context are lost and the “depth” of understanding is compromised.

Surveys may be used for descriptive, explanatory and exploratory purposes, and most often have the individual as the unit of analysis (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The descriptive survey aims to provide an overview of current conditions as they exist at a particular moment in time, enabling the researcher to describe attributes of a particular population or group (Babbie & Mouton, 2001).

An exploratory survey is conducted when there is insufficient information on a topic, and more needs to be learnt. It focuses predominantly on “what” questions: a typical example being a needs-assessment survey conducted prior to the development of an intervention (Mouton, 2012). The logic underlying the exploratory survey is no longer validation, but discovery.

The explanatory or analytical survey allows researchers to describe *and explain* why a particular situation exists. It involves examining interrelationships between two or more variables so as to test hypotheses or models, and draw explanatory inferences. Thus generalisations are made about the way situations are structured, and variables interrelate under certain conditions.

The testing of hypotheses, which are usually derived from pre-existing theories, suggests that survey design is most appropriate where a well-established body of knowledge exists, and requires validation and testing (*logic of validation*) (Czaja & Blair, 2005; Mouton, 2012).

Surveys may be *synchronic (cross-sectional)* or *diachronic (longitudinal)*. A cross-sectional survey is one in which a group of respondents are polled at a particular point in time (Mouton, 2012). The longitudinal survey may take one of three forms: the trend study; a cohort study; or a panel study. A *trend study* involves administering a survey to two samples within a population *at different points in time*, thus tracking trends and concepts and how they change over time. The sample, while from the same population, will usually not include the same people (Mouton, 2012). A *cohort study* “is essentially a trend study, which tracks changes among a specific cohort” (Mouton, 2012:48). A cohort can be defined “as a group or organisation that belong to a similar time period or location and tend to have similar experiences (Mouton, 2012:48). A *panel study* “aims to track change within a particular sample over a period of time” (Mouton, 2012:48). What differentiates a panel study from a trend study, however, is that the same people are studied each time.

While not widely known from a methodological point of view, Fink introduces the concept of the *qualitative survey*, as one type of survey design. She suggests that the qualitative survey be used to “collect information on the meanings that people attach to their experiences and on the ways they express themselves” (2003:61). She proposes that qualitative surveys are typically used to answer questions that are not commonly addressed in literature, and for which a quantitative survey is not appropriate. They are particularly suited to exploring the feelings, opinions and values of people and groups (Fink, 2003). Jansen (2010) suggests that while the qualitative survey is widely used in the social sciences (see for example Carter, 2002; Debski & Gruba, 1999; Kane, 2008), it is seldom considered a “true” research design. In his 2010 article, Jansen argues that it constitutes a legitimate means of enquiry and has its own logic and purpose. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter, as part of my own study design.

There are six examples of survey studies amongst the articles surveyed (see Table 3.1 above): Rao et al (2000); Foreman and Whetten (2002); Brickson (2005); Voss, Cable and Voss (2006); Cole and Bruch (2006) and Surgreen (2010). I will discuss two of these in greater detail as examples of survey design. I have chosen Foreman and Whetten (2002) as this represents a typical survey design, using statistical methods to test hypotheses and study causal relationship between variables, and Brickson (2005). Brickson represents a unique approach to data collection in survey design as she gathered qualitative data, which was then coded and analysed statistically, to test the hypotheses set.

**3.4.1 Foreman, P. & Whetten, D.A. (2002). *Member’s identification with multiple-identity organization. Organization Science* 13(6): 618-635.**

#### **3.4.1.1 Aims and theoretical framework**

The study was conducted in a rural community in the United States though no specific time frame is mentioned. The unit of analysis in this study is the individual (an individual member’s identification). The aim of the study was to close the gap between the development of theory in the realm of organisational identity and testing these theories. The authors draw on the assumptions of Social Identity Theory, in which identification is viewed as a process of comparison between a member’s perception of an organisation’s identity, and what they believe it should be. Increased identification occurs where these are similar and it is theorised that this will significantly affect a member’s level of involvement with the organisation. In this regard, the aim was first, to operationalise and test a model

of member identification as a process of comparison between perceived (by the members) and expected (or ideal) identity, and second, to extend this to include multiple, potentially competing identities. Finally, the authors aimed to explore whether members engaged in a similar process of comparison (perceived versus expected) at the level of organisation form (in this case co-operatives). While this is called “theory building” (2002:618) by the authors, it is in fact testing hypotheses which they have derived by extending the proposition that members identify with multiple levels in an organisation (for example, a work group, a department, or the organisation as a whole) to the level of organisational form, in this case co-operatives. The aim was to test *hypotheses using inferential statistics*.

Based on the above-mentioned theoretical framework the study was guided by several hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: The greater a member’s normative organisational identity gap, the lower his or her affective commitment to his or her local co-op.

Hypothesis 2: The greater a member’s utilitarian organisational identity gap, the lower his or her affective commitment to his or her local co-op.

Hypothesis 3: The greater a member’s normative organisational identity gap, the lower his or her continuance commitment to his or her local co-op.

Hypothesis 4: The greater a member’s utilitarian organisational identity gap, the lower his or her continuance commitment to his or her local co-op.

Hypothesis 5: The greater a member’s organisational form-level identity gap, the lower his or her cognitive legitimacy rating of the co-op organisational form.

Hypothesis 6: The greater a member’s organisational form-level identity gap, the lower his or her pragmatic legitimacy rating of the co-op organisational form.

### **3.4.1.2 Research design**

The authors conducted a survey using focus groups to help develop appropriate items. This is in line with good survey practice (Czaja & Blair, 2005). These items were then validated in two pilot studies to ensure their external validity. *Probability sampling* included 2000 members of an electric rural co-op (to include farmers and non-farmers) as this type of organisation served a dual purpose. It allowed researchers to explore hybrid identities (as co-ops have a normative and utilitarian identities), as well as a distinct organisational form (co-operative).

**Data-gathering** The sample was deemed to be representative: of the original two thousand surveys, eight hundred completed surveys were returned which means a response rate of 42%. However, once

unusable surveys were removed, only six hundred and seventy usable surveys remained, a response rate of 37%. The researchers used *structured measurement* and *standardised data collection methods*. Data gathering included the use of four measures:

Identification with organisational form: developed by the authors to measure cognitive and practical legitimacy of organisational form.

Identification with multiple-identity organisations: a second section of the measure aimed to assess attitudes of members concerning their involvement with a specific co-op.

Measurement of normative and utilitarian identity comparisons: developed by the authors to assess members' perceptions of the relative strength of each of the two identity elements.

Commitment measures: measured members' commitment to a particular co-op using measures derived from Meyer and Allen's (1984, 1997) affective and continuance commitment scales.

Because other factors beside identity may affect members' attitudes of legitimacy and/or commitment, various controls were built in for moderating the effect of these variables.

**Data analysis:** Data was analysed using statistical procedures namely hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions and alternatives to difference scores.

### 3.4.1.3 Key findings

1. Identity gaps do have an effect on members' assessments of organisational commitment and form-level legitimacy; and account for as much as two thirds of the variance.
2. The study provides support for multiple organisational identities, as analyses indicate that normative and utilitarian identity comparisons are distinct constructs, both affecting commitment and accounting for the overall variance.
3. Provides support for the idea that an identity comparison dynamic does effects members' evaluations of organisational form, supporting the idea of identity as a multi-level construct.

This study thus represents a typical survey design as the authors gather data using standardised data collection procedures and then use statistical methods to test hypotheses. In so doing, they are able to add to the existing theory on organisational identification. The next study by Brickson, while basically a survey design, allowed the author to test and flesh out a typology of organisational orientation. Instead of using structured items, she opted for a limited response option that provided qualitative data, which is coded and then analysed statistically to develop a typology of organisational identification.

*3.4.2 Brickson, S.L. (2005). Organizational identity orientation: Forging a link between organizational identity and organization's relations with stakeholders. Administrative Science Quarterly, 50: 576-609.*

#### **3.4.2.1 Aims and theoretical framework**

The study was conducted in the US though no indication is given of when it took place. The unit of analysis is the organisation, specifically law firms and beverage manufacturers. The aim of the study was first, to uncover properties of organisational identity orientation; and second, to identify its determinants. To do so, the author tested the following three hypotheses:

H1: Professional service firms tend to have a stronger relational organisational identity orientation than classic production-based firms.

H2: The type of clients served by professional service firms predicts differences in identity orientation. Specifically, firms serving corporate clients are more individualistic; those serving individuals and families are more relational; and those serving non-profits, public agencies, and citizens' groups are more collectivistic.

H3: Production-based companies structured as cooperatives have a more collectivistic identity orientation than those structured as non-cooperatives.

While personal identity has been represented as a three-part typology of identity relationships, little is known about how relationships are reflected in organisational identity or how organisational identity, in turn, influences these relationships. Identity orientation on an organisational level refers to the nature of relationships between an organisation and its various stakeholders, and is reflected in the types of statements members make about their organisations. It is postulated that there are three orientations from which organisations can relate to stakeholders:

- as separate and distinct (Individualistic);
- as dyadically connected to specific others (Relational);
- as connected to others through a more impersonal relationship with a larger collective (Collectivistic).



### 3.4.2.2 Research design

The author conducted a survey using *probability sampling* in which 1126 individuals from eighty-eight organisations were surveyed in the legal services and non-alcoholic beverage industries. Sampling took place on two levels, both organisational and intra-organisational. In most cases the questionnaires were mailed online, while others were provided in hard format.

**Data-gathering** The author used five measure of identity orientation, four qualitative and one quantitative. While not in line with the usual *standardised measurement*, open-ended questions allowed participants more detail in answering and permitted the researcher to improve her understanding of the dimensions of identity orientation by fleshing out themes associated with the latter. The following measures were used:

1. Ten statements test (TST) (derived from Kuhn and McPortland's (1954) Twenty Statements Test): This test required participants to finish a sentence "My organisation is..." in ten ways of their choice.
2. Troubling-event question (derived from Gabriel & Robinson, 1999): A short essay question in which participants were asked to describe a real or hypothetical event that would be considered troubling to the organisation.
3. Organisation as person question: Based on the idea that people tend to anthropomorphise organisations (Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Morrison & Robinson, 1997), participants were asked to describe their organisation as though it were a person.
4. Accurate motto question: This required participants to provide a motto they thought best described their organisation.
5. The quantitative measure comprised three multiple-choice questions obtained from Kashima and Hardie's (2000) Relational, Individual, Collective Self aspects scale (RIC). For each question participants were required to select the response best suited to their organisation – either relational / individualistic / collectivistic.

**Data analysis** Firstly, the researcher coded the qualitative responses, using several data analytic techniques to flesh out themes and subthemes associated with identity orientation. A total of 3 668 responses from beverage and 7 710 from law firms were coded. Firstly she coded whether a response reflected an orientation that was internal (related to insiders) or external (related to outsiders). Thereafter, she began iteratively fleshing out an identity orientation coding scheme for both external and internal responses, and identified a total of seven identity orientation codes. The researcher also

focused on themes and subthemes associated with identity orientations. Discrepancies were discussed with an independent coder. Reliability was checked and found to be strong with kappa  $>.7$ .

Percentage scores for each of the three identity orientations for each measure were calculated at individual and organisational levels by dividing the number of codes corresponding to a given identity orientation on a particular measure by the number of total responses provided for that measure. Primary predictor variables included industry (law / beverages), client type (law firms only), co-operative structure (beverage companies only). Control variables included organisational size and age, region, practice type (law firms only) and product type (beverage only). Individual level predictors included gender, age, tenure, functional area, hierarchical level and were included so that organisational level effects were not clouded by individual level effects. Two independent coders helped code seven levels in the legal profession. The researcher and one independent coder coded data for beverage firms that resulted in seven levels and eight functional classifications. The data was then subject to multilevel modelling.

### **3.4.2.3 Key findings**

Five overall orientation types were identified: strong pure, moderate pure, strong hybrid, moderate hybrid and weak. Evidence of across-measure consistency as well as between organisation differences in the three identity orientations support the viability of the identity orientation at the organisational level. Before testing the hypotheses, the researcher ran several analyses to ascertain the general properties of identity orientation, and a majority of responses (61% of the beverage companies and 77% of the law firms) reflected identity orientation. Almost half the sample was characterised by a pure external orientation with a substantial representation across all orientations in each industry. A sizable portion in each industry was characterised by a hybrid identity.

In line with H1, professional service firms exhibited significantly higher relational identity than production-based firms.

Consistent with H2, client type served by professional service firms predict differences in identity orientation, while law-firm specific multilevel models show that client type significantly predicts all three organisation identity orientations, both external and internal.

H3 predicted that production-based companies structured as co-ops would have a more collectivistic identity orientation than non-co-ops, and the results demonstrate that this is indeed so.

### **3.4.3 Some thoughts on survey studies of organisational identity**

In the first study by Foreman and Whetten (2002) the authors have taken the principles of Social Identification Theory, that members identify with aspects of the organisation, and have extended this reasoning to include both identification with multiple identities (in one organisation), as well as identification at various levels of the organisation, in this instance, organisational form. The design allowed them to extend theoretical propositions to new domains and test these to discover whether they have merit. While they describe the process as theory building, this does in fact occur via theory (hypothesis) testing to see whether the propositions have merit in a new context. Obviously, this is only possible in an instance where existing theory can be elaborated and tested. In this case, Social Identity Theory was fairly well established, developed over time and verified in various contexts, and this made the extension possible. Importantly, the theoretical contribution was at the level of individual organisational members and their identification with the organisation.

The Brickson (2005) study, while following a survey design, also made use of open-ended questions, thus moving from the traditional standardised data collection to an open-ended approach. This allowed for a large number of responses to be gathered which were then qualitatively coded, to identify various identity orientations. The concept of identity orientation is one borrowed from personal identity, and the aim was to see whether a similar typology exists as part of organisational identity. Similar types were in fact found, and this made possible the validation of a typology of identity orientation and the testing of hypotheses set for the study. The study, like most survey design, follows the logic of validation.

Both studies follow a logic of generalisation despite having very different data inputs. Foreman and Whetten's study used the structured measurement and standardised data collection methods, usually associated with quantitative survey research whilst Brickson used open questions usually associated with more qualitative approaches. Despite this, the nature of analysis follows a logic of generalisation, the aim being to generalise statistically from a small group of relatively homogenous people (or other cases) to a larger population, where the smaller group is shown to be a representative sample of the larger one. As indicated in the earlier discussion (see 3.2.1 Classifying research designs) the influence of context is relatively unimportant, so despite using qualitative-type data as an input, the study aims to

minimise the influence of contextual factors, employing a logic of generalisation. This distinction will become increasingly important in the discussion of the differences between the qualitative and quantitative survey in Chapter 4 (see section 4.3.1).

### **3.5 Content analysis**

Schwandt describes content analysis as “a generic name for a variety of means of textual analysis that involves comparing, contrasting, and categorizing a corpus of data in order to test hypotheses” (2007:41). Neuendorf defines content analysis as “a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method (including attention to objectivity, inter-subjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability,, replicability, and hypothesis testing) and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented” (2002:10). These definitions present content analysis as a systematic, valid and replicable means of analysing text (Breuning, 2011), the core idea being that the text can be classified into fewer content categories, with each category consisting of one, several, or many words. Words or phrases classified in the same category are assumed to have the same or similar meaning (Weber, 1985). Once the categories have been established, the number of each instance of text can be counted and can thus be used with statistical methods (Silverman, 2001; Weber, 1985). Quantification satisfies the criteria of being systematic and replicable, and allows for transparency in the findings (Breuning, 2011).

However if we use content analysis simply to summarise categories, it is reduced to a means of coding or data analysis and that which distinguishes it as a design is lost (Breuning, 2011). The coding of the text underlies the capacity to make inferences, and the analyst is thus able to answer questions of scientific or political relevance, which is what distinguishes content analysis as a design (Breuning, 2011). Thus, the content analyst is able to access unobservable phenomena through a process of inferring abductively from one domain to another (Krippendorf, 2004). It can thus be more broadly defined as a means of textual investigation involving a set of procedures aimed at making replicable and valid inferences from verbal, symbolic and communicative text /data about either the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message (Krippendorf, 2004; Weber, 1985; Silverman, 2001). To do so, the content analyst must construct an operational theory of relatively stable data-context relationships called an analytical construct. The analytical construct serves as a bridge between the available data and a target in the context. In this way, content analysts are able to infer answers to particular research questions. These are not unlike the inferences made by ordinary readers of texts, though the content analyst’s are more systematic, explicitly informed, and (ideally) verifiable

(Krippendorff, 2004). However, drawing valid inferences from the text implies that the classification procedure should produce variables that are considered valid, meaning that they should measure or represent what the researcher intends it to measure (Weber, 1985).

The benefit of content analysis is that it is unobtrusive, and this has two advantages (Breuning, 2011). It does not require the co-operation of the person being studied and the person will not change his or her behaviour for the investigation, as, for example, might be the case in claiming to behave in a socially desirable way when answering surveys. Furthermore, content analysis does not require significant research funding unless human coders are to be used (Breuning, 2011).

According to Krippendorff (2004), content analyses share a procedural logic, and he provides a framework for content analysis that is intended to serve prescriptive, analytical and methodological purposes. The prescriptive purpose serves to guide the conceptualisation and design of content analytic studies. The analytical purpose allows for critical examination and comparison of content analytic studies while the methodological purpose highlights performance criteria and standards to facilitate the evaluation of content analytic studies.

### **3.5.1 Distinguishing characteristics of content analytic design**

#### *3.5.1.1 Texts as clues to inaccessible societal phenomenon*

Verbal, symbolic and communicative text is assumed to contain clues to otherwise inaccessible phenomenon and thus provides insight regarding either the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message (Krippendorff, 2004; Weber, 1985; Silverman, 2001). By constructing a relatively stable data-context relationship the content analyst is able to infer answers to particular research questions. To do so, the content analyst must construct an operational theory, in which an analytical construct serves as a bridge between the available data and a target in the context.

#### *3.5.1.2 Context illuminates the meaning of the text*

Texts acquire meanings, interpretations and signification from their context, and just as data is open to interpretation, so too, the context of the data is always dependent on construction by someone (Krippendorff, 2004). In content analysis, the context clarifies what the analyst does with the texts, and what they are assumed to mean, communicate or accomplish. Furthermore, the context stipulates the nature of the world in which the texts are related to the specific research questions. The context thus

includes all the knowledge the analyst applies to the texts, and may include scientific theories, reasonable propositions, empirical evidence, grounded intuitions, or knowledge of reading habits.

#### 3.5.1.3 *The analytical construct as data-context bridge*

The analytical construct is the means by which the content analyst operationalises or formalises how a text is used in the context under consideration. This forms the basis for justifying the abductive inferences that are made from the given text to the unobserved features in which the content analyst is interested, and thus provides the necessary link between the available texts and the analyst's research question (Krippendorff, 2004).

#### 3.5.1.4 *The centrality of inference*

Inference plays a central role in content analysis, and it is on the basis of inference that the analyst makes claims about inaccessible psychological or societal phenomena from a body of texts. Inference involves arriving at a conclusion, using given premises as a basis but often moves beyond these. Inferential logic is described by Zucker & Tragesser (1978:501) as "logic formulated in a natural deduction system, in which the meaning of each logical constant is supposed to be given by its set of introduction rules". It is within a deductive system, and in particular the analytical construct, that the analyst draws inferences from a body of texts to a particular context. These texts then inform analysts about phenomena outside of the text, for example, meanings, consequences and uses, inferred from aspects within the text. The nature of the inference is abductive, and implies that "in moving from texts to the answer to a research question, ....it is the assumptive analytical construct plus the assurance that the analysis has been performed reliably that warrants that inference, which in turn is backed by the analyst's knowledge of the context in which texts occur or are interpreted" (Krippendorff, 2004:38).

Content analysis is usually associated with the *logic of contextualisation*, though in some forms (for example, older studies of communication and propaganda) it can be understood within the logic of generalisation, where a probability sample of texts was analysed. Content analytic studies can be used for *discovery or validation*, depending on the nature of the study and state of scholarship at a particular time. Content analytic studies are usually *synchronic*, though some, like survey research, can be conducted at different times to track changes in some phenomena as represented in the text, making them *diachronic*.

**3.5.2 Aust, P.J. (2004). *Communicated values as indicators of organizational identity: A method for organizational assessment and its application in a case study. Communication Studies, Winter 55(4): 515-534.***

### **3.5.2.1 Aim and theoretical framework**

The aim of the study was to develop “a specific content analytic method for quantitative OI assessment of an organization’s identity” (2004:523), thus enabling the researcher to determine what communicated values characterise an organisation’s identity, and to track shifts in values over a five-year period. It is on the basis of values highlighted in organisational documentation that the author wishes to infer information regarding its identity (characteristic one). The author works with two specific assumptions; first, communication is central to organising and without it, organisations would not function, so communication is central to understanding an organisation’s identity. Second, he argues for a close link between organisational identity and values, based on the idea that organisations establish and enhance their identity by choosing and communicating certain values. On this basis he concludes that values are a valid means of establishing an organisation’s identity, and Rokeach’s Value Theory is used to identify values. Here the *centrality of inference* is evident, in that he is inferring from the texts and the values identified in them, certain characteristics of the organisation’s identity. Organisational identity, as communicated by the leadership, is considered to be the *context*, in this instance. Values, as operationalised in Rokeach’s Value Theory, form the *analytical construct*, linking the texts (organisational documents) and the context (organisational identity).

I think it is important to clarify at this point that when referring to the context, I mean organisational identity as conceptualised and communicated by leaders of the organisation. In other words, organisational identity is derived from a set of institutional claims, much like the social actor perspective discussed in Chapter 2. While the content analysis permits the researcher to make inferences regarding the communicated identity of the organisation, it does not provide insight into how this identity is interpreted by members, and, given the multiple contexts within which they are based (38 countries), these are undoubtedly numerous and varied. Krippendorf (2004) disputes the tendency to believe that a text may have only one interpretation, and highlights the importance of context in allowing for multiple interpretations. While the analysis may provide a valid view of the organisation’s communicated values (as per the research question), the question of meaning and interpretation of the latter remains unanswered.

### 3.5.2.2 Research design

The study is described as a case study approach with a content analytic methodology. While the study has as its focus “a case”; in all other respects, it is characteristic of a content analytic study, and is discussed according to these criteria. Only textual data is used, and not the multiple methods of data gathering characteristic of case study design. The study was conducted in the United Church of God, an International Association that presents itself to the external public primarily by means of written communication, so the “value patterns displayed in its documents ‘can be observed and measured’” (2004:523). Given that content analysis is used for the study of trends, and has been used to track, for example, the values in inspirational literature, this is an appropriate choice (Krippendorff, 2004). This is a good example of the logic of contextualisation.

All possible data was considered for analysis, though due to the volume?, a sample was drawn. Data included: “a. the church’s Fundamental Belief statement...; b. regular letters from its president and and/or chairman, and c. United’s 20-30 page magazine...” (2004:523). Data was gathered from external messages from mid-1995 to July 2000, though because of the large number of documents, the sample was stratified and the data from years one, three and five was analysed to determine if variation had occurred over time. Clear guidelines were provided as to the data considered for analysis, which was taken from *the texts*, so critical to content analysis.

The texts were analysed using an adapted form of Rokeach’s Value Survey, an inference built into the analytic procedures (see Krippendorff, 2004). Rokeach’s Value Theory is an established theory of values and has been used extensively in organisational research including other Christian contexts. The existing value survey was adapted specifically for use in a church context, by including terms relevant to the latter in the descriptions of the value categories. There is also a close link between the data analysed and the environment about which inferences are made, as the documents originate directly from the sender (the church) on which the inferences relating to communicated values were based. As indicated, this forms the *analytical construct*.

Krippendorff (1980) identifies three designs in content analytic studies:

1. those aimed at estimating some phenomenon in the context of the data and are used when “content analysis is the sole method used” (1980:50). It is noted that “crucial for this design is that the content analyst utilizes all the knowledge he has about the system of interest in interpreting *one* set of unstructured or symbolic data. He does not rely on other methods to



validate his results and he cannot simultaneously consider different sets of data in relation to which additional insights might be obtained” (1980:50-51);

2. a design to test substitutability of one method;
3. those which test hypotheses.

The current study is an example of the first design type in that the frequency with which various values occur in a range of communication are identified (ranked according to the top five) and tracked over time (changes in the top five). In this context, no interpretations are made between the classification scheme or variables derived from it, and any causes or consequences related to these (Weber, 1985). *Validation* in this context is thus not necessary.

Texts, representing three different stages of the organisation’s history were considered; (T1) first year of operation, (T2) third year of operation and (T3) the fifth year of operation. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the overall frequency with which values occurred in each of these three time periods.

### **3.5.2.3 Key findings**

The researcher found that “a total of 24741 value terms were communicated by United during all three time periods. The mean number of value terms communicated per document was 127 (M=126,88), and the mean number of times each value category was referenced was 687 (M=687,25). Results indicated a range of 2713 value term references among value categories with family security being found most often, with 2779 references, and cheerfulness being found least often in United’s documents, with 66 references” (2004:526). In addition, the following three aspects were found:

1. The five most frequently referenced values were family values (terminal value), helpfulness (instrumental value), ambition (instrumental value), obedience (instrumental value), and mature love (terminal value).
2. Based on the core values, the organisation demonstrated consistency in its OI.
3. In the most recent year analysed, the following five values were emphasised: family security, ambition, helpfulness, obedience and wisdom.

### **3.5.3 Some thoughts on content analysis**

In a course I presented recently on research design, one of the participants asked me what the difference between content analysis and discourse analysis is. The question initially took me aback as I

have always considered these designs very different, though in trying to explain the differences I realised that for someone new to the field, these are perhaps less apparent. In content analysis, inference plays a central role, and it is on this basis that the analyst makes claims about inaccessible psychological or societal phenomena from a body of texts. These texts then inform analysts about phenomena outside of the text, for example, meanings, consequences and uses, inferred from aspects within the text. Critical discourse analysis relies on the assumption that there is a relationship between language and wider social and cultural context and practices, and that in language social relationships are mirrored and power relationships become reified or fixed, making change difficult. While both posit a relationship between texts on the one hand and social and psychological phenomena on the other, in content analysis the text is assumed to give insight into inaccessible phenomena in the world by means of inference and a sound analytical construct. Within a discourse analytical framework social reality is presumed to be produced and reproduced in language, and texts are viewed as a mirror of societal relationships, in particular power relations, and the discourse analyst aims to explain how these work so that change can take place. Thus there is a difference in the assumptions regarding the agency of language and texts. In content analysis language is viewed as a means to understand the social world, whereas in discourse analysis, language is believed to play a central role in producing the social world.

### **3.6 Case study design**

In contrast to survey research design and its focus on generalisation, the aim of the case study design is the study of the particular, in its real-life or current context that is the logic of contextualisation. Many of the studies of organisational identity have utilised a case study design, and this can be attributed to two factors. First, investigations of organisations lend themselves to case study research because the organisation is easily conceptualised as a case, being a contemporary phenomenon with events and processes, functioning in close relationship with its context (as described in the definition that follows). Second, because case study research lends itself to the study of social and organisational processes (of which organisational identity is a good example), a case study design is a logical choice (Hartley, 2004). The focus on social processes is similar to ethnographic field studies, and it is easy to see why authors such as Snow and Thomas (1994) use the terms interchangeably. The close relationship between these designs will be highlighted in the discussion that follows.

Hartley defines case study research as “a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context. The aim is to provide an analysis of the context and

processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied” (2004:323). According to Yin, a case study design allows the researcher to investigate a contemporary phenomenon in context, whilst retaining the “meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (1994:3), but where the phenomenon, events or processes are beyond the control of the researcher. Dyer and Wilkins highlight the “deep understanding of a particular setting (1991:614) and “rich description of the social scene” (1991:615) made possible by the careful consideration of the case, which allows researchers to identify new theoretical relationships and challenge existing ones.

Gerring explains that “case” refers to “a spatially limited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time. It comprises the type of phenomenon that an inference attempts to explain” (2007:19). Case study design may thus be *synchronic* or *diachronic*. The purpose of studying the individual case is provide insight into a larger group of cases. Case study research may incorporate one or several cases (multiple case studies), though the larger the number of cases, the less intensively these will be studied (Gerring, 2007). Case study research nevertheless follows the *logic of contextualisation*, as consideration of the context is a key feature of the design.

Taking the above-mentioned into account, the aim of case study design is to understand the detail and complexity of the case (a phenomenon or process) as it interacts and operates in a dynamic social context, influencing and being influenced by that context. The detail with which the case is studied allows for comprehensive theories to be developed which provide insight into a larger class of similar cases. In most instances it follows the *logic of discovery*, though at times, case studies are used to validate existing models and theories.

### **3.6.1 Distinguishing characteristics of a case study design**

The following distinguishing characteristics of case study research can be identified:

#### *3.6.1.1 The primacy of the case*

The logic of case study design is driven by an interest in the particularity (as opposed to the ordinary) and complexity of a case, and what can be learnt from it (Stake, 1995, 2005). A case is defined as a “specific, unique, bounded system” (Stake, 2005:445), and is a contemporary phenomenon, studied in context, in a way that maintains the characteristics of real-life events. Stake (2005) highlights the importance of boundaries in defining the case, highlighting that not everything is a case. In organisational research, a case is usually one or more organisations, groups, or individuals (Hartley,

2004). While the case is regarded as singular, it may consist of subsections, groups, occasions, dimensions and domains (Stake, 2005). Aspects of the case that may form the basis of the investigation include (Stake, 2005):

- the nature of the case, including typical activities and functioning;
- its historical background and physical setting;
- details of the context – see next point;
- information regarding related cases;
- particulars of informants through whom the case is known.

It is the primacy of the “case” in case study designs that has led to the high number of classifications as case studies in the study of organisational identity. The fact that the organisation is so easily distinguishable as a “specific unique bounded system” means that the study of organisational phenomena will tend naturally to lend itself to case study design.

#### *3.6.1.2 Consideration of the case in its context*

In case study research, the context of the case is deliberately included as part of the design and is helpful in understanding how the context affects and influences social processes (Hartley 2004). This allows for situating the case, and understanding influences operating on “the case” adds to the complexity which characterises case study research (Hartley, 2004). Case study researchers may take into account social, economic, political, ethical and aesthetic contexts (Stake, 2005). Different groupings within the case (as discussed above) may have differing contexts and these may shed light on aspects of the relationship between the groupings (whatever their form) (Stake, 2005).

#### *3.6.1.3 Multiple sources of data*

The detailed understanding of the case that is required in case study research, implies that multiple sources of data are used and should converge in triangulating fashion (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, data gathering may be both planned and opportunistic (Hartley, 2004; Yin, 1994). In case studies a variety of methods can be used including documentation, archival records, interviews, focus groups, participant observation, direct observation, physical artefacts and questionnaires (Hartley, 2004; Stake, 2005; Yin, 1994). What distinguishes case study design from ethnography is that while participant observation may be used, this is one of many methods for gathering data and is not privileged in any sense.

#### 3.6.1.4 Understanding of other similar cases

Gerring asserts that “[w]hat distinguishes the case study method from all other methods is its reliance on evidence drawn from a single case and its attempt, at the same time, to illuminate a broader set of cases” (2007: 29). Important here is the emphasis on understanding the case in order to understand other similar cases, not the broader population, as one attempts to do in survey research (Stake, 2005). One of the reasons for studying the case in detail is to expand and generalise theories what Yin terms “analytical generalization”. This is in contrast to the enumeration of frequencies or statistical generalisation that forms the basis of survey research. While not describing analytical generalisation per se, Dyer and Wilkens summarise the idea effectively when they observe that “authors described general phenomena so well that others have little difficulty seeing the same phenomena in their own experience and research” (1991:617). The aim of analytical generalisation is to describe the phenomenon in sufficient detail to enable rigorous theory development, from which new cases and contexts can be understood.

Twelve of the studies have been classified as case studies, namely, Dutton and Dukerich (1991); Elsbach & Kramer (1996); Czarniawska and Wolff (1998); Corley (2004); Empson (2004); Brown et al (2005); Ravasi and Schultz (2006); Bronn et al (2006); van Tonder (2006); Nag et al (2007); Oliver and Roos (2007); and Alvesson and Empson (2008). Of these, Elsbach and Kramer (1996); Czarniawska and Wolff (1998); Van Tonder (2006); Oliver and Roos (2007); and Alvesson and Empson (2008) are multiple or collective case studies and Empson (2004) and Ravsi and Schultz (2006) are longitudinal case studies (diachronic). Various other studies have been described by their authors as case studies but, for the purpose of this classification, have been included as part of other designs. The reason for this is that, while they have a case as their focus, the process by which the research has been conducted, fits the characteristics of other designs, for example, Coupland and Brown (2004) (included as discourse analysis) and Aust (2004) (included as content analysis). For the purpose of this analysis, I will be discussing Elsbach and Kramer (1996); Empson (2004) and Ravasi and Schultz (2006).

**3.6.2 Elsbach, K.D. & Kramer, R.M. (1996). *Members’ responses to organizational identity threats: Encountering and countering the Business Weeks rankings. Administrative Science Quarterly, 41(3): 442-476.***

#### 3.6.2.1 Aims and theoretical framework

The study was conducted in the United States in response to the 1992 Business Day survey, which challenged the traditional rankings attributed to US business schools, thus constituting a significant threat to identity. Prior to the Business Week evaluation, US business schools were able to highlight identity attributes important to them, but the ostensibly objective criteria of the survey threatened perceived organisational identity. The aim of the study was thus to “describe how organization members respond to identity threatening events, which represent a symbolic and sense-making dilemma” (1996: 442). This provided a unique opportunity to study a complex process and one that is not always easily accessible. It represented a *contemporary phenomenon over which the authors had no control* and highlights the *primacy of the case*. In addition to *understanding some element of the case*, namely members’ responses, there is furthermore a focus on the *close relationships between the case(s) and an aspect of the context*, namely an identity threatening event, and an attempt to understand how the latter impacts the former. The authors drew on various theoretical frameworks as conceptual departure points for this study, but these were merely guides or tools to make sense of the data emerging from the participants, and *the aim was nevertheless theory building*.

### 3.6.2.2 Research design

The authors themselves did not specify a design type and simply referred to using “qualitative, interview, and records data” (1996:442). The researchers sampled the top twenty schools because major categories emphasised by Business Week were “Top 20” and “Outside Top 20”. The authors chose to focus on eight schools at various levels in the ranking and those whose rank had shifted significantly within the top twenty. The sites were carefully chosen to include those most affected by the Business Week Survey and thus most likely to experience threats to their organisation’s identity. *There is evidence of purposive sampling and the choice of extreme cases (as per Flyvbjerg’s (2004) and Gerring’s (2007) classification)*. The cases are extreme in the sense that they were the most likely to experience the proposed identity threats and thus *enable theory building* in this area. The choice of eight schools indicates *a multiple case study*, as discussed earlier.

Data was collected over a one-year period, and was gathered by means of documentary analysis and interviews. Semi-structured interviews with forty-three respondents were conducted. Documentary evidence (forty-seven documents) included stories about rankings in MBA newspapers and alumni magazines, local and national newspapers as well as internal documents and memos. Data gathering was consistent with that of a case study and the emphasis was on *multiple sources, and in particular interviews and documentary evidence, without participant observation*.

Data was analysed using an iterative approach, with three phases of iterations. It was in the data analysis that the careful strategy designed to answer the researchers' questions came to light as various data sources were used to identify consistently-held identity beliefs and the responses to the threats posed by the Business Week Survey.

### **3.6.2.3 Key findings of the study**

There was evidence that schools retained a group of core identity dimensions over a six-year period, and that many of these were not included in the Business Day ranking, thus prompting the response. Threats were classified according to degree and type of threat, with two types being identified: those that endangered the value of core attributes and those aimed at the positional status of the organisation. Business schools responded by highlighting their schools' membership in favourable social groups through "(1) categorizations that highlighted positive identity attributes not emphasized by the rankings, and (2) categorizations that highlighted favourable social comparisons not emphasised by rankings" (2006:456). Members used the categorisation tactics for two reasons: "(1) to affirm positive aspects of their school's identity that the rankings had neglected and (2) to make sense of and explain why their school achieved a specific disappointing ranking" (1996:456).

In responding to identity threats, members attempted to affirm their organisational identities by (1) selective categorisations highlighting "cherished attributes of the organizations' enduring identities that were neglected by the rankings" (1996:457) and by (2) "selectively categorizing their schools along central identity dimensions not recognized by the rankings" (1996:458). Two tactics were used. Tactic 1: Selective categorisations highlighting alternate identity attributes; and Tactic 2: Categorisations highlighting alternate comparison groups. The multiple case study led to an understanding of the processes that follow an identity threat, and represented a significant theoretical contribution to an understanding of organisational identification. This particular case study's results are often cited in organisational identity research.

**3.6.3 Empson, L. (2004). *Organizational identity change: managerial regulation and member identification in an accounting firm acquisition. Accounting, Organizations and Society, 29: 759-781.***

#### **3.6.3.1 Aim and theoretical framework**

The aim of the study was two-fold: first, to determine the process of organisational identity change after an acquisition; and second, to determine how changes in an accountant's organisational identity affect his or her professional identity. The study was conducted in the UK in two accounting firms, one a global firm (pseudonym "Sun"), the other based in the UK market only (pseudonym "Moon") that had recently joined through a merger. This provided a unique opportunity to study a *contemporary phenomenon over which the author had no control* with due *consideration to the context* in which it operates. The unique opportunity offered by "the case" to study a merger which is, by its very nature, a complex process and not always easily accessible, highlights the *primacy of the case*.

The theoretical framework is based on three interconnected themes: the dialectic between individual and the organisation from which organisational identity emerges; the flexible and consistent character of professional identity; and the role and significance of organisational identity in accounting firms, where a diffuse authority structure in the form of a partnership often exists. The author developed a framework that highlights the following aspects of organisational identity change: the manager's aspirational organisational image; evolving organisational identity; organisational members' self-concepts impacting their identification (or not) with the organisation; as well as professional identity. The framework presented in the article guides the study and data analysis, and in this instance, study of the case benefits from the development of prior *theoretical propositions*. Because the logic of validation applies in conjunction with contextualisation, this can be described as a *critical case study*. Furthermore, the logic of diachronicity applies as the merger process is tracked and its impact on identity traced.

### **3.6.3.2 Research design**

While she does not refer specifically to case study design, Empson comments that this study, like most studies of organisational identity, is case-based. Consistent with characteristics of case studies, the author used *multiple sources of data* that included interviews that were supplemented with archival and observational data that served to validate interviewee comments. Staff communication sessions were observed and archival data included internal memos related to negotiation and integration planning, legal documents related to the acquisition, slide presentations to staff, press releases and press articles, and marketing and recruitment brochures. Sampling was carefully executed and the following served as criteria: hierarchical level; equity holding; area of business; functional responsibility; and length of tenure.



The researcher constructed coding frames to capture emerging themes and QSR NUD.IST was used to code interview text. Interview data was analysed alongside other data to identify inconsistencies and verify key themes. Findings were validated by key informants.

### **3.6.3.3 Key findings**

Initially both Sun and Moon had very distinctive but very different identities with evidence of a very successful socialisation process in Sun. A detailed description is provided of the process of de-identification and re-identification during the acquisition, highlighting specific interventions and their impact on the success of the process. A description of the evolution of Sun's identity is also provided. With regard to the impact of changes in the accountant's organisational identity on his or her professional identity, it was found that strong identities co-exist in various sectors of the accounting profession. The author began with a framework outlining the process of evolving organisational identity, and this process was validated in the context of the merger. There was thus an emphasis on *validation of an existing theoretical framework rather than theory building*.

### **3.6.4 Ravasi, D. & Schultz, M. (2006) Responding to organizational identity threats: Exploring the role of organizational culture. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(3): 433-458**

#### **3.6.4.1 Aims and theoretical framework**

Two studies were conducted in Bang & Olufsen (B & O) and combined when the researchers found they had been working in the same company studying identity from similar perspectives. The first started in 1992 and the other in 1997. In 1999 the two studies were merged and the researchers refer to it as a longitudinal field study. Additional data (tracing the development of the first identity statement), was added to the analysis, enabling a longitudinal examination of a period of more than twenty-five years. The time frame included three different responses to perceived identity threats. This case thus provided the authors with a unique opportunity to explore three phases of identity threats, reinforcing the importance of the *unique, particular case*. The extended time frame over which the study was conducted makes the study diachronic and thus a *longitudinal case study*. Because it explores a process of events with the aim of building a model or theory, it can be described as an *exploratory case study*.

The authors highlight two principal lines of thought about organisational identity: the social actor perspective; and the social constructionist perspective. They highlight the importance of both aspects –

institutional claims and shared understanding together representing different features of the construction of organisational identities. The two views together highlight both sense-giving and sense-making processes by which organisational members intermittently revisit their common understandings and reassess formal claims regarding their organisation. These *propositions guided the gathering and interpretation of data*.

The authors simply refer to the study as a longitudinal study, though based on the criteria for a case study it is classified as such. Various methods of data collection were used and included fifty semi-structured interviews conducted with forty organisational members. Identity seminars were held in 1993 and 1998 in which identity claims were introduced. Characteristic of case study design, researchers used *multiple sources of data*. Sources of data included transcriptions from identity workshops and seminars, documentation including in-house magazines and other internal communication tools, identity manuals and posters (illustrating new identity statements), annual reports and other external communication reports, interviews with managers and other employees, corporate histories and other archival material, as well as two corporate histories. Data was analysed following the prescriptions for grounded theory.

#### **3.6.4.2 Key findings of the study**

During the earlier phases of analysis two typologies were developed. The first entailed the division of actions into “externally orientated” (those focussed on external perceptions) and “internally orientated” (focussed on organisational features and internal perceptions). Further analysis led to the development of a typology of identity-related actions, in which the latter were categorised as either sense-making or sense-giving. Sense-making actions included those that reinforced the re-evaluation of members’ understanding of core and distinctive characteristics of the organisation. Sense-giving actions referred to managerial activities aimed at presenting and illustrating new identity claims to both internal and external groups. Finally a theoretical model of how organisations respond to identity threats was developed, thus contributing to *building theory* around the process of responses to organisational identity threats.

#### **3.6.5 Further ideas on case study design**

It will become apparent as this chapter unfolds that there are many similarities between case design, ethnography, narrative design and even discourse analysis. While it is difficult to explain these in detail

without having discussed the other designs, there are a few points I would like to make which will make matters clearer as the discussion evolves.

Case studies lend themselves to being written as narratives, as the latter more easily capture the complexity and contradictions of “real life” on which case studies are focused (Flyvbjerg, 2004). While the aim is to build theory, it is often difficult to summarise the intricacies inherent in a case study in neat propositions and theories, so case study researchers often resort to representing in narrative form the complexities and contradictions that emerge from a study. This is particularly applicable in the study of organisational identity, which has identity as narrative as one theoretical departure point. While this may at face value appear similar to narrative design, discussed in section 3.8 of this chapter, there is an important distinction. Narrative design has narratives as its input material or data, whilst case study design has a case narrative as its output. Data gathering in case studies is not limited to narratives and may take a wide range of forms. Finally it must be said that case study design is used widely in many disciplines and fields and when used in other disciplinary contexts, would have fewer overlaps with the designs mentioned here.

### **3.7 Ethnographic field studies**

Ethnography entails the researcher’s immersion in the social life of a group, and allowing him or her to observe and understand the day-to-day experience and behaviour of participants and, if necessary, to talk to them about their feelings and interpretations (Brewer, 2004; Waddington, 2004). Brewer describes ethnography as a style of research, rather than a single method, and defines it as “the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by means of methods that capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also in the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally” (2004:312).

The aim of ethnography is to uncover and explain how people come to make sense of their daily lives and activities (Van Maanen, 1979; Ahrens & Mollona, 2007; Perlow & Repenning, 2009; Kornberger, Justesen & Mouritsen, 2011; McGibbon & Peter, 2008; Eriksson, Henttonen & Merläinen, 2008). Furthermore, there is an emphasis on grounding the phenomena observed in the field and thus preserving the context in which observations occur (Baszanger & Dodier, 2004). Van Maanen (1979) highlights the importance of culture in understanding the setting, as this allows the fieldworker to make sense of the observed patterns of human activity (see also Sanday, 1979). Ethnography is also referred

to as “‘field-work’, ‘field studies’ ‘qualitative method’, ‘interpretive research’, and ‘case study method’ (Burgess, 1982:1; Snow & Thomas, 1994:458).

### **3.7.1 Distinguishing characteristics of ethnography**

#### *3.7.1.1 An insider perspective*

Ethnography is conducted from an insider perspective which means the researcher aims to understand the world from the viewpoint of participants, and to explore the social meanings they ascribe to their worlds (Brewer, 2004; Sanday, 1979). However, in doing so, it is critical to understand how the culture of the setting, what Van Maanen terms “the socially acquired and shared knowledge available” (1979:539) accounts for the observed patterns of activity. The researcher does require a guiding theoretical perspective or framework to gain conceptual entry into the subject matter, though it is not necessarily bound by received or prior theory (Waddington, 2004), often opting to ground theory in the experiences of participants. Problem definition can come at any time in the field though one may begin with guiding hypotheses (Waddington, 2004).

#### *3.7.1.2 A naturalist orientation*

What further distinguishes ethnography is its close association with a particular philosophical method, namely naturalism (also referred to as the humanist, hermeneutic or interpretive paradigm) (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003; Brewer, 2004). Naturalism can be described as “an orientation concerned with the study of social life in natural settings as they occur independently of experimental manipulation” (Brewer, 2004:313).

#### *3.7.1.3 Privileging participant observation*

While ethnographers make use of various methods for data collection, critical to ethnographic research is the method of participant observation (Sanday, 1979; Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1979). This is described by Tedlock as “an ethnographic field method for the study of small, homogenous cultures” (2005:467), the aim being for field workers to spend an extended period of time (about two years) actively involved in the community being studied. The benefit of participant observation is that it allows researchers to witness the activities, processes and relationships being studied, thus enabling them to evaluate accounts provided by participants and provide a more accurate interpretation (Van Maanen, 1979). Furthermore, it allows the ethnographer access to data that is “hidden” to informants themselves, often because it forms so much part of the context, they no longer recognise its existence (Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1979). Whilst participant observation is the cornerstone of ethnographic

research, modern ethnographers stress the importance of triangulation, and also make use of documentation, interviews (both formal and informal), media coverage (where applicable) and the internet (Brewer, 2004; Waddington, 2004).<sup>9</sup>

#### 3.7.1.4 *A focus on activities, processes, practices and relationships*

The focus of ethnographic studies is the activities (Van Maanen, 1979), processes (Perlow & Reppenning, 2009), practices (Ahrens & Mollona, 2007; McGibbon & Peter, 2008) and relationships (Eriksson et al, 2008; Kornberger et al, 2011) of people, but from their own perspectives. The aim is not to impose meanings on how these activities are structured, but rather to understand these from the insider perspectives discussed above. The local context and culture provides an important source of insight when making sense of these activities, processes and patterns (Eriksson et al, 2008; Van Maanen, 1979).

Ethnography follows the *logic of contextualisation*, as the focus is on a group with an emphasis on providing an in-depth understanding of the latter within its context. The emphasis is most often on the *logic of discovery* as the researcher aims to understand the activities, processes, practices, and relationships from the view of the insider to the group or culture. Ethnographies entail extended periods in the field in the form of participant observation, and will thus follow the *logic of diachronicity*.

Ethnographies of work occupy a central place in the genre of ethnography, and research in this area can be divided into three categories (Brewer, 2004):

- occupational careers and identities as means by which organisations preserve their continued existence;
- managerial control in organisations;
- practical reasoning in formal organisational contexts.

While the afore-mentioned categories do not provide a definitive characteristic of ethnographies as a whole, this feature of ethnographic research is important when considering studies of organisational identity in which work, identity and managerial control play an important role. Ethnographies, while focusing on how work takes place, consider the important question of control in organisations, and how this is accomplished through the reproduction of practices and identities (Brewer, 2004). Parker (2005)

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<sup>9</sup> Some modern ethnographers, for example Brewer (2004), place emphasis on being familiar with the setting, rather than *actual* participation in the setting, as critical to ethnography. However what distinguishes the approach to data collection is the exploration of social meanings as defined by the participants, rather than the researcher.

stresses that ethnographic work should address the various types of space operating in a community (of which the organisation is one example), and how these provide opportunities for resistance or escape. These spaces may be geographical and physical or textual and discursive (Hook & Vrdoljak, 2002). This critical edge is not unlike the focus on control and hegemony present in critical discourse analysis, a point I will take up later in the discussion.

An aspect that has not been included as a characteristic of ethnographic research per se is that of reflexivity, and accounting for the researcher in the research findings. Early ethnographic accounts have been heavily criticised for presenting an account of the data heavily influenced by the researcher and his or her biases, while this fact remained unacknowledged (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Brewer, 2004; Tedlock, 2005). The crisis of representation and the reflexive turn in the social sciences have led to questions being raised about the role of the researcher in research reports and the challenges around presenting a multi-vocal account of the groups or cultures studied (Angrosino & May de Pérez, 2003; Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Parker, 2005). Researchers reporting ethnographic research should thus reflect on their role in the production of the ethnographic narrative as well as on factors that enable and constrain the research process (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Parker, 2005).

Five of the studies have been classified as ethnographic field studies: namely, Ruud (1995); Brown and Humphreys (2002); Humphreys and Brown (2002a); Humphreys and Brown (2002b) and Brown and Humphreys (2006).

For the purpose of this analysis, I will be discussing Ruud (1995); Brown and Humphreys (2002) and Humphreys and Brown (2002b).

**3.7.2 Ruud, G. (1995). *The symbolic construction of organizational identities and community in a regional symphony. Communication Studies, 46(3): 201-221.***

#### **3.7.2.1 Aims and theoretical framework**

The case in this instance was a symphony orchestra in the United States, and the study was conducted in the early 90s. The focus was naturally occurring talk and the aim was to symbolically construct OI in the form of a spoken system of symbols that were commonly understood and voiced by symphony orchestra members. While the study is focused on a case, an organisation and its identity, it is classified as ethnography as the focus of the study was the *naturally occurring activities, processes, practices*

*and relationships*, and *involved participant observation*, so critical to ethnography. The study was conducted on the assumption that discursive practices of a particular speech community are important in creating a sense of identity and shared ideals. Identity is best viewed as multi-vocal and discursively contested, often manifesting in ‘symbolic tensions’, which represent oppositions in shared systems of meaning. While this involved the study of language, it did not constitute a discourse analysis.

### 3.7.2.2 Research design

Apart from the mention of an “ethnographic account” there is no description of the design, but data gathering included four hundred hours of fieldwork, attendance of official symphony functions, rehearsals, and performances, interviews, informal conversations and documentation (compilation of field notes, newspaper accounts and organisational printed material). The immersion in the field through participant observation suggests the *privileging of participant observation* and is in line with a *naturalist orientation* to the study of social life, critical to ethnography.

### 3.7.2.3 Key findings

Symbolic action within the symphony orchestra was analysed using a three-step process, the broad guidelines of which appear to have been guided by the phases recommended by Geertz’s (1973) framework for analysing a culture’s web of symbols (discussed above). The first step was to identify culturally significant terms that had local meaning for orchestra members, thus *attending to the insider perspective*. For example, the musicians’ identity statements focused on their artistic contribution and were as follows: [“We are] professionals” (1995:203), [“We are] part-timers” (1995:204), [“We are] stressed” (1995:204), [“We are] activists” (1995:205), and [“We are] fulfilled when playing music” (1995:206). The second step was to search for clusters of terms that stood in opposition to each other to form ‘agons’ or a ‘dramatic conflict’ (1995:202). Examples here included “realistic vs unrealistic” (1995:211), “informed vs uninformed” (1995:213), “creative vs uncreative” (1995:215) and “passionless vs passionate” (1995:215). The third step was to examine the meanings of the terms with regard to their function within the symphony orchestra as a community. Identity is formed in the context of the afore-mentioned cultural categories and by identifying with a particular group, conflicts arise in line with the conflicts suggested by speech patterns.

**3.7.3 Brown, A.D. & Humphreys, M. (2002). *Nostalgia and the narrativization of identity: A Turkish case study. British Journal of Management, 13(2): 141-159.***

*and*

***Humphreys, M. & Brown, A.D. (November, 2002b). Dress and identity: A Turkish case study. Journal of Management Studies, 39(7): 927-952.***

I discuss these two studies together as they are two research foci emerging from one study. The aim of the first article was to consider the role of nostalgia in creating an identity where discursive practices are assumed to provide the resources for authoring identity narratives. In the second, the role of dress as a tool for hegemonic influence in identity contexts is addressed. While these have as their focus an organisation, which is easily conceived of as a case, they are ethnographic in that they focus on the exploration of social meanings and processes, namely identity, and involve participant observation, so critical to ethnography.

### **3.7.3.1 Background to the studies**

The studies were conducted in the Faculty of Vocational Education of “Hero” University in Ankara, Turkey (an organisation). The faculty in which the study was conducted was previously a college which had as a result of a change in legislation been incorporated into the university, a change which had involved a considerable loss of status, reduced income for members, as well as a loss of control over their working lives. Data collection occurred in two phases, February to May 1995, and February to May 1996.

### **3.7.3.2 Aims and theoretical framework**

In both studies, a narrative approach to organisational identity was adopted with an emphasis on fragmentation and the resistance of hegemony, as a conceptual framework. Organisational identity is viewed as narratives constructed by members as they make sense of their shared history and the central, distinctive and enduring characteristics of their organisation. Narratives are used by organisation members to extend, resist, accommodate and contest hegemony. In the first study, the focus was on the use of nostalgia by university members as a means of contesting versions of identity imposed on them unilaterally by university elites. In the second, the use of the headscarf as a discursive resource in contentions about organisation identity was considered. Dress has a long history in Turkey as an expression of political and religious values. A broad review of modern Turkish history and the development of the Turkish system of higher education were also considered, so the context of the country and its political dynamics played an important part in making sense of the *activities, processes, practices and relationships* under scrutiny.



### 3.7.3.3 Research design

Both studies were carried out from an interpretive perspective, characterised as "inquiry from the inside" by the authors, between February 1995 and May 1996. The primary objective in both cases was "to produce an ethnographic account of the working lives of those engaged in the faculty of vocational education at Hero University" (2002:930, 144), *emphasising the insider perspective*, and a *naturalistic orientation*. The researchers were involved in organisational events in an attempt to generate a "thick description", culminating in a well-grounded ethnographic account (*privileging of participant observation*). The Humphreys and Brown study (2002), while classified as ethnography, has involved considerable attention to the local political context and in this sense, comes close to good case study research in considering *the relationship between the case and its context*.

*Data gathering:* Researchers gathered multiple sources of unstructured data in two phases. Data-gathering methods included semi-structured interviews, one group interview, informal conversations, and documentation including internet pages, published articles, committee minutes, letters and memos, as well as data gathered from the locale (buildings and support facilities). Clothing worn by members as well as interpersonal relations between faculty members, administrative staff and students were also observed and noted.

*Brown & Humphreys (2002) data analysis:* The data was coded inductively with the aim of identifying categories of meaning important to participants (*insider perspective*) so as to develop general themes describing the faculty. The material was then analysed using Hatch's (1993) cultural dynamics model, allowing authors to identify processes of cultural construction, preservation and change. The aim of the resulting case narrative was to represent the complexity of the faculty culture, striving to maintain its 'multivocality'.

*Humphreys and Brown (2002) data analysis:* In this study, the data was analysed inductively using a form of grounded theory analysis. As with the previous study, the analysis was influenced by Hatch's cultural dynamics model used to present cultural complexity and dynamism. Here too, a decision was made to represent the case data as a faculty narrative to emphasise the inherent story-like character of fieldwork accounts. The narrative, while giving the illusion of being written from the perspective of faculty members, nevertheless bears traces of the authors as they attempt to reconstruct a social reality.

### 3.7.3.4 Brown and Humphreys' key findings

The results are presented as a faculty identity-narrative that captures the reflexive processes of both faculty members and the researchers themselves. Three main themes emerged from the analysis: birth and growth; yearning for yesterday; and contrasts and confusions. It was found that nostalgia did in fact give organisational members access to a collective heritage of identity-relevant values and beliefs, and acted as a means emotional support during times of organisational change. Nostalgia was found to provide socio-historic continuity, allow resistance to hegemonic control and help prevent anxiety.

#### **3.7.3.5 Humphreys and Brown's key findings**

First, it was found that dress played an important role in debates on organisation-level politics and identity. Second, organisation elites were limited in their ability to author collective organisational identities because members drew on discursive regimes outside of the organisation, and used these to resist attempts at unilateral control. Third, differences in dress codified and reinforced antagonism, and “dress” was used in defence of a stable identity narrative in a post-modern world characterised by disparate images, fragmentation and ambiguity.

#### **3.7.3.6 Reflexivity and representation**

Given the challenges of studying another culture, reflexivity was given particular attention by the researchers. They explained the dilemma of studying the “other” as follows: “...a Westerner in the East and a European in Asia, but also an English male in an all-female Turkish faculty and a Christian in a nominally secular state with an Islamic population” (Brown & Humphreys, 2002:145). This was overcome by means of using an interpreter (a Turkish woman) with an understanding of the nature of the research and who acted as a reflexive cultural insider. Furthermore, a bilingual secretary was used to transcribe the data.

In addition to the strategies employed to overcome obvious differences, they nevertheless acknowledged that the material they presented constituted their own construction of the “overlapping and inter-linked story-lines that our respondents disclosed to us” (2002:145). They reminded the readers of these that the narratives produced are products of both the faculty members sharing their stories and of the authors themselves.

#### **3.7.4 Further thoughts on ethnographic field studies**

Ethnographies, much like case studies, result in rich, detailed and complex descriptions, which may be difficult to capture in theoretical propositions and concepts. This is especially so when aspects of

culture are being studied, as culture is often transmitted in stories, sagas and myths, which are all, depending on the precise classification, much like narratives (Alexander, 2005). Because organisational identity is also conceived of as a narrative process, its presentation in ethnographic research reports may also be in the form of a narrative, much like a case narrative.

Modern ethnography's focus on work and the domination and control associated with it, follow a similar line of thinking to that of discourse analysis (to be discussed further on in this chapter). In ethnography, however, the focus is on practices and relationships that produce and reproduce domination and control in organisations (or other groups and institutions). In discourse analysis, the aim is to show how language and discourse produce relationships of power whilst simultaneously hiding relations of domination and inequality.

### **3.8 Narrative studies**

*“Imagine a world without narrative. Going through life not telling others what happened to you or someone else, and not recounting what you read in a book or saw in a film. Not being able to hear or see or read drama crafted by others. No access to conversations, printed texts, pictures, or films that are about events framed as actual or fictional. Imagine not even composing interior narratives, to and for yourself” (Ochs, 1997:185)*

Narrative research has, as its basis, the assumption that narratives provide an important means by which human beings understand and make sense of their lives and actions, as highlighted in the quotation above (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004; Riessman, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). This is particularly so in the construction of identity, both personal and organisational, as narrative gives prominence to human agency and imagination (Kohler Riessman, 1993), so it is logical to expect a narrative approach to its study. In fact, Kohler Riessman (2008) suggests that the increased interest in narrative studies is precisely due to a postmodern preoccupation with identity. The challenge with a narrative approach, however, is determining what precisely is meant by the term, as narrative can simultaneously refer to material, a method or a means to understanding psychological and social phenomena (Kohler Riessman, 2008; Squire et al, 2008).

There is considerable diversity in narrative research, with scholars drawing on a range of traditions, and defining *narrative* is largely discipline-related (Kohler Riessman, 2008). At one end of the continuum, one finds social linguistics in which narrative refers to “a discrete unit of discourse, an extended answer by a research participant to a single question, topically centered and temporally organized” (2008:5). At

the other end of the continuum is social history and anthropology where narrative can refer to “an entire life story, woven from threads of interviews, observations, and documents” (2008:5). In the centre are disciplines such as psychology and sociology, where narratives encompass “extended accounts of lives in context that develop over the course of a single or multiple research or therapeutic conversations” (2008:6). Narrative may also be considered a heuristic device, a metaphor for understanding human life and action (Czarniawksa, 1997).

Narrative analysis “refers to a *family of methods* for interpreting texts that *have in common a storied form*... the analyst is interested in how a speaker or writer assembles and sequences events and uses language and/or visual images to communicate meaning” (Kohler Riessman, 2008:11). According to Squire et al (2008), narrative research, unlike other qualitative frameworks, offers no clear methodological procedures, as for example grounded theory or interpretive phenomenological analysis. Furthermore, there are no clear guidelines about suitable sources or levels at which narratives should be gathered, and sources may include stories recorded in everyday speech, interviews, diaries, TV programmes or newspaper articles. Furthermore, there are no clear requirements regarding stories’ particularity or generality; nor their epistemological significance.

Squire et al (2008) highlight three theoretical divisions in narrative research: the event-centred; the experience-centred; and those centred on the co-construction of narratives. Event-centred research focuses on particular events that have happened to the narrator, while experience-centred research focuses on the full range of experience. What these two types have in common is a focus on the *individual*, and that narratives are “assumed to be a representation of internal phenomena such as events, thoughts and feelings (Squire et al, 2008:5). Researchers in the third approach focus on narratives as social codes, and their patterns and functioning in their context. The focus of the final form is narratives that have been dialogically co-constructed, thus emphasising the external, *social* element of narratives. It is this social element that forms the basis of narrative theorising in organisational identity.

### **3.8.1 Characteristics of narrative studies**

#### *3.8.1.1 The primacy of narratives in understanding human action*

What distinguishes narrative analysis as a research design is the focus on narratives as a means of understanding and organising human action, often referred to as the narrative turn (Bruner, 1997; Sarbin, 1986; Kohler Riessman, 1993). While narratives are used in many other designs, the underlying

assumption here is that the narrative is the primary way in which people make sense of their experiences (Kohler Riessman, 1993). The narrative in this context is a unique process of retrospective meaning making, the shaping and ordering of past experience (Brockmeier, 2001; Bruner, 1991; Kohler Riessman, 2008; Squire et al (2008). This implies that narratives are constituted, having already been through a process of interpretation, and the aim of a narrative study is to understand how the narrative is used as a retrospective meaning-making tool (Freeman, 2002; Kohler Riessman, 2008). Furthermore, it is within the intentional sense-making process, associated with narratives, that their agency originates (Freeman, 2002; Kohler Riessman, 2008). Narratives are thus viewed as verbal action and are assumed to argue, complain, confirm, challenge, defend, deceive, explain, entertain, inform, justify and persuade (Chase, 2005; Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004; Kohler Riessman, 2008; Squire et al, 2008). This verbal action is, however, not unchecked, and narratives are assumed to be enabled and constrained by an assortment of social resources and conditions (Chase, 2005; Czarniawska, 2004). It is this characteristic of narrative that enables researchers to study similarities and differences across narratives (Chase, 2005).

### *3.8.1.2 Focus on the context as location for the narrative*

Narratives must always be “placed” or considered within a context, as it is within the latter that they are rendered meaningful (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ochs, 1997). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight three elements that may be included as part of the context; namely temporal, spatial and social elements. The temporal context refers to considering people in their narrative history, with a focus on past, present and future, rather than defining how people, places, and things are in the present (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kohler Riessman, 2008; Ochs, 1997). The spatial context refers to the physical spaces relevant to the narrative, and may include current spaces or those that form the physical context for past settings of the narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The social dimension refers to the placing of the narrator in a network of social relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kohler Riessman, 2008). Because of the agentic nature of narratives, researchers treat these as “socially situated interactive performances” produced in a particular setting, for a specific audience and for a definite purpose (Chase, 2005:657). The focus is thus on the “narrative in the context of its telling” (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001:12) and takes into account the flexibility and variability of the interactive situation (Squire et al, 2008). Thus for the narrative analyst, an awareness of language - its meaning and use in describing experience - is important, as is the use of social context and how people draw on cultural resources in telling their stories.

### 3.8.1.3 *Openness in interpretation*

In narrative, the focus is on the narrator's ability to make a point or generate emotions, and in order to achieve these, accuracy may be compromised (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004). Narrators may focus on incidental details and remain silent about issues the researcher may consider to be important. Narratives are thus assumed to contain inconsistencies, imprecisions, lacunae, non-sequiturs, illogicalities and ambiguities. However for the narrative researcher, "the truth of a story lies not in its accuracy but in its meaning" (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004:115). Narratives usually have a diversity of meanings, some of which may be fairly straightforward while others may be less obvious (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004).

Just as there are various meanings for narratives, so there may be many interpretations and ones that even conflict (Gabriel & Griffiths, 2004). While specific interpretations cannot be proved or disproved by clear scientific criteria, interpretations may be more or less original, clever, perceptive, incomplete, misleading or even wrong. Different researchers have proposed criteria for judging the interpretation of narrative. Kohler Riessman (1993) highlights three criteria for the "trustworthiness" of narratives: persuasiveness or plausibility; correspondence; and coherence (see also Gabriel and Griffiths (2004) for an alternate set of criteria).

### 3.8.1.4 *Plausibility of narratives*

While it does not represent a characteristic per se, the plausibility of narratives and the truthfulness or validity of narrative explanations are important considerations when conducting narrative research. Freeman proposes that the interpretations and explanations provided by narrators are consistent with the particular reality they inhabit. Accounts (narratives) can then be plausible explanations at best, by which he means they are coherent and make sense of the available information. In addition, the chosen narrative should "make better sense than other possible narratives" (1993:163). Polkinghorne also addresses this problem and suggests that narrative accounts can be valid where "'valid' retains its ordinary meaning of well-grounded and supportable" (1988:175). Chreim (2005) echoes the two criteria discussed above and proposes that narratives be judged on the basis of their coherence (how various parts fit together) and verisimilitude (the extent to which narratives ring true when compared with experience and happenings in the world).

Narrative studies, because of their focus on a smaller number of cases, with the aim of understanding these for their own sake, and within their context, represent the *logic of contextualisation*. Whilst narrative studies do at times focus on the development of conceptual inferences and theoretical

propositions (as per the *logic of discovery*) both Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Kohler Riessman (2008) argue that this results in a loss of narrative richness and compromises the particularity inherent in the individual narrative. Narrative studies may follow the *logic of synchronicity or diachronicity*, though most often they are accessed from one point in time.

Two of the studies listed in Table 3.1 have been classified as narrative studies, namely Chreim (2005) and Backer (2008). Both these studies rely on textual data and trace the continuity and change in narratives of an organisation's identity. For the purpose of this analysis, I will discuss Chreim (2005).

**3.8.2 Chreim, S. (2005). *The continuity-change duality in narrative texts of organisational identity. Journal of Management Studies, 42(3): 567-593.***

### **3.8.2.1 Aims and theoretical framework**

The study was conducted in Canada and traces narratives constructed by senior managers between 1986 and 1997, the aim being to track how continuity and change were managed discursively in texts of organisational identity. The particular focus of the study was on the use of identity labels, so as to enhance an understanding of persistence and change in organisational identity.

Chreim (2005) considers organisational identity to be constantly constructed in reflexive fashion by organisational members. The first characteristic, *a focus on narratives as data source* is clearly evident as meaning is made retrospectively of a process of identity management and how change and continuity in identity labels are traced in a process of ordering or shaping past experience. She acknowledges that in developing texts of identity, authors deliberately use themes and discursive strategies to promote continuity and / or change, thus demonstrating the *agentic nature of narratives in achieving the purposes of their authors, depending on the context in which they are produced*. In authoring organisational identity narratives, authors have at their disposal a variety of macro social discourses and cultural material, as well as legitimate identity narratives (*plausibility of narratives*), the choice of which will depend on the message the text is intended to convey, thus highlighting the *importance of context*.

### **3.8.2.2 Research design**

Narrative analysis was chosen, as this allows the researcher to study both continuity and change in identity labels attached to the organisation. The researcher chose annual reports, message to the

shareholders (MTS) and two statements of values and philosophy) and business press articles, because these represent a more permanent source of narratives, unlike conversations that are fleeting and difficult to retrieve for later study. Furthermore, annual reports provide a longitudinal account of the organisation's story. Twelve messages to shareholders - a total number of 14901 words, with an average of 1242 words - were analysed for identity themes. The analysis was described as follows: "Analysis of the texts involved iterations of reading of the chronologically arranged MTSs and statements of values and identification of central themes and contextual elements, which were refined with subsequent iterations of analysis" (2005:574). The author used Atlas to retrieve quotations.

### **3.8.2.3 Key findings**

In the analysis of the MTSs and values statements, three themes appeared to be central: BMO as the "first" bank; the bank's "North American position"; and the bank's "commitment to stakeholders". The evolution of the bank's identity themes was unpacked and it is apparent how even within one theme, there was progression from the tenure of one Chairperson to another, as well as within the tenures of the Chairpersons. Continuity and change were achieved through "the selective reporting of elements from the past, present and future, the juxtaposition of the modern and attractive' with the 'outdated and undesirable', the persistent use of expansive labels that allow the addition and subtraction of meanings attached to labels, and the importation of selected themes from wider macro-discourses" (Chreim, 2005:567).

### **3.8.3 Further thoughts on narrative design**

Narrative designs have much in common with case studies and Kohler Riessman (2008) suggests that narrative inquiry is one way of conducting case-centred research. The similarities lie in a focus on the particular and the richness associated with understanding the case in its context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). While this does not preclude the development of themes or categories, as indicated earlier, these avenues result in a loss of narrative richness and compromise the particularity inherent in the individual narrative (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kohler Riessman, 2008). However, where this does occur, the emphasis, as with case study research, is not on statistical generalisation but rather the development of conceptual inferences and theoretical propositions. The key difference however lies in the nature of the data, with case studies focusing on all types of data, and narrative research specifically on narratives.

Whilst traditional ethnographies focus on events and processes, rather than the stories people tell about them, stories are an important source of knowledge about social life and culture, and there is a close



link between narrative and ethnographic designs (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kohler Riessman, 1993). Chase (2005) emphasises that life histories have been used to “present insiders’ views of culture and daily life”, the aim being to understand individuals who were assumed to be representative of their cultural group. Referring to the work of Thomas and Znaniecki (1918/1927), she argues that a narrative approach to sociology allows for a more personal understanding of a group and institutional life. Emerging from both anthropology and the life history method, is what some have termed *narrative ethnography*, which involves long term engagement in the field (ethnography) and the presentation of the findings as a multi-vocal text representing both the researcher and the researched (Chase, 2005). In this approach, the two designs are merged.

Finally, much like ethnography and discourse analysis, which focus on power relations and practices of domination and control, narratives too, are considered as a means for resisting hegemonic control, and exerting power.

### **3.9 Discourse analysis**

According to Fairclough (1992), there are two approaches in discourse analysis, which he refers to as ‘non-critical’ and ‘critical’. Van Dijk makes a similar distinction, referring to social discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Social discourse analysis has the aim of considering “discourse as social action...engaged in a framework of understanding, communication and interaction which is in turn part of broader socio-cultural structures and processes” (1997:21). Critical scholars of discourse, on the other hand, are not only interested in the link between discourse and societal structures, but aim to be *agents of change* for those for whom change is most needed. Critical discourse analysis will be discussed in greater detail for the purpose of this chapter.

Fairclough and Wodak view discourse as a form of social practice suggesting “a dialectic relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institutions(s) and social structure(s) which frame it” (1997:258). The dialectic relationship implies that the discursive event is shaped by the situations; institutions and structure highlighted above but importantly shapes them in return. For this reason, discourse is viewed as constitutive of society – comprising situations, objects of knowledge as well as the identities and relationships between people and groups of people. Because it constitutes the latter, it is said to sustain and reproduce the status quo, thus giving rise to power (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Mumby & Clair, 1997; Parker, 1992).

Parker points out that critical discourse analysis “radicalizes the turn to language” (1992:xii), as it is in language that power relations are mirrored and social relationships reified. Furthermore, language structures ideology so that change is difficult. Critical discourse analysis is a “form of intervention in social practice” (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997:258). The aim of which, then, is to emphasise “the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds, are produced in discourse” (Potter, 2004:202). This enables an understanding of structuring processes in participants’ constructions of texts and how these are achieved and challenged; as well as the recognition that the researcher’s own versions of the world are similarly constructed and contingent (Fairclough, 1992; Potter, 2004).

Mumby and Clair (1997) suggest the relationship between power and discourse is opaque and thus not always readily apparent. Ideology is used to denote the process by which “social actors, as part of larger social collectives, develop particular identities and experience the world in a particular way” (Mumby & Clair, 1997:183). Ideology is closely related to relations of power and control in a society, and there is a three-way relationship between discourse, ideology and power. Discourse reproduces power relations whilst ideology plays a mediating role, “providing an interpretive frame through which discursive practices are given meaning” (1997:184). This means that power is not necessarily a coercive force but rather a subtle and routine means of establishing interpretive frames, which support powerful parties’ ends. The challenge with CDA is thus to show how discourse produces relationships of power whilst simultaneously hiding relations of power and inequality.

In the context of organisations and their identity, the aim is to explore the relationship between organisational talk and the exercise of power (Mumby & Clair, 1997). The authors argue that within the context of critical discourse analysis, organisations are viewed not only “as social collectives where shared meaning is produced, but rather as sites of struggle where different groups compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that shape their own interests” (1997:182). The aim of critical discourse analysis in the study of organisational identity will be to reveal how various groups compete to promote various versions of organisational identity.

### **3.9.1 Characteristics of discourse analytic studies (critical)**

Various authors have produced guidelines for doing discourse analysis (see for example Parker (1992); Potter and Wetherell (1987), and Van Dijk (1997)), though I have chosen to focus rather on key distinguishing features of discourse analysis.

### 3.9.1.1 *Language constituting power relationships in society*

Critical discourse analysis relies on the assumption that there is a relationship between language and the wider social socio-cultural context and practices and that in language social relationships are mirrored and power relationships become reified or fixed, making change difficult. Captured in language, and reflected in texts, are constructions of the world (both inner and outer), society and events (Potter, 2004). These versions of the world benefit some members of society and limit or constrain others, but change is made difficult by the fact that these constructions become fixed, as the same constructions are produced and reproduced in language. In so doing, they support institutions and reproduce power relations (Parker:1992).

### 3.9.1.2 *It has an emancipatory mind-set*

According to Fairclough and Wodak, unlike other research designs that have as their focus “the way things are”, CDA is considered a “form of intervention in social practice and social relationships” (1997:258). Critical scholars of discourse are not only interested in the link between discourse and societal structures, but aim to be *agents of change* for those for whom change is most needed (Van Dijk, 1997a). The aim of CDA is thus clearly emancipatory, with scientists aligning themselves with the dominated, rather than the dominating (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). The aim of discourse analysis is to identify discourses at work in the text and show how these support institutions in local and global, social and cultural contexts and in reproducing power relations, and have ideological effects (Fairclough, 2005; Parker, 1992; Van Dijk, 1997).

### 3.9.1.3 *Naturally occurring text and talk*

The aim is to study “real” data, with a focus on naturally occurring talk and text that has not been edited or changed in any way. Thus analysis would include the interactions present in informal conversations in addition to more formal and institutional dialogues. This is in line with the assumption that all language, including everyday talk, mirrors power relations within groups, institutions and cultures and is used to enact, confirm and challenge social and political institutions (Mumby & Clair, 1997).

### 3.9.1.4 *Analysis of a wide variety of talk and texts*

Discourse analysis has as its focus a wide variety of talk and texts, though the meaning associated with this concept (in this context) is fairly broad (Anataki, Billig, Edwards & Potter, 2003). Parker defines

text as “delimited tissues of meaning reproduced in any form that can be given interpretive gloss” (1992:6). Whilst many types of data may be used in discourse analytic designs, it will always be imperative that the data is in textual / written form so as to analyse the discourse(s) involved (Fairclough, 1997; Parker, 1992).

**3.9.2 Coupland, C. & Brown, A.D. (2004). *Constructing organizational identities on the web: A case study of Royal Dutch / Shell. Journal of Management Studies, 41(8): 1325-1347.***

### **3.9.2.1 Aim and theoretical framework**

The goal of the paper was to analyse two email exchanges posted on Shell’s website Interactive Forum to investigate how organisational identities “are constructed through processes of description, questioning, contestation and defence” (2004:1325) with an emphasis on including organisational “outsiders” in the discussion (*An example of CDA being conducted on a wide range of talk and text*). All the messages analysed were posted between 12 Jan 1998 and 22 October 2001. The WWW is a relatively new genre of communication, and it allows for the expression of multiple identities. With regard to the distinguishing characteristics highlighted in the earlier discussion, two have relevance here. Firstly, these exchanges represent naturally occurring text and talk and could reasonably be considered the web equivalent of informal conversations (*Naturally occurring text and talk*), given the realities and dynamics of web-based interactions. Having investigated various possibilities where outsiders are allowed to engage insiders in identity debates, Shell’s website turned out to be the only one which allowed access to messages posted by “insiders” and “outsiders”, and thus there was no reasonable comparator.

The authors view organisations as socially constructed and organisational identities are regarded as discursive achievements, developed and maintained by all stakeholders engaged in continual identity-centred debates. Organisations are viewed as having multiple identities, authored in conversations between organisational members as well as between members and ostensible outsiders. Identity is the outcome of a continual process of construction with no single definitive version possible. Identity construction can be regarded as a text which is also a site of action.

### **3.9.2.2 Research design**

The data set included all messages posted on Forum between 12 Jan 1998 and 22 October 2001. There were five main sub-fora and messages ranged between 4 and 1263 words, with the average message

being 200 words. All messages were systematically downloaded, printed and read through to identify the types of messages and nature of discussions. At an early stage the researchers realised it would be better to focus on a small number of interactions in more detail, and thus focused on “values”. They examined each message and response pairs but focused on six that had the most potential for examining identity-related issues. These were narrowed down to two exchanges that were *typical* of the category of exchange. Thus four messages are analysed: two messages and their respective responses.

Each message pair was analysed with the response considered in terms of how it addressed specific claims (identity constructions) and provided counter claims / interpretations which were in fact alternative constructions of identity (*an example of discourses and the effects thereof*). For example, the economic interests of the company are the focus of one phrase, captured as follows: “‘capitalistic empire of Shell bureaucrats’. Arguably, this is not just a description of a company doing what companies are commonly understood to do. Here excess is constructed” (2004:1333).

In another place in the same message, the writer refers to “Shell’s hidden agenda” : here doubt is cast “on the morality of Shell”. “Also through interpreting ‘investment’ as ‘bribes’, the company’s activities are defined in critical terms” (2004:1333). In these extracts, *the effects of the choice of particular words, associated with a discourse are highlighted*. In a reply to the above-mentioned message, the author begins by highlighting the first author’s unwillingness to disclose his / her name – a direct comment on identity. Aspects such as tone and the use of normalising techniques to counter claims of capitalistic excess (for example, “a company such as Shell” (2004:1335)) highlight the use of alternative discourses, with different meanings and effects to construct a more “normalised” version of Shell’s practices and identity.

The issue of context is difficult because the messages have a context in respect of the exchanges that have taken place. All messages during an extended time frame were downloaded. General information about Shell and its doings was also available. What is unknown, however, is the context of the authors of the messages. However, given the focus of discourse analysis on the agency of language, it is safe to say that the context of the messages was taken into consideration.

Some reflections by the researchers:

1. The researchers themselves made the selection and while they admit it is not “sample to population” generalisable, they maintain that the study nevertheless contributes to our understanding of how organisational identities are linguistically constructed.
2. Much of the “supporting detail” (visual impact, colour, animation, graphic etc) was missing.

### **3.9.2.3 Key findings**

The study showed that in the context of web postings, organisational identities are not only defined by leaders but are open to continual negotiation and renegotiation by internal participants as well as external stakeholders. For this reason, organisational identity can be viewed as emerging “through the interplay of narratives embedded in conversations between insiders, and between insiders and outsiders” (2004:1341). The Forum provides a discursive space that is less controlled and for this reason, the maintenance of corporate hegemony, in this domain is constantly under threat. This undermines efforts by the organisation to fix meaning in defining organisational identity.

### **3.9.3 Further thoughts on discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis follows the logic of contextualisation as the aim is to understand how language produces particular effects and reproduces power relations in a particular context. The aim is to discover how this is achieved, thus employing a *logic of discovery*. In discourse analysis, the *logic of diachronicity or synchronicity* can be employed, depending on the aim of the study.

Much has been said about the overlaps between various designs, and it is not necessary to repeat the similarities already identified. But perhaps one last comment on the similarities between ethnography and discourse analysis would be useful. Mumby and Clair (1997) cite Michael Rosen’s (1985; 1988) work that combines critical ethnographic research and participant observation with textual analysis. In this context, ‘text’ is interpreted broadly and practices such as annual corporate breakfasts, speeches and Christmas party skits, are regarded as texts. Van Dijk (1997) also refers to the similarity between ethnography and discourse analytic studies, highlighting the role of language in making possible cultural understanding and talk.

I have highlighted the difference in underlying assumptions between content analysis and discourse analysis, but there is a difference in the medium of communication as well. While content analysis may be applied to formal and informal communication, it is often applied to formal communication to gain

access to inaccessible phenomena, while discourse analysis is most often applied to natural talk and text to see how power operates in normal talk and conversations.

### 3.10 Discussion

In the literature review, I highlighted three potential juxtapositions in the perspectives of organisational identity. These are:

- Organisational identity as a property of organisation and residing in formal institutional claims as opposed to being the outcome of collective meaning-making by members;
- Organisational identity as widely shared and collectively agreed-on as opposed to the possibility of its being fragmented and contested;
- Organisational identity as having temporal continuity as opposed to its being fluid and continually constituted.

A central argument of this thesis has been that the choice for a particular research design (and its associated logic) has a direct influence on the kind of knowledge generated through the implementation of that design. I would argue that this also applies to the topic of “organisational identity”. In the table below, I have considered each of the designs I have discussed in this chapter, in terms of each of the alternative perspectives of OI highlighted above. In each case, I consider the likelihood that a given design will give rise to a particular perspective on organisational identity.

**Table 3:2 Outcome of knowledge generated by different research designs**

<b>Property of OI</b> <b>Research Design</b>	<b>Property of organisation, residing in institutional claims versus collective meaning-making by members</b>	<b>Widely shared and collectively agreed-on versus fragmented and contested</b>	<b>Temporal continuity versus fluid and continually constituted</b>
<b>Quantitative Survey</b>	In most instances, a survey design will only allow exploration of a topic along pre-determined parameters, and it is difficult to access a	A survey can only give insight into what it is designed to explore, and it is unlikely that a survey could allow for the exploration of	A once-off survey could only consider the temporal continuity of identity and by the nature of its inability to access alternate identities

	<p>broad range of views. Because formal identity claims are known, it is more likely that these would form the basis of the survey, and it is likely that OI would be viewed as a property of the organisation. The exception is for example the open-ended questions used initially in the Brickson (2005) study, where a more open-ended, albeit limited exploration of members' views was permitted.</p>	<p>contestation. It can however explore multiple identities (for example Foreman &amp; Whetten, 2002), only within the framework of already having determined their existence. A pre-formulated questionnaire with closed-ended questions would determine the extent to which these are evident or not, without accessing alternative identities. Contestation could be measured only if defined as a non-reaction to the predefined identities.</p>	<p>would be unlikely to measure its continual constitution. The survey, if administered at different moments in time, could give an indication of the degree to which pre-determined identities are relevant, at a given moment in time.</p>
<p><b>Content analysis</b></p>	<p>In the studies reviewed for this project, content analysis was used to explore OI as property of the organisation (Aust, 2004). It could conceivably also have been used to study members' identification by accessing examples of member's talk about the organisation, and applying the value framework to these. However in both cases, the description of identity would have to be restricted to the values described by Rokeach (assuming Aust's 2004 assumptions) or</p>	<p>In the Aust study communicated values were used as a "measure" of identity. Some values were used more frequently and were thus assumed to be more "central" to OI. In the study under review there was no way of accessing contestation, because it focuses on OI as a property of the organisation. Although there is no example of this, content analysis could be used to access contestation. It would be depend on the research question. One could</p>	<p>Content analysis is often used to track trends and changes in communication over time through the use of frequency counts (Weber, 1985). Inherent in this design is the assumption that change happens and can be studied (as reflected in the Aust study) though these studies generally focus on degrees of change within the status quo, and would be unable to access the "fleeting nature" of identity as, for example, in a discourse analytic study (Coupland &amp; Brown, 2004).</p>



	whatever framework was used as part of the study.	conceivably access members' talk and using an analytical construct to explore examples of these.	
<b>Case study</b>	Because of the wide range of means used to gather data, a case study would most likely access identity as institutional claims, as well as the collective meaning-making of members. Where data-gathering relies on documents and archival records, which often reflects the institutional claims available to members, identity as property of the organisation would be accessed. However, these would be used in conjunction with interview data, which would give insight into collective meaning-making around the formal institutional claims.	Because case studies rely on interviews and engagement with organisational members, it is possible for the researcher to discover whether identity is widely shared and agreed on or fragmented and contested, especially where these are compared with institutionalised identity claims.	Case studies are often designed precisely to track changes over time, introduce the element of formal institutional claims, and are thus more likely to focus on temporal continuity over time.
<b>Ethnography</b>	Ethnographic studies are designed to explore (usually in situ) the experiences and interpretations of people in their ordinary activities. It is thus ideally suited to capturing organisational identity as the collective meaning-making of	Ethnographic designs have developed a fairly critical edge in considering the important question of control in organisations, and would thus be ideal for exploring identity as fragmented and contested, as these are a means by which members	Because of its focus on participant observation and unstructured interviewing style, ethnographic studies are ideal to explore the possibility of identity as fluid and continually constituted. However, given the nature of groups and their tendency

	organisational members.	resist the hegemony associated with OI.	towards common norms and a collective history, it is also possible for ethnographic study to find temporal continuity in OI.
<b>Narrative analysis</b>	Narrative design works on the assumption that social reality is basically captured in narratives. Narrative analysis will always be from the perspective of the individual member as they make sense of the organisation through their story-telling.	Narrative design, because it allows for stories to be told, makes possible the collection of multiple stories regarding organisational identity, and will not specify whether these are widely shared or largely contested. It allows for both possibilities (Brown, 2006).	A narrative study will typically not specify whether stories that emerge may constitute an OI that is enduring or one that is fluid and continually constituted but allows for both possibilities at varying moments in time (Brown, 2006).
<b>Discourse analysis</b>	Discourse analysis could focus on the OI as a property of the organisation or as the property of the observer, depending on the research question, and the nature of the discourse being studied. If formal institutional claims are studied, these would represent OI as a property of the organisation. Alternatively, discourse analysis could focus on the perspective of organisational members, as found in Coupland and Brown (2004).	Discourse analysis, because of its critical orientation and its capacity to focus on small snippets of communicative text, is perhaps best suited to explore identity as fragmented and contested as it allows for a critical, “micro” approach to the study of identity. It is however conceivable that one could explore OI as widely shared and collectively agreed on, as discourse analysis focuses on language, which is by nature social and makes collective action and agreement possible.	The focus of discourse analysis on small snippets of communicative text make it ideal for studying OI as continually constituted as demonstrated in the Coupland and Brown (2004) study. It is however conceivable that one could track slight changes in the temporal continuity of OI also using a discourse analytic methodology.

It is apparent from Table 3:10 above that all of the designs, do – in one way or another - influence the nature of knowledge and the way it is constructed: some constraining the scope of knowledge generation while others open up various possibilities in this regard. The *survey design*, for example, because of the closed-ended question format, makes it difficult to access anything outside of the prescribed questions and would thus be unlikely to access collective meaning making, a fragmented and contested identity, or a continually constituted OI. However, in instances where survey design employs qualitative data as input, it would be possible to access a wider range of views, though the meaning and contextual implications of these would typically not be explored in detail. In a similar way, *content analysis*, may, depending on how it used, generate varying degrees of knowledge of organisational identity. Where applied, as described by Aust (2004) using a pre-determined codebook, it is likely to produce evidence in line with the framework used as basis for the study. In such instances, organisational identity will simply be a reflection of the terms used in trying to access it. However, as with survey design, greater access would be possible where an open codebook is used, especially where this is developed in conjunction with organisational members. Content analysis with its emphasis on textual analysis at varying moments in time would be particularly useful in tracking continuity or lack thereof in organisational identity. *Case study*, because of its emphasis on documents and archival sources, will allow for both the formal organisational OI claims to be considered alongside of members' views as these are explored through interviews. *Ethnography*, with its open-ended and unstructured approach, would allow the researcher to access the process of collective meaning-making and allow for OI as widely shared and / or fragmented and contested. It would also make possible the discovery of identity as having temporal continuity or being continually constituted. The openness allowed by *narrative analysis*, also makes possible the generation of various possibilities depending on the nature of the research question and the narratives studied. *Discourse analysis* with its critical orientation and focus on snippets of communicative text, as shown in Coupland and Brown (2004), would be more likely to produce evidence of a fragmented identity, and one that is continually constituted. However, given a different research question, it could produce a very different outcome.

In the final analysis, it can be concluded that research design does constrain or make possible the generation of different types of knowledge regarding OI. Some designs - for example, the survey design and content analysis - are particularly limiting because of the emphasis on a pre-determined framework or theory. Other designs do open up possibilities but the final outcome will nevertheless be influenced by the nature of the research question.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I first discussed the notion of “research design” briefly and considered three sets of logic according to which they can be classified. Second, I provided an overview of key empirical studies of organisational identity, presented in Table 3.1. In the subsequent sections, I discussed each of the research design types highlighting distinguishing characteristics associated with each. For each of these designs, I illustrated the design types by alluding to examples of each. In the final section, I considered each of the research designs in the light of the three potential juxtapositions in the perspectives of organisational identity discussed in Chapter 2, exploring the likelihood that a particular design will give rise to a specific type of knowledge about OI.

## CHAPTER 4: THE RESEARCH METHOD AND PROCESS

### 4.1 Introduction

One of the aims of the study was to gather data regarding organisational identity using an online qualitative survey. The aim of this chapter is to describe the process I followed in designing my questionnaire and gathering the data. I begin by discussing my choice of epistemological/methodological paradigm, after which I discuss the qualitative survey design. I then explore the potential of the open-ended organisational survey as a means of gathering data, and how this led to the development of the organisational identity questionnaire. Thereafter, I describe the research method, paying attention to aspects of data gathering and analysis, and consider how elements of my own identity would inevitably have affected the research outcome.

### 4.2 Locating myself paradigmatically

*“Catch-all terms like ‘realism’, ‘constructionism’ and so on, invite endless and distracting debates, most of which can be resolved just by attending to the varieties obscured by excessive generality” (Harré, 1998:xi).*

As a researcher, I approach my topic from a particular perspective, which has implications for what is learnt from the study (May, 2001), how it is learnt and thus the use to which it will be put. These views have informed both my perspective on the nature of organisational identity and my choice of methodology. Yet in attempting to formulate it, I came face-to-face with the problem highlighted in the quotation above, that of “excessive generality” which makes the point that terms have diverse meanings in various contexts for different individuals. In the section that follows I explain the ontological and epistemological positions with which I associated myself and explain exactly where I stand in relation to the “excessive generality” associated with these terms.

In the discussion that follows, while I have recognised sources where necessary, I must acknowledge my debt to one book in particular, as this has shaped my thinking in more ways than can be reflected by merely listing reference, namely, *The foundations of social research* by Michael Crotty (1998). Crotty has succeeded in presenting the discussion of ontology and epistemology in a way that is concise and accessible. In the next sections, I locate myself ontologically and epistemologically.

### 4.2.1 Realism in ontology

I consider myself to be a realist in ontology, by which I mean, in the words of Miles and Huberman: “We think social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the objective world – and that some lawful and reasonably stable relationships are to be found among them. The lawfulness comes from the regularities and sequences that link together phenomena. From these patterns we can derive constructs that underlie individual and social life... Human relationships and societies have peculiarities that make a realist approach to understanding them more complex – but not impossible. Unlike researchers in physics, we must contend with institutions, structures, practices, and conventions that people reproduce and transform. Human meanings and intentions are worked out within the frameworks of these social structures – structures that are invisible but nonetheless real. In other words social phenomena, such as language, decisions, conflicts and hierarchies, exist objectively in the world and exert strong influences over human activities because people construe them in common ways. Things that are believed become real (epistemological reality) and can be inquired into” (1994:4).

Crotty (1998) points out that often realism is taken to imply objectivism and is even, at times, equated with objectivism (see also Nightingale & Cromby, 2002). For example, Guba and Lincoln state “if, for example, a ‘real’ reality is assumed, the posture of the knower must be one of objective detachment or value freedom in order to be able to discover ‘how things really are’ and ‘how things really work’” (1994:108). According to Crotty, this confuses “things” and the “meanings of things”. He distinguishes between things and the meanings of things and on this basis holds that: “Realism in ontology and constructionism in epistemology turn out to be quite compatible” (1998:11). The assumption of the distinction between “things” and “meanings of things” also underpins the relationships between the more realist aspects of identity theory, captured primarily in the social actor approach, and the constructionist approaches, which emphasise the meaning construction that is inherent in human beings.

### 4.2.2 Social constructionism in epistemology

*“Social constructionism is at once realist and relativist. To say that meaningful reality is socially constructed is not to say that it is not real” (Crotty, 1998:63).*

While I am committed to a realist perspective in ontology, I support a social constructionist epistemology. According to Crotty, constructionism is defined as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and

out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (1998: 42).

#### **4.2.2.1 Knowledge is constructed not created**

According to Crotty, “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (1998:43). Captured here are two elements: human beings engage with the world and, in this process, meaning is constructed. For this reason, knowledge is neither entirely subjective nor is it entirely objective: “...the world and the objects therein are indeterminate and while pregnant with potential meaning, actual meaning only emerges when human consciousness engages with them” (Crotty, 1998:43). He uses the example of a tree and how this “real” thing will hold very distinctive meanings for different groups of people, for example, artists, loggers, or people with no other source of heating.

This is captured in the phenomenological concept of intentionality, which I believe to be critical in understanding how we come to know and make sense of the world. Intentionality in this context refers to people always being conscious of something: consciousness is directed towards an object (Crotty, 1998:44). It is also in the concept of intentionality that the tension between objectivity and subjectivity are united. Human beings (subjective) engage the world (objective) and meaning is constructed out of the interaction between the two (Crotty, 1998).

Crotty’s discussion of Levi-Strauss’s concept of the “bricoleur” was particularly helpful in understanding my role as a researcher. In some circles, the bricoleur has been interpreted to mean something akin to a “Jack-of-all-trades” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:2), the implication being that as researchers we should be comfortable working from multiple perspectives and possess multiple skills, approaching the topic of our study with imagination and inventiveness. This meaning is however very different from the meaning of bricoleur, as used by Levi-Strauss (1962). In the context of “The Savage Mind”, the text in which the term is used, the bricoleur is far more than a multi-skilled handy-man, but rather “a makeshift artisan, armed with a collection of bits and pieces that were once standard parts of a certain whole but which the bricoleur, as bricoleur, now reconceives as parts of a new whole” (Crotty, 1998:50). The question that faces the bricoleur is: “what can I make with what I have?” and the focus is on the possibilities presented by the material the person is working with. I highlight this point because often constructionism has come to be associated with an almost exclusive focus on the self and self-reflexivity, which is highly subjective and is not about engaging with the “object” at all. It is not in this

sense that I use the term social constructionism, and while I do not negate the importance and value of reflexivity, research must be focused on my own relationship with the material I have studied and judged along these lines. This is significant because the material comes with its own constraints and context, and will inevitably set limits on what can be produced and what interpretations can be made.

#### **4.2.2.2 Knowledge is socially constructed**

Furthermore, because we are born and socialised into an already interpreted world, meaning making is not conducted in isolation but in conjunction with other people, and for this reason reality is said to be “socially constructed” (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Crotty, 1998). The means by which this process of social construction takes place is a matter of some debate amongst constructionists, as is the role of language in the process. In strong versions of constructionism, language is taken to be the only means by which reality is constructed (Potter, 1998; Gergen, 1999) while its weaker forms consider language to be only one aspect of this process (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Collier, 1998). Nightingale and Cromby (2002) suggest that in addition to language, embodiment, materiality, socio-cultural institutions, interpersonal practices and historical trajectories (structures and the reproduction of structures of power) all play a role in the social construction of reality. This is key in understanding identity, because as Coupland and Brown suggest, “identities are constructed in relation to material and social factors” (2004:1329).

It is against the backdrop of a social constructionist approach to knowledge generation that a qualitative survey as research design was chosen.

### **4.3 Designing a qualitative organisational survey**

The survey was discussed in some detail in Chapter 3 as part of research designs used in studying identity, and as one survey design type, I introduced the qualitative survey as a means of exploring the feelings, opinions and values of people and groups in topics for which a quantitative survey is not appropriate (Fink, 2003).

Organisational identity is usually regarded as “unique”, in that any feature can potentially be identity defining (Van Tonder, 1999) and because of this, many studies of identity entail a description of identity (usually in conjunction with a research question), and little work has been done in identifying common identity elements. The exceptions include Alvesson and Empson (2008), who identify



common identity dimensions across four consulting firms, and Van Tonder (2011) who has developed dimensions for both Sense of Identity (SoI) and Fact of identity (FoI) concepts. Those designs focused on describing identity are usually case-based and rely on ethnographic or narrative perspectives, which are time- and labour- intensive. They are also difficult to carry out in companies with a large number of employees who are geographically dispersed, both within a single country and across different countries.

For this reason, a need was identified for a questionnaire to provide a description of organisational identity, as perceived by members of a company. The request originated from the CEO and HR Director of the newly formed, Delta, who wanted to see how similar or dissimilar the newly merged identities actually were. In planning the merger, they had considered other elements including culture but there was nothing available which could give them a description of each heritage organisation's identity. They were also interested in identifying commonalities to facilitate building a new common identity. A qualitative survey, which is primarily descriptive, provides a means to accomplish this.

#### 4.3.1 Characteristics of a qualitative survey

Jansen (2010) argues that the qualitative survey constitutes a legitimate type of research design and while it is often used (see for example Carter, 2002; Debski & Gruba, 1999; Kane, 2008), it is seldom considered a "true" research design. It is only Fink (2003) who mentions this as a variation of survey design, but she seems to be largely ignored by other authors on the subject (Jansen, 2010). In an attempt to provide substance to the design, Jansen (2010) presents a framework outlining the underlying logic of the qualitative survey. In Table 4.2.1 below I present an adapted version of this framework as it pertains to my own study (Jansen, 2010:3-4).

**Table 4.1: Comparing the Qualitative and Quantitative survey**

	Qualitative survey	Quantitative survey
<i>Defining knowledge aims</i>	Used to explore diversity on any topic in any population. Primarily descriptive.	Used to explore frequency distribution on any topic in any population. Primarily descriptive.
<i>Sampling</i>	Purposive sampling, based on diversity, coverage of population diversity.	Probability, by chance. Precision of estimate.
<i>Data collection</i>	Data may be collected in any way at any level for example, text, observations	Data may be collected in any way and at any level.

	and interviews.	
<i>Data analysis</i>	Coding of the data can take place at three levels: unidimensional analysis, multi-dimensional analysis and explanation.	Counting frequencies, descriptive statistics, estimating parameters and further statistical analyses.
<i>Quality issues</i>	Reliant on quality measures associated with qualitative research for example peer debriefing, reflexive accounting and the audit trail (as used in this study)	Various measures of reliability and validity

While the aim of both types of surveys is primarily descriptive, the nature and use of the descriptions differ. The qualitative survey is used to describe a phenomenon in its *context* taking into account contextual demands, thus employing a *logic of contextualisation*. The quantitative survey, on the other hand aims to transcend the details of the context and seek generalisations (based on statistical frequencies) thus employing a *logic of generalisation*. Whilst the nature of the data input may be similar (as suggested by Table 4.1), the way in which it is analysed, and the implications of this for the conclusions drawn, is what distinguishes the nature of the description, and ultimately the use to which it can be put. Researchers using qualitative surveys are usually not aiming for representative or generalisable results nor are they interested in the “typical” person; rather the aim is to provide meaning and uniqueness to questions of interest (Fink, 2003).

As indicated, any feature of organisational identity can be potentially identity-defining (Van Tonder, 1999), and for this reason, the qualitative survey can serve the purpose of exploring its facets and allowing for an inductive analysis and description of its character. Furthermore, the aim of the qualitative survey is to explore and describe diversity, and in the study of identity, an instrument must provide scope to capture its potential ambiguity, multiplicity and plurivocity (Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998; Parker, 1992). Ambiguity provides organisational members scope in the way they define themselves, allowing for a range of beliefs, opinions and actions, given the influences and dynamics of various contexts (Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998). Multiplicity or plurivocity refers to the multiple facets of identity, which does not necessarily imply fragmentation but reflects the various contexts, stories and perspectives associated with the organisation (Brown, 2006; Albert, et al, 2000; Gioia, 1998).

While qualitative surveys are usually used to describe individual diversity within a population, the aim of the study was to explore identity (which may be coherent or fragmented) in the organisation, and thus represents a form of organisational survey. Employee surveys have a long history in organisational research, with changing purposes and foci, as organisational needs and areas of interest have changed over time (Higgs & Ashworth, 1996). They are an outstanding way of gathering data in organisations, especially where members are geographically dispersed, a requirement highlighted above. The aim of organisational surveys is to provide meaningful results to facilitate organisational decision-making while keeping the costs and time constraints associated with other designs to a minimum (Higgs & Ashworth, 1996; Simsek & Veiga, 2000).

The uses of surveys in organisations include:

- Gathering employee opinions about a wide variety of topics including remuneration and benefits, HR processes and functions, organisational processes and planning, as well as the impact of business strategies;
- Identifying areas of concern;
- Monitoring the impact of programs and interventions;
- Aiding in organisational change and improvement;
- Segmentation of employees (gathering specific employee feedback based on classification according to specific demographics such as tenure, job level, compensation plan, etc.);
- Comparing employee perspectives across organisations.

(Kraut 1996:5-10; Higgs and Ashworth 1996:24-26).

While there are benefits associated with organisational surveys, there are also critiques which include the assumption that people have clear views and opinions about the topics being investigated and that the questionnaires used are able to capture these views and opinions accurately (Galadiński and Kozłowska, 2010:271).

When conducting a qualitative survey, the aim is to sample purposively to cover existing varieties of the phenomenon, so as to describe this diversity (Jansen, 2010). Data may come from written or recorded documents, interviews and observations, and qualitative surveys usually generate a vast amount of information that must be analysed and interpreted (Fink, 2003). Qualitative surveys may be based on various cycles of data collection and analysis, though in many instances pragmatic concerns

allow only for a “single one-shot, one-method” sample, and involve only one cycle of data collection and analysis (Jansen, 2010:3).

Jansen (2010) identifies three levels of survey analysis, namely unidimensional description, multidimensional description and explanation. The first level, *unidimensional description*, involves classifying data into objects, with dimensions for each object, as well as categories for each dimension (Jansen, 2010). In a quantitative survey, *multi-dimensional description* occurs by grouping variables on the basis of statistical correlations amongst the variables. In a qualitative survey, synthesis of difference occurs either around concepts/ variables or a unit/ case. Concept-oriented synthesis entails compiling several dimensions into an abstract core concept, whereas case-oriented synthesis involves grouping cases together based on similar arrangements of attributes. The final level entails *explanation* and involves an analysis of patterns between various dimensions (Jansen, 2010).

Having provided an overview of the qualitative survey, and its potential use in an organisational survey, I proceed to discuss the potential use of internet-based surveys as a means of conducting organisational research, especially in organisations where members are geographically dispersed.

#### **4.3.2 The potential of internet-based surveys**

Traditionally, surveys have been conducted via mail, in person, by telephone and by means of a central site, and more recently, by means of email and the Internet (Fleming & Bowden, 2009:284). There has been an explosion in the use of the Internet and the world wide web and the market penetration of this form of technology has surpassed other new technologies such as radio and television (Tourangeau, Couper & Conrad, 2004; Cook, Heath & Thompson, 2000). The increase in the use of email, internet banking and paying of bills suggests a familiarity and convenience with certain groups in the population, though where this is not the case, it can impact the representativeness of a sample (Fleming & Bowden, 2009:285). Despite this, the only studies exploring identity on the web (though not by means of surveys) were those by Coupland and Brown (2004) and Silience and Brown (2009).

It is important to distinguish between various types of internet-based surveys, also known as ‘computer-assisted survey information collection’ (CASIC)(Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008). Email survey techniques (EST) refer to survey data gathered by means of a computerised self-administered questionnaire. Fricker (2008) distinguishes between email and web surveys referring to both types as internet-based surveys. In an email survey, questionnaires will be sent by a researcher via email or

accessed on a website from a link sent via email. Once the questionnaire is completed, the mail with the completed form is returned to the researcher, or where it is completed on the web, it is downloaded to a data file (Simsek & Veiga, 2000; Simsek & Veiga, 2001; Sue & Ritter, 2007). These are to be distinguished from web-based surveys where the survey is announced on the world wide web and respondents are diverted to the site from other links (Simsek & Veiga, 2001; Sue & Ritter, 2007; Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008). Most internet-based organisational surveys will be conducted through email surveys, and the organisational environment is one that is particularly conducive to the use of the latter (Cook et al, 2000; Simsek & Veiga, 2000). For the purpose of this study, I will refer to an internet-based survey; more specifically, the use of an email survey technique I used.

The benefits of using email-invitations include fast response-time, the ability to contact people with common characteristics and the ease with which reminders can be sent, multiple times if necessary (Sue & Ritter, 2007). The disadvantage of a questionnaire or link attached to an email is that if not password-controlled, people not included in the sample may come across the questionnaire and complete it (Simsek & Veiga, 2000). In the context of my study, this would be limited to people in the organisation (though conceivably family members of those sampled could also have had access to the questionnaire, if they had access to an employee's email).

Response rates in all forms of survey research have declined, though Kaplowitz, Hadlock and Levine (2004) found that internet-based surveys achieved a comparable response to mail surveys where both were preceded by an advance mail notification. Fleming and Bowden (2009) also found that response rates to mail and internet-based surveys were not statistically different. In a study of people's attitudes towards internet-based surveys, Thompson and Surface (2007) found that only 8% of the sample indicated their disapproval of the format, as opposed to 37% indicating their disapproval of the paper-based version. Although the web has provided opportunities for new ways of gathering survey data, researchers have to master the unique challenges posed by this type of survey, as research into these methods is still new and not much is known about the effects of techniques developed for other survey contexts, applied in internet-based surveys (Solomon, 2001; Dillman & Smyth, 2007).

There are several benefits associated with internet-based surveys:

- Internet-based surveys provide greater anonymity as there is no clear way of identifying people participating in the survey (Simsek & Veiga, 2001). Shields (2003) suggests that power differences related to race, class and position are surmounted in the relatively safe and

anonymous environment of a web-based survey and the students in her study were prepared to share more sensitive information. Dillman and Smyth (2007) also suggest that internet surveys are preferable where sensitive data is gathered.

- Participants tend to provide longer and more substantive responses to qualitative questions (Kierman, Kierman, Oylar & Gilles, 2005). Shields (2003) received considerable interest and commitment in an open-ended internet-based survey from students who provided rich and well-elaborated answers, with an average of 35 words, the longest response being 198 words. A similar oral survey in response to the same questions generated an average of 12 words with a range of 142 words. The internet-based survey also allowed for greater usage of creativity, stylistic devices and expression of emotion than the oral survey (Shields, 2003).
- Ease of typing and changing a response allows for more detailed and self-disclosing answers (Reja, Lozar Manfreda, Hlebec and Vehovar, 2003; Kiesler & Sproull, 1986).
- For economic reasons internet-based surveys are preferable as the costs associated with surveying are low and more people can be reached over a geographically dispersed area (Fleming & Bowden, 2009; Cook et al, 2000; Tourangeau et al, 2004; Kaplowitz et al, 2004; Schleyer & Forrest, 2000; Shields, 2003; Smith, Smith, Gray & Ryan, 2007; Wyatt, 2000; Simsek & Veiga, 2001; Blank, 2008).
- Internet-based surveys can be developed with ease and be ready for administration within a relatively short period (Fleming & Bowden, 2009).
- They are less time-consuming, with quick and easy dissemination and collection of data (Simsek & Veiga, 2001; Shields, 2003; Wyatt, 2000).
- Smith et al (2007) found similar response rates for paper and email responses in the Millennium cohort study, though internet respondents provided more complete information.
- Participants experience less evaluation anxiety than in other survey forms (Kiesler & Sproull, 1986).
- Because web-based survey information is stored immediately in a database, the risk of transcription errors (as in paper and pencil questionnaires) is eliminated (Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008).

The following are disadvantages associated with internet-based surveys:

- Clear guidelines must be given as there is no one who can provide additional information should some aspects be missing or unclear (Reja et al, 2003).

- People may not complete the questionnaire as there is no interaction with another person, and internet users are inclined to be more impatient and read more quickly than non-internet users (Reja et al, 2003).
- Access to the internet may still be felt as a threat as many people do not or choose not to access the internet and participants have varying levels of computer and internet skill (Dillman & Smyth, 2007; Solomon, 2001). Furthermore, people may be wary of emails from an unknown sender because of “phishing” and spyware (Dillman & Smyth, 2007).

In my own study, the last point of critique did not pose a risk, as the sample of participants was known to be computer literate, and the mail was sent out from the CEO of Delta (head of newly merged Alpha and Beta), a source with which organisational members were familiar.

### **4.3.3 Choosing a question format**

Jansen (2010) differentiates between open (inductive) and pre-structured (deductive) qualitative surveys. In the former, objects, dimensions (characteristics of the objects) and categories of dimensions are identified by interpreting the raw data. In the pre-structured qualitative surveys, the diversity is defined beforehand, and the analysis aims to identify the diversity existing in the population being studied. Bearing in mind what has already been stated regarding organisational identity, and its potential uniqueness, I decided to explore the use of open-ended questions, drawing on the conceptual framework discussed in Chapter 2. In the next section, I discuss the potential as well as the limitations of open-ended questions in internet-based survey research.

Traditionally, a quantitative survey relies on closed-ended questions, primarily because they are easier and less expensive to code than their open-ended counterparts (Lazarfeld, 1944; Geer, 1991). Closed questions typically reflect the perspective of the researcher, and the respondent is limited to set responses, whereas open questions allow for the respondents to voice their own opinions and perspectives with regard to a particular aspect (Reja, et al, 2003; O’Cathain & Thomas, 2004; Popping, 2008). Open-ended questions are occasionally used in conjunction with closed-ended questions as a basis for developing other questions or for allowing respondents to explain their responses to other items in the survey, thus reducing frustration (Pratt, 2008). They are seldom used for detailed analysis, as this is time consuming and labour-intensive.

However, Higgs and Ashworth (1996) suggest open-ended questions may be effective for gathering employee input and may contain rich information, and respondents to internet-based surveys show greater willingness to answer open-ended questions (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998). Open-ended questions can yield useful information especially when researchers are attempting to gather new information about a topic, explore participants' experience or complex issues that do not have a finite or pre-determined set of responses, of which identity is a good example (Carey, Morgan & Oxtoby, 1996; Reja, et al, 2003; Sproull, 1988). They provide a means by which employees can respond in their own words and express emotion more honestly because of the anonymity associated with a survey, thus yielding interesting insights and capturing alternative explanations not possible in closed-ended questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Jackson & Trochim, 2002). In this way, researchers are able to access important concerns of participants, allowing for salient issues to be raised (Reja et al, 2003; Greer, 1991).

Reja et al, (2003) found that in comparing open and closed formats of the same questions, participants answered comfortably within the range of permitted answers (the closed-ended) but where given the freedom to respond, produced a richer, more diverse set of responses, thus limiting the bias associated with closed-ended questions.

The disadvantages of open-ended questions include the lengthy analysis time, the difficulty in coding responses due to unclear meaning as well as an increase in the amount of missing data for open-ended questions (Reja et al, 2003:159). Furthermore, Schuman, Ludwig and Krosnick, (1986) found that open-ended questions are more sensitive to changes in external events and reports by the media, than closed-ended questions are. Finally, the reliability associated with open-ended questions may be low as respondents report only what comes to mind immediately and do not have the prompts provided by closed-ended questions (Popping, 2008).

#### **4.3.4 Data generated by open-ended survey questions**

There is some debate regarding the nature of data generated by open-ended questions, with some authors suggesting the data is qualitative rather than quantitative (Mossholder, Settoon, Harris & Armenakis, 1995). For this reason, O'Cathain and Thomas (2004) suggest open-ended questions lie somewhere between qualitative and quantitative data, especially where used as an addition to closed-ended questions. Open-ended questions do lack the strengths associated with qualitative data, namely a detailed analysis of the context and a lack of conceptual richness; however, where sufficient data is



obtained, they suggest analysis can produce emerging themes about an issue (O’Cathain & Thomas, 2004; Jackson & Trochim, 2002). While the data generated in the survey did not generate the same detailed descriptions as one would expect from an in-depth interview or focus group, they were sufficiently detailed and rich in content to allow me to discern “discursive regimes” through which employees accomplish organisational identity (Clark, Brown & Hailey, 2009), and thus identify narratives and statements associated with each of the heritage organisations. O’Cathain and Thomas (2004) stress that where data is presented qualitatively, attention should be paid to quality issues associated with qualitative data analysis.

Open-ended questions, due to the diversity of respondents, produce a variety of responses and response formats as the ability to articulate varies from respondent to respondent (Popping, 2008). In addition, the length of responses varies greatly between respondents and it is generally accepted that those with strong feelings will write a considerable amount while those without such feelings will keep responses short (Mossholder et al, 1995).

#### **4.3.5 Typical errors in surveys**

Whilst the errors discussed below are usually associated with quantitative surveys, I discuss these here as some of them have their origin in the use of the internet, and thus have some relevance to my own study. There are various types of errors present in survey research, and various categorisations of these exist (for example, Dillman, 1991; Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008). For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to categorise these according to Simsek and Veiga (2001) who identify sampling error and nonsampling error (which includes non-response and measurement error).

##### *4.3.5.1 Sampling errors*

Sampling lies at the heart of the survey method as it is impractical to survey the whole population, hence the need to focus on a sample to infer back to the population (Fricker, 2008). Key to this, however, is an unbiased sampling frame (Simsek & Veiga, 2000). The sampling frame refers to a list of all possible people who could be included in the survey, and the representativeness of the sample refers to the fact that each person in a population has a chance of being sampled (Dillman, 1991; Fricker, 2008; Simsek & Veiga, 2001). In the general population, the lack of access of people to the internet can induce a sample bias to web-based surveys as not all members have access to the internet or are computer literate, and there are differing levels of technical ability amongst participants (Fleming & Bowden, 2009:285, Schleyer & Forrest, 2000; Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008; Simsek & Veiga,

2001). The email survey provides the most control in this regard as the questionnaire or link is sent to specific people identified beforehand, though this may be subject to threats; for example, a person forwarding it to a colleague who in turn completes and submits it (Simsek & Veiga, 2001).

Organisational research designs are traditionally susceptible to sample selection bias and strict adherence to the representativeness principle would exclude much fruitful organisational research (Simsek & Veiga, 2001). Yet, where data is gathered in only one organisation, the sampling frame is less of an issue, especially where the researcher gains top management consent to carry out the survey (Simsek & Veiga, 2001), as was the case in my study.

#### 4.3.5.2 Non-sampling errors

*Non-response error* refers to respondents who simply do not respond to the survey, and this can result from the person not responding at all, termed unit non-response, or from missing questions or information by one person, called item non-response (Simsek & Veiga, 2001). With regard to unit non-response, Rogelberg, Sederburg, Aziz, Conway, Spitzmüller and Knight (2003) distinguish between active or passive non-response. *Passive non-response* is a lack of response as a result of a chance event and is not based on an active decision not to participate; for example, staff turnover, maternity and sick leave, redeployment, internal address errors, and heavy work load, the latter obviously being a real issue in the organisation within which the study was conducted. Loosing or forgetting the survey are also considered to be passive non-response. *Active non-response* results from a deliberate decision not to respond to a survey.

Rogelberg, Luong, Sederburg and Cristol (2000) found that employees who expressed organisational commitment considered completing an organisational survey to be part of being an organisation citizen whilst those experiencing low commitment and dissatisfaction towards their jobs and immediate supervisors may avoid the additional effort. Furthermore, those who held less positive beliefs over the way in which the organisations would handle survey data were also less inclined to complete a survey. Organisational survey responses are also likely to be influenced by personality traits, for example, agreeableness, the attitude towards the topic being surveyed, and contextual variables like social norms (Rogelberg et al, 2000). While these findings have not been demonstrated in internet surveys, it is likely to have implications for my findings, as there was a high response rate, with only a few “across the board” negative responses. Organisational identity was generally viewed in positive terms but this could be because those who were less likely to be positive were omitted due to non-response error.

Non-response error could thus introduce inaccuracies into the findings as those who did not participate may differ from those who did participate (Bosnjak & Tuten, 2006; Van Geest & Johnson, 2013). Errors may also arise through the systematic non-completion of certain questions and incomplete answers to questions, where participants withheld socially undesirable information (Kiesler & Sproull, 1986).

*Measurement error* refers to the discrepancy between a true and observed response, and arises as a result of refusal to answer certain questions, supplying incomplete answers, not following instructions, not reporting socially undesirable information and reporting socially desirable information (Dillman & Smyth, 2000; Kiesler & Sproull, 1986; Simsek & Veiga, 2001). While these factors have not been conclusively studied in internet surveys, Simsek and Veiga (2001) concluded that from studies conducted, internet self-administered surveys appear to provide results that were comparable to responses in postal surveys, the common critical element being the guarantee of anonymity. Design elements in internet- based surveys can be a cause of measurement error, for example, differences in hardware and software configurations in technology may result in participants receiving stimuli in different ways (Sills & Song, 2002; Dillman & Smyth, 2007). For this reason, careful attention must be paid to the design of the survey instrument, aspects of which will be discussed shortly briefly.

#### **4.3.6 Rationale underlying the survey**

One of the challenges in studying identity is the “uniqueness” thereof. As Albert and Whetten (1985) point out, it is not possible to provide a universal list of organisational characteristics as a definitive set of measureable properties related to organisational identity, as these need to be determined by a particular organisation for a given purpose. Thus a generic organisational identity survey would not be possible. However, a survey with open-ended questions allows for a broader range of internal participants to capture aspects of organisational identity inhering in institutional claims regarding those aspects they consider to be central, distinctive and enduring (Ravasi and Schultz, 2006). The internet-based survey is particularly suited for organisational research, making it ideal for the researcher to identify “symbolic rallying points” (Brown, 2006:742) employees have chosen to portray and project what they view to be their organisation’s identity (Ybema, Keenoy, Oswick, Beverunge, Ellis & Sabelis, 2009:304), drawing on the “local world of stories” within which they operate, to describe their organisation (McAdams, 1996:298).

My original intention was to select completely open-ended questions, for example the Ten Statements Test used by Brickson's (2005) and the Twenty Statement Test used by van Tonder's (2006). The original instrument, developed by Kuhn & McPortland (1954), comprised incomplete sentences that required participants to respond to the question "Who am I?" with twenty different statements. It was adapted for the exploration of organisational identity by reformulating the question as "Who am I (company X)?" (Brickson, 2005; van Tonder, 2006).

However, the aim of my study was to explore how various, more concrete aspects of organisational functioning are used in making sense of and constructing an organisational identity without specific reference to the concept of identity. For this reason, I chose not to use the TST, preferring to provide dimensions of organisational functioning, particularly those identified by Empson (2004); Brickson (2005); Bronn et al (2006) and Alvesson and Empson (2008) which included types of staff and clients, services and reputation, management systems and styles, values and culture, dominant logic and company motto.

The aim was not to find out about successful staff, the culture, management or leadership per se but rather how these together exemplify something of the organisation as a whole, namely its identity. The assumption was that in presenting their organisation along various dimensions (for example, staff, culture, management and reputation), employees would contextualise these elements, locating them in particular discourses perceived to be relevant to the organisation's identity (Karreman & Alvesson, 2001:63). The advantages of not asking about identity directly were that it would not impose an understanding of identity that might not be there, and it would minimise the effect of social reporting (Alvesson & Empson, 2008). The participants were invited to provide information regarding their organisation in response to the open-ended questions described below.

#### **4.3.7 Organisational identity survey**

##### **Questions**

*For me the three core values of my heritage organisation's are:*

Values are an integral part of identity because they act much like a constitution – a guideline for making decisions in line with identity. Values have implications for the moral and legal parameters for identity (see also Aust, 2004; Bronn et al, 2006; Empson, 2004; Albert & Whetten, 1985).

*My organisation's culture could best be described as (culture is viewed as the generally accepted way of doing things in an organisation):*

To ensure that people understood what was meant by culture in this context, I added a brief descriptor: *culture is viewed as the generally accepted way of doing things in an organisation*. Culture is often termed “the way we do things around here” and refers to the practices and routines organisational members engage in and which are assumed to reflect organisational identity, which is embedded in culture, acting as symbolic context for its development and maintenance (Hatch & Schultz, 1997) (see also Empson, 2004; Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Albert & Whetten, 1985).

*In my heritage organisation, change is viewed as:*

The relationship between organisational identity and change has been a focal point in OI research (Backer, 2008; Corley, 2004; Corley & Harrison, 2009; Empson, 2004). Change is an integral part of the environment in which organisations function and the capacity to adapt to change has affected the continued survival of some high-profile organisations. The question was included to get a sense of the degree to which change is seen to be an integral part of identity or not.

*I would describe successful staff in my heritage organisation as:*

The logic underlying this question is that staff who embody the characteristics of the organisation should be seen to be the successful ones (see for example Empson, 2004; Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Hogg & Terry, 2000). The aim is to understand what is perceived as success, so as to understand what characteristics are viewed as embodying organisational identity.

*I would characterise staff relations in my heritage organisation as:*

Given that organisational identity is given life through interactions, descriptions of staff relations should constitute something of the identity of the communal, reflecting the shared values and beliefs regarding how people “should” act.

*I would characterise client relations in my heritage organisation as:*

Much like relationships with internal members, the nature of client relations and attitudes of employees towards clients should constitute part of their identity (see Empson, 2004).

*Relationships with external stakeholders could be described as:*

This was also not part of the literature review, but the HR Director, knowing that external stakeholders form an important part of the work processes, suggested this question as a possible element forming part of identity. In the engineering industry, stakeholders form an important part of the work processes (ECSA, 2006), and have important implications for the organisation as social actor.

*I would describe my heritage organisation's reputation in the marketplace as:*

Reputation refers to the signification that the company is subject to, based on its institutional and physical context, and its relationships within this, thus constituting a significant element of identity. It also forms the basis for organisational image (see Empson, 2004).

*I would describe my heritage organisation's service in the marketplace as:*

The products or services an organisation produces or offers are central to the purpose of its existence, and for this reason, service is a critical element of identity (see Empson, 2004).

*The management style in my heritage organisation could be described as / The leadership in my heritage organisation could be described as:*

Leadership and management are considered to be critical influences in the construction and maintenance of identity, and thus will be an important source of information regarding identity (Empson, 2004; Albert & Whetten, 1985). I decided to use both terms to access meanings associated with both management and leadership.

*At my heritage organisation, the relationships between management and employees could be described as:*

Like other relational elements of the organisation, management-employee relationships provide a clue as to what is modelled as acceptable behaviour central to identity.

*I would describe the management systems in my heritage organisation as:*

This was an element suggested by Bronn et al (2006) as well as Empson (2004), and was raised by the HR Director, as it was an area in which the two organisations differed significantly. It proved to be a valuable addition in terms of understanding identity.

*If you had to, in one short phrase, summarise what was distinctive about your heritage organisation, what would that be? (Think of it as devising the company motto):*

This question was drawn from Brickson (2005) and in contrast to the previous questions in which I had provided specific guidelines regarding how participants “should” think about identity (i.e. with regard to a particular dimension); in this question, they were free to highlight aspects they deemed crucial in making sense of their organisation. Also important here was the emphasis on “distinctive”, attempting to get to differences between the organisations.

*In what key ways would you say that Alpha and Beta differ?*

I was concerned that, due to the merger, partners having been chosen for their similarity (it was on this basis that the merger partners had been determined), the differences between the two may not have been apparent. By including a question on differences, I prompted participants to consider those aspects that, in their view, were truly unique about their organisation. The idea of difference is also related to distinctiveness as a characteristic of identity.

*Describe your emotional connection to the organisation:*

In his metaphor of identity as an onion, Whetten uses the peeling back of the layers of the onion and the subsequent tears to be a good illustration of the importance of emotion in identity (In Albert et al, 1998). For this reason, a question regarding the participant’s emotional connection to the organisation was included.

*Imagine you meet someone at a cocktail party or on a plane. What would you say about your organisation?*

Much like the motto question of Brickson (2005), the final one allowed participants the freedom to express elements of their organisation that they may not have had the opportunity to express. I deliberately phrased this question more openly – almost inviting a short description or narrative, as one would be likely to do on a plane or at a social gathering.

#### **4.3.8 Designing the online survey**

Bearing in mind the discussion about the disadvantages of email surveys, as a researcher I needed to do everything possible to ensure reliable and valid data collection. This meant the questionnaire itself had to receive careful attention as it is through this medium that the researcher and participant connect

(Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008). Surveys should look professional and inviting, be easy to understand and answer, and accessible to the target population (Sue & Ritter, 2007:3).

Self-administered questionnaires are designed using four languages; visual, numerical, graphic and symbolic, each of which affects the way questions are interpreted (Tourangeau et al, 2004; Christian & Dillman, 2004; Christian, Dillman & Smyth, 2007, Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008). Visual cues include verbal messages (text), the use of numbering, symbolic cues (such as arrows and boxes) and their culturally defined meanings, as well as graphic elements such as spacing, colour, brightness, size and font. People use interpretive heuristics to draw meaning from visual elements in a survey, for example, questions in close proximity are related (Christian & Dillman, 2004; Dillman & Smyth, 2007). It is recommended that graphics and multimedia elements be kept to a minimum both to avoid confusing respondents, and running the risk of differences in technology configurations resulting in participants receiving stimuli in different ways (Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008; Dillman & Smyth, 2007).

The important aspects for this study were the visual cues, particularly in the form of text, and graphic effects, related to spacing. Because I used open-ended questions, and required responses as detailed as possible, it was important that the spacing reflected this, as the amount of space provided influenced both the number of words and themes offered by the participants (Christian & Dillman, 2004). With regard to the text, questions had to be as clear as possible, as participants have only these words to go by and they must reflect the researcher's meaning (Dillman & Smyth, 2007; Christian & Dillman, 2004). To ensure the latter, the questionnaire was proofread by a consultant in the firm as well as the HR director and CEO. Several changes were made to accommodate their concerns.

Various specialised software tools and packages are available which offer key features of questionnaire design with user-friendly interfaces to maximise reliability and validity (Vehovar & Lozar Manfreda, 2008). For this reason I chose to work with Survey Monkey, a well-known survey tool and sought the help of an academic survey specialist both with regard to designing the questionnaire as well as managing the technological side of the process.

The first question, especially, should be easy to complete and take no more than few seconds, and so I asked respondents to which heritage organisation they belonged prior to the merger, as this was critical in classifying their responses (Sue & Ritter, 2007:3). I requested demographic information but in line



with advice from the survey specialist this was located in two places. The more important organisation-related demographic information was incorporated at the start and included questions regarding staff category, years of service, organisational unit and job title. At the end of the survey I asked for information regarding age, highest formal qualification, gender, language, ethnicity and nationality. The reasoning underlying this decision was that if participants got tired of completing the questionnaire, at least I would have the most important demographic information.

#### **4.4 Describing the research process**

##### **4.4.1 Research setting**

The survey was conducted in two engineering firms that had recently merged. At the time of data collection, the merger was about three months old. The organisations had been carefully chosen with regard to their similarity in culture and values, in order to facilitate a productive merger. This was beneficial for two reasons. First, organisational identity is best articulated when under threat (such as a merger or an acquisition) or when faced with major disruptions such as bad publicity or crises (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Dutton et al, 1994; Elsbach & Kramer, 1996; Ashforth & Mael, 1996). Coming so soon after the merger meant that memories were still fresh and nostalgia was likely to be present (Brown & Humphreys, 2002). Second, studying two organisations in the same industry, chosen precisely for their similarities, provided the ideal opportunity to consider the question of whether identity can truly be truly distinctive given the similarities between the two organisations.

The two organisations are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 to set the context for each of the identity narratives, but a few key elements are included here as well.

##### **4.4.1.1 Organisation 1: Alpha**

Alpha is described in promotional material as “a leading South African consultancy, having provided professional multidisciplinary infrastructure design and management solutions across a wide range of industry sectors for more than five decades....While remaining firmly rooted in South Africa, with a local office network spanning all nine of the country’s provinces, the company has steadily expanded into the rest of Africa and the Middle East. With more than 15 permanent and temporary offices now established throughout these regions, Alpha has developed into a truly multinational consultancy” (Marketing brochure).

Alpha had offices in all nine of South Africa's provinces, and employed more than 1700 people including engineers and other professionals, technicians, training specialists and systems analysts. In addition, it had offices in various African countries including Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana, Uganda, Namibia, Malawi and Ethiopia, with involvement in various West African countries including Nigeria, Ghana and Libya.

The organisation operated in both the public and private sectors within the following sectors: transportation, property, energy, mining and municipal services. Within these sectors, Alpha's areas of expertise included the construction, maintenance and management of buildings, infrastructure asset management, construction, health and safety, training and capacity building, agricultural engineering, environmental services, disaster management, land reform and social development services.

#### **4.4.1.2 Organisation 2: Beta**

At the time of the merger, the organisation Beta was described as follows: "With over 75 years experience, Beta is a well-established and dynamic firm of consulting engineers and environmental scientists with nearly 600 professional and support staff. We offer clients across the African continent exceptional service delivery combined with innovative thinking and strategic insight" (Project Review Document, 2008). While the company is described as "having a foothold in many countries" (Civil Engineering News, 2007; Alpha Archive, The History of the Firm, 2007:4), offices were located in various cities and towns in South Africa.

The organisation operated in both the public and private sectors within the following sectors: heavy civil engineering; water resources and supply; infrastructure services; structures and buildings; transportation and roads; and purification and environmental. Within these sectors, Beta's areas of expertise included: bridges; industrial structures; water and waste treatment; water quality and management geotechnical (including road pavements); roads; airstrips; and airports (Project Review, 2008; Service information sheets).

#### **4.4.2 Gaining access to the research setting**

I accessed the organisation via my husband's consulting firm, and particularly through a colleague of his who had a good relationship with the CEO of the newly-merged firms (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). I was asked to put together a brief overview of myself and the intended study, and on this basis was

invited to meet the CEO and HR Director of the newly formed company (who had been the CEO and HR Director of one of the heritage organisations). Both of these people are well qualified: the CEO has a PhD and the HR Director several post-graduate qualifications. The academic nature of my request appealed to them and on this basis, I was granted access to the organisation. I also met with the marketing manager, who supplied me with the company documentation.

#### **4.4.3 The process of sampling**

When using a qualitative survey design, the researcher usually makes use of purposive sampling focused on diversity in the population. In this case the aim was to gather a (potentially) diverse range of views regarding organisational identity, but to ensure that everyone had the potential to be included. For this reason a mixture of random and stratified sampling was used (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fricker, 2008). Stratified sampling ensured representation from varying job groupings, but within these groupings, members were selected on the basis of probability sampling

The data collection process included two phases. The first group included 200 employees of the merged entity, 100 from each of the heritage organisations. To ensure that different groupings were represented, these numbers included 20 secretaries, 30 technical directors and 50 associates. The second group included 140 civil technicians and young engineers, 70 from each of the heritage organisations. In Alpha, all employees had to have been with the company for a minimum of two years. Owing to the merger, all Beta employees were considered “new” as they had been included on the Alpha systems at the time of the merger, and so this criterion could not be applied. Within each of the staff categories, all staff members were allocated a GUID (Globally Unique Identifier) number. These were then ordered and the first 20, 30, 50 or 75 of each of the required categories were selected.

Of the total of 340 questionnaires sent out, 242 responded, a response rate of approximately 71%. One hundred and thirty two of these were from Alpha, 105 from Beta and five had not included the name of their heritage organisation so could not be used, reducing the final response rate to about 70%. Once I had worked through all the responses I removed 97 respondents as there were too many questions left unanswered, and was thus left to work with 140 completed questionnaires, 75 from Alpha and 65 from Beta. This represents a response rate of approximately 41%.

#### **4.4.4 Data collection process**

The questionnaire was developed as described above, and then sent to the survey specialist to transfer into the survey monkey format. Once this was done, the link was sent to the HR Director for distribution. The survey was managed internally by the HR Director and externally by a survey specialist. The HR director sent out the questionnaire on behalf of management, and specifically the CEOs of the heritage firms. All completed responses were sent directly to the survey specialist who prepared the Excel file and sent this to me.

As indicated, two rounds of data collection were used. In the first round, an email was sent to 200 staff members from the following job categories: technical director, associate, and administrative. After 106 responses were received, a reminder was sent to the first group. In the second round, the questionnaire was sent to 140 civil technicians and young engineers. It was important to access a wide range of employees as organisational identity is constructed and negotiated in the interactions between them (Hatch & Schultz, 1997). The email contained a request to participate in the survey, providing a link to the survey itself. The survey was managed on my behalf by an independent consultant who specialises in web-based surveys. The email also made clear that the study was being conducted on behalf of the organisation by independent consultants, and it was to these persons that any queries were directed.

#### **4.4.5 Post- survey procedures**

Each respondent was assigned a unique identification number and responses were downloaded directly to an Excel spread-sheet, thus cutting out possible transfer errors (Sue & Ritter, 2007). The data being in digital format and immediately able to be used is a distinct advantage of web-based surveys. While every attempt was made to avoid survey errors, there were several incomplete items and these reduced the response rate significantly (Sue & Ritter, 2007).

In keeping with a traditional survey, it is necessary to clean the data, and remove all incomplete items (Sue & Ritter, 2007). This was done in conjunction with my academic supervisor, and a judgement was made depending on the number of missing items and the quality of existing ones, whether or not to include a particular participant. In some instances, a participant would leave some of the questions incomplete but provide interesting responses to others. In such a case, the participant would be included as part of the sample. As indicated in the discussion of response rates, 97 respondents were removed due to the fact that too many questions were left unanswered.

## 4.5 Transforming the data

### 4.5.1 The challenge of analysing open-ended questions

Open-ended questions generate interesting and challenging texts to analyse as they contain various types of data including shorter “free list” types of text as well as narrative explanations in sentences and paragraphs (Jackson & Trochim, 2002). In my study this was certainly the case, and a variety of textual data was present, including one-word answers, short phrases and brief paragraphs, the longest being 234 words. While it is possible to draw on the principles of qualitative data analysis to identify trends and patterns in the data when analysing open questions, this remains a time-consuming and labour-intensive process (Blank, 2008; Basit, 2003; O’Cathian & Thomas, 2004). The challenge lies in dealing with textual data with none of the richness or depth usually associated with ethnographic or case-study research.

In this process I was guided by the principles and phases identified by Wolcott (1994), from whom the title of this section also derives its name. The process of transformation refers to the awareness that something new is being constructed by the researcher, “something that never existed before” (1994:15). This is inevitable, because as the researcher, I chose to focus on some elements of the data to the exclusion of others, which resulted in the transformation of the data from something that was quite different from the original data gathered.

Wolcott (1994) identifies three emphases that are key to the process of transformation: description, analysis and interpretation, and qualitative researchers use these processes in different ways as they strive to organise and present their data. The boundaries between the three are not necessarily always clear and form a dialectic rather than a linear process. Wolcott’s (1994) emphasis on description is applicable primarily in the gathering of ethnographic data, which was not the case in the current study. I will thus focus specifically on his discussion of the analysis and interpretation of data as these influenced my own study. I have termed these “the logic of analysis” and “the art of interpretation”, as Wolcott (1994) suggests analysis requires a process of careful logic, whereas interpretation moves more into the realm of imaginative crafting.

*The logic of analysis:* According to Wolcott, analysis refers “quite specifically and narrowly to systematic procedures followed in order to identify essential features and relationships consonant with the descriptors noted above” (1994:24). To capture the essence of the process of analysis, Wolcott

uses several words and phrases which include: “cautious, controlled, structured, formal, bounded, scientific, systematic, logico-deductive, grounded, methodical, objective, particularistic, carefully documented, reductionistic and impassive” (1994:23). These suggest that analysis is a thorough and orderly process focused on identifying relationships grounded in the data, and that it is defensible and open to scrutiny. It is in the process of analysis that the researcher focuses on specific elements to the exclusion of others and in this way transforms the data, which is “contradictory, subjective, unruly and partial” into something that can be regarded as credible (Wolcott, 1994:26). Thus my aim in analysis was to provide a rigorous and carefully documented account of the manner in which the data was analysed, and present how I came to group specific elements together in a systematic and methodical manner. This is outlined in detail in Appendix A: Construction of Narratives.

*The art of interpretation:* The goal of interpretation is “to make sense of what goes on, to reach for understanding or explanation beyond the limits of what can be explained with the degree of certainty usually associated with analysis” (Wolcott, 1994:10-11). In contrast to analysis, he describes interpretation as “freewheeling, casual, unbounded, aesthetically satisfying, inductive, subjective, holistic, generative, systematic, impassioned” and “creative, speculative, conjectural, fresh, surprising, unpredictable, imaginative, inspirational, insightful” (1994:23). While, strictly speaking, the researcher “interprets” throughout the transformation of the data, in part by choosing some elements over others, interpretation as a phase requires moving beyond the realm of certainty, and begins to enter that of the “interpretive possibility” (Wolcott, 1994:40). Here the researcher relies on the creative human imagination and while this is informed by the possibilities of the analysis, she is not bound by these.

#### **4.5.2 Analysing the survey data**

Coding can be done manually by the researcher or by making use of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), and the choice is dependent on the size of the project, funds and time available, and the preference and expertise of the researcher (Basit, 2003; Davis & Meyer, 2009, Silver & Fielding, 2008). In the study, I made use of AtlasTi as a data management tool (Silver & Fielding, 2008), though all the coding was done by myself and was data-driven. This resulted from my concern that words can have more than one meaning, and this often depends on the context in which it is used. It is difficult for a program to determine which will be the most suitable code to capture that meaning, and for this reason I chose to code the data myself (Popping, 2000:19).

The development of codes can happen in one of two ways; from the data itself, or by developing a list of provisional codes based on the conceptual framework and key variables of the research study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Popping (2000:20) refers to these as an instrumental or representational perspective. Instrumental coding is performed from the perspective of the researcher, often with codes developed a priori, and may include the use of a computer program to analyse the data. Representational coding, on the other hand, takes seriously the perspectives of the respondent, and involves a human coder assigning a code to data, based on their interpretation thereof. By its very nature, identity is idiosyncratic (or that is my understanding) and it would have been difficult to develop a priori codes and categories, so these were developed from the data itself, thus creating a representational perspective.

In addition to the guidelines of Wolcott (1994), I drew on the general principles of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), though these were adapted to the specifics of the study. Jansen (2010) suggests that while a set of guidelines is useful, these remain secondary to the core goal of the study, which is the relationship between the data fragments and the aims of the study, which nevertheless require theoretical sensibility and creativity. Braun and Clarke describe thematic analysis as a “theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data” (2006:77) with the aim of identifying its patterns. This simply means that it can be used within a realist or constructionist account of the data, or for those “sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism” (2006:81) such as critical realism. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest six phases:

1. familiarity with the data;
2. developing initial codes;
3. organising codes into themes and gathering data relevant to these themes;
4. reviewing the themes as they relate to the coded extracts;
5. defining the specifics of the theme and developing a name for each;
6. producing the report.

When determining themes, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that one should state what counts as a theme. This need not be determined by the number of times an issue is mentioned, but rather whether it relates to the research question. In my own study, the number of times something was mentioned was certainly a driving factor as this was a descriptive survey and I was not only looking for an answer to a research question in the data but also trying to produce an account of identity based on the participants’

responses. In this instance, the number of times an issue was mentioned was relevant as it gave an indication of its importance in the minds of participants.

The data was analysed twice, and while this proved to be extremely time-consuming and frustrating, it meant that I developed a very good sense of the data. Each time the entire data corpus, that is all the responses in the survey except those excluded due to missing data, was analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Whilst Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that only that data relevant to the research question should be coded, in the context of a qualitative study the aim is to study difference, so all data was potentially relevant. The first time, the data was analysed *per question* and I was able to get a sense of how participants felt about various dimensions of the organisation, including values, culture, staff and service reputation. However, this did not give a real sense of themes across the dimensions that became evident as the data was analysed, the second time around, *per respondent*. This allowed me to get a sense of how each respondent identified with the organisation as a whole, as well as the identity themes across the dimensions or questions. This was valuable in that I was able to contextualise their individual responses within their general view of the organisation. I was able to pinpoint respondents who identified positively with the organisation on all dimensions, one or two who responded negatively to all questions, as well as those who identified with the organisation (sometimes quite strongly) but who also provided dissonant voices with regard to one or another element of identity.

In the first round the data was analysed in Excel with a spread-sheet per question. The aim was then to transfer the data to SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for further analysis, but when I was unable to do this, because of the size of the file, I was forced to re-analyse the data, this time in Atlas. The first step in this process was to copy the answers of each respondent into a Word format that was then saved as a Rich Text File (RTF) (Basit, 2003). These RTF files contained the participants' demographic information as well as their responses to each of the questions in the survey. Once I had created a project in AtlasTi, these documents were then loaded into the program (Basit, 2003).

#### *4.5.2.1 Developing open codes*

I began the analysis by assigning open-ended codes to data extracts. These were provisional and grounded in the data, which, as indicated, ranged from one word to chunky paragraphs (Basit, 2003; Bowen, Edwards & Catell, 2012). The second round of coding led to a substantially different set of codes, which then formed the basis of the categories that followed. In terms of understanding identity, this was a more useful route to follow. Codes were primarily data-driven and I tried understanding the



meaning of the respondent in assigning the code that, in my understanding, captured the key idea(s) contained in the response. In cases where only one word was given, I assumed these words to have a similar meaning as they belonged in the same “language game” (Wittgenstein, 1958). In other instances, I was able to make sense of responses based on other replies in the survey, whilst others made sense once I began to work through the company documentation. Some made little sense even in the context of the other data, and had to be discarded entirely.

One of the challenges in coding is that a text unit (a response to a question) may contain many different kinds of information. This was a very real issue in analysing the data for the current study, as respondents would, at times, provide quite diverse ideas within one response. I decided to keep responses intact and assign various codes to one response unit, so as to capture the fragments of meaning contained in each. This was done for two reasons: one to capture in as much detail as possible the diversity of responses but also, at the same time, to preserve at least some context within which the data fragments rested.

The extract below is taken from the question regarding culture and the description is as follows:

*“mostly a positive culture (as opposed to toxic). Employees took part in some of the decision making. There was freedom to better yourself. I used to be part of the administrative staff, before completing my engineering studies. Sometimes the perception was that technical staff were the ‘real’ employees, and the supporting staff were ‘second class’ – in admin this was rather de-motivating” (P 41).* This response contains at least four key ideas namely:

- a positive culture (coded: positive culture);
- the freedom to develop (coded: freedom to develop);
- the ability to take part in decision making (coded: employees part of decision making);
- the idea of a tension between technical and administrative staff (coded: ‘real’ vs ‘second class’ staff).

#### 4.5.2.2 Developing meta-themes

In most inductive qualitative analysis processes, the next step would be to construct second-order categories but the qualitative survey data meant that while there was certainly overlap in the data, there was also a fair amount of openness and considerable diversity in the responses. Furthermore, there was no real “research question” to guide me in my choice of themes, except a description of each of the

heritage organisations' identity. Thus, to allow for coherence in the process of second-order coding, I identified three (tentative) broad "meta-themes" or narratives for each organisation, and constructed categories within these, using a form of abductive reasoning. I chose the word "narrative" because the responses *are an account* (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/narrative>) of the organisation's identity that I am in *the process of narrating* (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/narrative>), drawing on the data I have gathered. I then used the narratives as a context for developing second-order categories which I describe in the next paragraph.

#### *4.5.2.3 Developing second-order categories*

Within the broad meta-themes or narratives, the next step was to develop categories to describe the data in a meaningful and manageable way, offering my interpretation of views presented by the participants of their heritage organisation's identity (Basit, 2003; Contas, 1992). Categories do not reside in the data and were constructed by comparing codes with one another, and grouping similar ones together, refining the categories through a constant process of classification and adjustment (Contas, 1992; Dey, 1993).

The one challenge with this approach is that when assigning first-order codes to second-order categories, one data extract could have been assigned various different categories. While this is an option in qualitative data analysis (Baptiste, 2001), I wanted to avoid this and chose rather to categorise the data extract in one category only.

In categorising the data, I moved from Atlas to a Word document and opened a series of tables in which I began to cluster the codes in the context of the broader identity narratives (this is demonstrated in Appendix A). I chose to do this in Word, rather than Atlas, because I could not always see how the earlier codes had been classified and doing this in table form meant that I could constantly refer to other similar codes and compare the way they had been classified. I tried to classify most of the codes into a second-order category but some simply didn't fit anywhere, and these were discarded.

One of the challenges in analysing the data was to ensure that I was really dealing with identity. As indicated, the data was gathered in response to several questions regarding elements of an organisation (including values, culture, staff and management systems) presumed to encompass elements of identity. However, in deciding on the final dimensions, I had to ensure that these were valid facets of identity, and not irrelevant ones prompted by a question in the survey. For example, were clients mentioned

because there was a question regarding clients, or are clients genuinely an important facet of identity? In deciding what constituted an important element of identity, I used the following line of reasoning. Some facets were “genuinely emergent” (Simpson and Carroll, 2008:37), for example, the idea of being professional. Nowhere in the original questionnaire did I refer to being professional but this emerged from participants as an important dimension.

In other instances, however, there was a close link between one or more of the survey questions and the identity facet, for example, the importance of clients, which could arguably have been influenced by the questions regarding the organisation’s service and client relations. In these instances, I used an additional criterion to ensure that this was truly an identity characteristic and was not given undue importance by the fact that a question was asked regarding that particular dimension. The characteristics had to have been mentioned in response to other questions as well as the ones relating to the particular dimension. For example, the word “client” was one of the most widely used words in the survey, and was used in response to almost all the questions asked, including values, culture, distinctive characteristics and key differences.

In constructing the categories, there were two elements in particular that I paid attention to, namely; description of successful staff, and dissonant voices. As indicated above, one of the questions in the survey related to the description of successful staff members. The assumption underlying this question was that staff members who in their conduct and manner supported and promoted characteristics of the organisation considered central, distinctive and enduring, would be considered successful. For this reason, where specific characteristics of staff members coincided with or underpinned a particular identity category, these were described as part of the identity statement.

Furthermore, identity is seldom monolithic and is open to question and contestation, and for this reason, I have also included what I term dissonant voices, in the identity statements where these are most relevant. Some of these “voices” openly contradict the identity statement whilst others provide alternative views or perspectives to the dominant one. To counteract the appearance of a monolithic account, I have included the latter as dissonant voices even though some of these voices openly support the identity statement, but I point out the implications of these, or point to contextual factors that may influence the operation of the identity statement in particular situations. They are thus not necessarily a contradiction of the identity statement, but operate to further explain and enlighten the reader about the complexities of identity characteristics.

#### 4.5.2.4 Naming the second-order categories

Once I had groups of codes in the tables, I began to develop names for these. Generally speaking, names of categories may come from theoretical constructs or from phrases used by participants themselves (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). I chose to formulate the meta-themes and categories as descriptions of the organisation's identity, taking the form "We are ...", as organisational identity is viewed in response to the question "Who are you?" Organisational members typically respond by saying "We are ...", describing facets of their organisation's identity (Whetten & Mackey, 2002; Rao et al, 2000; Nag et al; 2007). I could have used the usual thematic form but, given the topic, – organisational identity – I chose rather to formulate these responses in a manner that was consistent with the nature of the topic being investigated. Thus each of the heritage organisations' identity was presented as set of identity statements, located in a broader identity narrative, and represented a suitable responses to the question: "Who are you?".

In devising the identity statements and narratives (naming the categories), I worked in one of two ways. In some instances, the identity statements were an adaptation of a data extract, for example: "We are client-focused" is based on the data extract, "The company was client focused and looked after and cared for personnel" (P 60). Many of the descriptions contained interesting, rich metaphorical descriptions of the firm and I tried where possible to include these in naming the identity narratives and statements as they captured in colloquial terms how participants perceive and talk about their organisation. Furthermore, the participants' descriptions are richer and more interesting than titles I could conceive of, since I was not intimately acquainted with the organisation. For this reason, I have chosen to weave these descriptions into my own constructions, but have indicated in each case where I have drawn from one of the participants.

In instances where no suitable "participant-driven" phrasing could be found, the identity narratives and statements are my own formulations, and represent an attempt to "summarise" the identity-relevant statements that internal participants have made about the organisation (Brown, 2006) (quoted in Sillince & Brown, 2009:1832). For example, the identity statement, "We are professional in our approach", is not a direct quotation from the data (the closest is "Professional approach" (P 11)) but rather my own summary of many references to being professional and to professionalism.

The content of the categories and the development of each are discussed in detail in Appendix A: Construction of narratives.

In analysing the survey data, I drew on company documentation, discussed below, to make sense of some of the more obscure references. The documents were not analysed in detail and served as context-setting and sense-making material. I describe these briefly in the next section.

#### 4.5.3 Documentation

In addition to the survey, I used company documentation to shed light on the organisational context and to help contextualise the narrative fragments, thus ensuring a more probable interpretation of meaning (Esterberg, 2002; Boje, 2008). The documentation certainly helped me understand some of the more obscure references in the responses: for example, in the survey, one of the participants referred to Beta's involvement providing expert testimony to the State Attorney's office: *"Excellent – Beta was regarded as a source of expertise, always ready and willing to serve for example on Steering Committees for Water Research Commission research projects and thus play a leading role in determining the direction and usefulness of research within water in the country. Beta staff also serve on ISO inspection teams, assist the Green Scorpions in identifying illegal activities even providing expert testimony to the State Attorneys office on a voluntary basis. Beta serve as examiners for professional engineer registration and have enjoyed a reputation as a quality institution always willing to contribute knowledge, experience and skills to the sector and society as a whole"* (P 94).

Not understanding the intricacies of the field, I was unsure as to why this would be necessary, and hence its importance in making sense of identity. In the book on <sup>10</sup>Beta Head, there are several stories of how Beta Head and certain staff members were very well known for their ability to provide expert testimony in court describing the behaviour of water in, for example, insurance claims (to name just one area). While there was only one reference to it in the survey, the company documentation not only provided insight into its meaning, but also its importance as part of what the organisation is.

By providing a summary of the culturally-sanctioned stories and discourses, the documentation provides a good overview of the image the organisation is trying to project, and thus its identity, "as it would like to be perceived" (ideal identity). Where there is an overlap between ideal identity and the

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<sup>10</sup> One of the heritage organisations, Beta, was named after its founder. I thus distinguish between the company, which I have called Beta, and the founder, whom I have called Beta Head.

identity as described by participants, one can piece together a picture of organisational identity as this was perceived by participants. In the table below I list the documentation I drew on for each of the heritage organisations.

**Table 4.2: List of documentation per heritage organisation**

<i>Alpha</i>	<i>Beta</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Company profiles per country</i></li> <li>• <i>Capability profiles per area of specialisation</i></li> <li>• <i>Staff newsletters</i></li> <li>• <i>Marketing brochures</i></li> <li>• <i>Group magazines (marketing brochure with an overview of prestige projects and company information)</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Beta Head: The Man, The Practice (a book by Tony Murray)</i></li> <li>• <i>Project reviews (2001-2008 with the exception of 2006)</i></li> <li>• <i>Staff newsletters</i></li> <li>• <i>Organisational information sheets</i></li> <li>• <i>Chairman's reports</i></li> </ul>

Using an open-ended survey in the context of an organisation does allow one to draw on company documentation that would not always be possible when accessing information from more diverse groups where no common context exists.

Informed by the process of analysing the survey data, as well as that of the company documentation, I developed identity narratives for each of the heritage organisations. I will discuss these in the paragraphs that follow.

#### **4.5.4 Developing the company's identity narratives**

In the process I have described thus far, the emphasis was on the analysis of data, attempting to ensure a systematic, well-reasoned account of the processes followed. In the next step, the emphasis was on interpretation and the creative presentation of the findings.

In Appendix A: Construction of narratives, I provided a detailed account of the analysis process. From these second-order categories, I constructed an identity narrative for each of the heritage organisations.

#### *4.5.4.1 Assumptions underlying the development of the narratives*

The responses to the survey can be likened to a series of “textual snapshots” – each capturing a fragment of the organisation’s identity. The resulting identity narratives I constructed are not unlike the process of montage produced in the world of film. Montage involves a process of “selecting, editing, and piecing together separate sections of film to form a continuous whole” ([http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/American\\_english/montage](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/American_english/montage)). In this context, various fragments of text that appear to be related, have been combined to produce a more or less coherent description of facets of the organisation’s identity. In this process, I worked like the bricoleur (Levi Strauss, 1962) discussed in my first section: Locating myself paradigmatically.

Squire et al (2008) identify three strands of narrative work. The first entails what is termed “event narratives”, focusing on events that have happened to the narrator. The second is termed “experience narratives” and entails the study of a wide range of experience, drawing on various types of media, including written and visual material, as well as narratives inherent in objects and actions. The focus of the final form is “co-constructed narratives”, that are dialogically constructed, for example through interviews and e-mail exchanges.

It is the second type of narrative I will focus on in this study; namely, the experience of organisational identity as described in a qualitative survey. Identity is performed in social contexts, and is enabled and constrained by the larger patterns of storytelling present in the organisation (Squire et al, 2008). In the qualitative survey, I take “performed” to mean they are presented for a particular purpose, and are thus shaped and influenced by the audience for whom they are produced. In this context, the participants are producing constructions of their organisation’s identity, as these are remembered with fondness and nostalgia, or, in some instances, a lack thereof. Where these constructions are similar (based on my own interpretation), and present a pattern, I have chosen them as the basis of my identity statements and narratives. However, complete agreement is unlikely, and counter arguments may challenge or dispute the dominant pattern or discourse. These I have included as dissonant voices.

It is important to acknowledge that these narratives are attributable to both my own reflexive processes and the inputs of the participants, both of which are designed to both inform and persuade (McAdams, 1996). The narratives, as they currently stand, are the outcome of a process of constant revision, as they were re-examined and changed as the process of second-order coding proceeded, to ensure they truly

captured a combination of the identity statements which effectively constituted, my second-order categories.

#### **4.6 Quality of qualitative research**

Scientific rigour is a critical factor in any form of research as it is associated with the quality of the research outcomes, and there is consensus that qualitative enquirers must demonstrate the credibility of their study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Schurink W, 2009). The question of rigour becomes particularly important in qualitative research, as there is a fair amount of flexibility associated with the process. The challenge is thus to establish criteria that ensure rigour in the process, whilst at the same time accommodating the flexibility associated with this type of research (Flick, 2007). Flick thus suggests that quality should be positioned in the tension between rigour and flexibility. The nature of quality criteria for this particular study also poses a challenge, as many of the typical quality criteria are not relevant, given the nature of data collection. Traditionally in qualitative research, the researcher is the vehicle through which data is collected, by means of interviews, focus groups and observation and the subsequent interpretation of these. In my own project, the data was gathered by a more “static” means and apart from setting the questions, I played no role in data gathering. For this reason, I did not build relationships with the participants or interact with them in any way and thus cannot account for my personal interactions with them and the implications of these. Furthermore, because participation in the survey was anonymous, I was also unable to conduct member checks to confirm my interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This proved to be frustrating at times as occasionally responses were unclear, and being able to clarify a response with participants would have been satisfying. To some extent I was aided by the company documentation that shed light on or provided a context for a number of the responses where the meaning was unclear. In situations where I was unable to understand a response because the meaning was too obscure, I left these out of the data corpus rather than interpret the response incorrectly.

##### **4.6.1 The audit trail as instrument of trustworthiness**

Schurink, W. (2009) suggests that the researcher’s theoretical approach, research strategy and methodology are the basis from which the trustworthiness of the study should be judged, and that the audit trail is a means of establishing the credibility, dependability and confirmability of the findings. Altheide and Johnson (1994) describe the audit trail as a systematically maintained documentation process of the researcher’s continuous critical analysis of all decisions and actions taken during the entire research process. Schurink, W. (2009) suggests the auditing trail should “display the interaction



between the researcher and his/her research participant(s) in such a way that the research can be understood not only in terms of what was discovered but also how it was discovered” (2009:795). In this way, readers are informed about the position of researchers and their involvement in the study.

Typical audit trails would include a detailed description of the context (history, physical setting and environment); the number of participants as well as key individuals involved in the process; activities and schedules; division of labour; hierarchies; routines and variations; significant events as well as their origins and consequences; members’ perspectives and meanings; social rules and basic patterns of order (Altheide & Johnson, 1994). However, in this study my role was limited to the collection and analysis of data, and the audit I have developed centres around these two aspects. In the current chapter I have provided a detailed overview of the data collection process as well as highlighting elements of its analysis. To account for my own place in the data analysis and interpretation, I have included a detailed description of the second-order coding process and the construction of the narratives in Appendix A. By making plain my process, I hope to convince the reader of my rigour, and in so doing allow him or her to evaluate the “accuracy” of the process. I use this word cautiously because I am very aware that while there needs to be some “evidence” for my narratives, these are constructed by me and may differ from a narrative constructed by a different author. However, there needs to be some conceptual link between the narratives I produce and the data upon which they are grounded, and by making my process more explicit, the reader is able to judge whether this is, in fact, the case. The exact process of coding and its outcomes remains a personal one that tells one particular story of the identity of these organisations.

#### **4.6.2 Locating myself socially, politically, culturally and linguistically**

I use this heading rather playfully: it is based on Alvesson’s suggestion that reflexivity implies an effort on the part of the researcher to locate herself socially, politically, culturally and linguistically (Alvesson, 2002:179). Qualitative research should entail a reflexive process (Schurink, E. 2009), and in addition to the audit trail provided here and in the next chapter, it is also important that I reflect on elements of my own identity so that the readers can make sense of my own processes of interpretation.

Grbich (2007:9) defines reflexivity as: “*a heightened awareness of the self in the process of knowledge creation, a clarification of how one’s beliefs have been socially constructed and how these values are impacting on interaction, data collection and data analysis in the research setting*”. It is this process of “*interpreting our own interpretations, looking at one’s own perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye*

*into one's own authority as interpreter and author*" that Etherington (2004) believes will enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Reflexivity involves accounting for the researcher and her research agenda, personal beliefs and emotions that impact the construction of knowledge, highlighting how the various social contexts she is located in influence the outcome of the research process (Ruby, 1980; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Hsiung, 2008; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). This description highlights the importance of the human element in the professional; the emotional in what is viewed as a cognitive endeavour; and the unmistakably personal in the academic. In the section that follows I attempt to sketch a few relevant aspects of my own identity that would influence my views and interpretation of organisational identity.

*I come to this research as a middle-class woman, a wife, a mother of two, and I am now a part-time academic, but for most of my career I have worked full time in academia. I was raised in a family with an English mother and a father who was raised both as English and Afrikaans (his father was Afrikaans and his mother was English). We were however raised as English and attended English schools. I am married to an Afrikaner though as a family we speak English and our children likewise attend English schools. I have taught at an Afrikaans university for 23 years, eight of which have been part-time. For this reason, I believe I have a fairly good understanding of at least these two cultures in our country. I am by religion a Christian, and tend to have an optimistic outlook on life, though this is tempered daily with its realities. I am passionate about equality and fairness though realise that people cannot always be treated exactly the same. I have become, through this study, very interested in what makes people passionate about their organisations and this has undoubtedly in turn influenced its outcome.*

*By profession, I am an Industrial Psychologist, and for this reason am influenced by both managerial and psychological discourses and perspectives. I currently work with Masters students – both in industrial psychology and engineering. I teach qualitative research to the former and people management to the latter. From teaching engineers, in a very interactive format, I have developed a fairly sound understanding of the challenges they face in the organisations and industries they work in with regard to the way people are treated and managed. These perspectives have affected the way I have made sense of my data and chosen to prioritise certain things over others. I will highlight two examples: one of the challenges young engineers in South Africa face is the transfer of knowledge to younger engineers. The reason for this is tied to the political environment where there is pressure on*

*older, white males to make way for younger people, especially those of colour. In an effort to hold onto power, these older people withhold developmental input and knowledge transfer. For this reason, the emphasis on development in Alpha and in Beta in particular, stood in strong contrast to common practice and became particularly salient. In addition, many of the engineering environments are subject to intense pressure because of extreme workload and stringent deadlines, often exacerbated by staff shortages because of the economic downturn. When this is coupled with the engineering stereotype (which is not altogether unfounded) of engineers not being “people’s people”, work environments often become quite tense and stressful. With these perceptions as a basis, the emphasis on the value of people in both Beta and Alpha becomes meaningful. These are two more obvious examples, but they hopefully illustrate how my own teaching environment affects my own research.*

#### **4.7 Ethics of the research process**

Social research requires of people to engage in a process in which they are often asked to reveal thoughts, experiences and views which are close to their hearts and may be somewhat private (Babbie & Mouton: 2001). For this reason, participation in research studies should be voluntary. In my research study, members were chosen randomly to be part of the research process and a request by management accompanied the survey link. Although they were encouraged to complete the survey, they were able to exercise their right not to participate by simply ignoring the request. Participants were also able to exercise the freedom to determine how much they shared and at what level of intimacy this lay, depending on their own level of comfort.

In addition to voluntary participation, anonymity of participants and the confidentiality of their responses are paramount (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Because the survey was conducted online, responses (without a name) were submitted directly to a data file and the researcher had no way of linking a particular response to an organisational member. Participants were allocated a number and any quotes from the data they submitted were referenced by virtue of their participant number, thus ensuring confidentiality. In this way I strove to make sure no harm came to any of the participants.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described to the reader the research process I followed in this study. I began by locating myself paradigmatically, and thereafter described the design of the questionnaire, with an emphasis on providing an overview of the benefits of the open-ended, web-based questionnaire.

Thereafter I described the research process with the aim of locating my own identity as part of the knowledge construction process.

## **CHAPTER 5: IDENTITY NARRATIVES OF THE HERITAGE ORGANISATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Four I traced the process of constructing the identity narratives and statements developed from the data gathered in the organisational identity survey. In Appendix A, I have traced the logic underlying the construction of each of the categories on which the identity statements and narratives described in this chapter are based. These serve as an “internal audit”, so to speak, of my process of category construction.

In this chapter, each of the narratives is presented, and each is preceded by a description of the background to the organisation.

### **5.2 Alpha**

#### **5.2.1 Background to the organisation**

Alpha has its roots in a partnership that was born in 1951 between Dr Hennie van Wyk and Hannes Louw, and began life as Van Wyk and Louw (Five decades / company documentation). A year later, it became Van Wyk and Louw, abbreviated to VWL. Incorporation as a private company came in 1966 with Hannes Louw as the first chairman of the board. Over the years VWL grew considerably and this period is described in company documentation as a period of incredibly hard work, a culture of everyone being prepared to do whatever was necessary and a sound work-life balance with family social gatherings over the weekends (Five decades / company documentation). Furthermore, it is depicted by the successful completion of several iconic buildings (one of which was featured in the Guinness Book of Records) and the venture into new fields of engineering and construction. Many of these are characterised as industry firsts; for example, introducing shareholding in the 1960s and the development of construction supervision as a department in the firm (which very soon became mandatory for all engineering firms). The narrative is of a process of growth in the face of new and varied challenges, successfully overcome, allowing the firm to “spread its wings” and diversify further (Five decades /company documentation). From the 1980s various subsidiaries were born to support its ventures into various fields and by the early nineties, VWL (Inc.) had seven subsidiaries. In keeping with political transformation taking place in South Africa in the years leading up to and following 1994, the various subsidiaries were consolidated to form Alpha Engineering International (Pty) Ltd. In the following year, eight functional divisions replaced the eight subsidiaries, each trading as part of

Alpha. This enabled Alpha to “provide a fully- integrated one-stop service” (Five decades). The nineties saw further global expansion as well as a move to ensure representation through various empowerment deals. In early 2009 Alpha merged with Beta, and a little later Gamma, to form Delta.

### **5.2.2 Alpha at the time of the merger**

At the time of the merger, Alpha was described in promotional material as “a leading South African consultancy, having provided professional multidisciplinary infrastructure design and management solutions across a wide range of industry sectors for more than five decades.... While remaining firmly rooted in South Africa, with a local office network spanning all nine of the country’s provinces, the company has steadily expanded into the rest of Africa and the Middle East. With more than 15 permanent and temporary offices now established throughout these regions, Alpha has developed into a truly multinational consultancy” (Marketing brochure).

As indicated above, Alpha had offices in all nine of South Africa’s provinces and employed more than 1700 people, including engineers and other professionals, technicians, training specialists and systems analysts. In addition, it had offices in various African countries including Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana, Uganda, Namibia, Malawi and Ethiopia, with involvement in various West African countries including Nigeria, Ghana and Libya. The organisation operated in both the public and private sectors within the following sectors: transportation, property, energy, mining and municipal services. Within these sectors, Alpha’s areas of expertise included the construction, maintenance and management of buildings; infrastructure asset management; construction health and safety; training and capacity building; agricultural engineering; environmental services; disaster management; land reform and social development services.

Promotional material focused on the multinational nature of the firm, claiming: “our involvement in projects throughout the world ensures a thorough understanding of the requirements of a project managed between firms in several different countries. Alpha has successfully overcome the difficulties caused by different time zones and the intricacies of accommodating cultural differences” (Doc: Coastal & Marine Developments).

At the time of the merger, Alpha was ranked amongst the world's top two hundred international design firms, ninety-seventh, and was the only South African-owned firm to find a place in these rankings (Company documentation). It was at the time South Africa's largest engineering company ([www.en.wikipedia.org](http://www.en.wikipedia.org)). It had, for the second time in a row, been placed first in the category: Consulting Engineers (general) in the annual publication Top 500: South Africa's best Companies. Alpha's stated vision was (Company documentation):

“To be a preferred and globally recognized professional services provider offering sustainable infrastructure lifecycle solutions”. Its stated values were:

- Integrity
- Excellence
- Teamwork
- Embracing diversity
- People empowerment.

The Alpha brand logo comprised two colours – blue and yellow. The blue represented confidence and professionalism with the associated attributes of conceptualisation, responsibility, loyalty, pragmatism, astuteness, authority, intuition and intelligence. The yellow represented business acumen and the making of informed decisions, associated with attributes such as wisdom, confidence, thoughtfulness, trustworthiness and charm. It was the mix of professional / technical expertise and business acumen that formed an important part of the first identity narrative that was constructed from the responses to the organisational identity survey: “We are an industry leader”. The remaining narratives were: “We are client focussed professionals” and: “We are a people- orientated company”.

### **5.2.3 We are an industry leader**

#### **5.2.3.1 We are a leading company**

As indicated above, one of the formal claims referred to “a leading South African consultancy”, with several staff members reiterating the claims of “leadership”. Terms such as “leading”, and “leaders” in various forms were used to describe the organisation, for example, a “leader in Africa” (P 65), “leaders in quality” (P 48) and leaders in the field” (P13/ P72). Others referred to Alpha as “a force to be reckoned with” (P 41) and alluded to its status as one of the “Top 500 in SA” (P 42 / P 45). This was in fact a legitimate claim, as indicated in the description above. It ranked within the Top 500 in SA but

also within the Top 200 internationally. One member indicated that it was “right up there as one of the main role players” (P 16) though s/he acknowledged that this was not the case in every field of engineering, citing dam building as an exception.

The company was also described as an “industry leader” six times, with one participant stating, “it started out as a small leader and developed as a market leader” (P 9). Another participant highlighted the fact that despite Alpha’s being both large and a market leader, it nevertheless continued to pay attention to detail at both client, employee and projects level: “Without having any other work experience to use a comparison, it has been great working for a company with the values of Alpha. Despite its size and market position as the leader in the field in the country, Alpha is structured in such a way that it still pays attention to detail on a client level, employee level and project level. It is a flourishing company which reflects the manner in which it tackles work with excellence” (P 10). Formal identity claims highlighted the concept of leadership as core to the organisation, though they emphasised the importance of strong partnerships as well. Leadership was defined as “not just about being number one. It is about having a vision and about building strong partnerships that reflect that vision” (Alpha Facets, 2006:2)).

The perception of being a market leader was obviously one which appealed to the personal identity of members, as this implied that they too were leaders in their field, as one participant indicated: “Alpha was much more dynamic and driven to be a leader in the market place, with people to match” (P 65).

### **5.2.3.2 We are a highly regarded engineering company**

The company was described by employees as being “well known” (five times), a “well known brand” (P 12) and as having a “good name in the market” (P 13). The word “respected” was used twelve times to describe Alpha’s reputation, and once in conjunction with “well-known”. It was also mentioned once with respect to stakeholders’ views of the organisation: “We were well respected in the industry” (P 21) as well as part of the company motto: “Well known and respected company, providing work of high quality” (P 55) and in response to the cocktail party / plane question: “a company that provides high quality work, has completed numerous prestige projects, both locally and abroad, and is well respected in the building industry” (P 55). Finally one member indicated: “A company with a proud history over an extended period of time with a lot of distinctive projects as proof” (P 78).



Organisational members believed that Alpha was highly regarded in the market and its services could be recommended to others: “Definitely a company to be used for a project” (P 15). Another participant, who had only been with Alpha for two years and was previously with a municipality using Alpha’s services, provided a perspective as a former “outsider”: “As I am involved with Alpha for two years as employee, I wish to mention that while I was with Makhado Municipality we appointed Alpha on various projects and my experience with Alpha was based on the fact that Alpha was trustworthy, and was always totally committed and had a lot of expertise” (P 51)<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, members believed Alpha to be a source of competition amongst similar firms: “Alpha is reputable in the market for implementing infrastructure projects in a professional manner, taking into cognizance the needs of the beneficiaries that is the client and community” (P 27). Furthermore, Alpha and its services were viewed as providing a source of competition: “Any tender that we submitted, you hear fellow friends discussing that we are amongst their threats... so I guess out there we were competitive” (P 46).

One member explained how important staff were in conveying the image of the organisation: “They take good care of their image through their employees, yet those who’re still new in the industry tend to take some time to reach such stages of ‘carrying the image in the best way possible’” (P 44). While not a reference to identity specifically, image was viewed as the outward manifestation of organisational identity, and the extract emphasised the role of staff in promoting a particular view of the organisation. It also hinted at a socialisation process that took a fair amount of time and successive stages to instil the tacit knowledge needed for staff to project the “correct” view of the organisation. This highlights the control function of organisational identity. A similar idea was raised in the next identity statement where the participant suggested that “to get joy out of the company” one should be referred to the “right” person, as not all employees were up to standard.

But there were also some “dissonant voices”, one of which suggested that despite the company’s reputation being good, there were nevertheless negative attitudes towards the it: “good although there were several instances of very negative attitudes for no apparent reason” (P 64). The other suggested the firm was not as reactive as it could be: “representing excellence but not always as reactive as we could be” (P 24). Finally, one participant suggested that: “awareness amongst the general public seemed to be limited – this was probably more pronounced in Cape Town than in Pretoria where the company

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<sup>11</sup> There are some good examples of “identity work” in this paragraph as participants draw on supposedly “outsider” positions, being part of the “Makhado Municipality” and “fellow friends discussing” to promote ostensibly “objective” perspectives which promote the expertise, commitment and trustworthiness of the firm. In doing so, they are providing excellent examples of what Albert and Whetten (1985) describe as identity statements being a political-strategic act.

had a bigger footprint and attracted more of the projects in the public eye” (P 10). This suggested that while the firm was well-known in the industry, it was less so to the general public, highlighting the contextual constraints in identity.

### **5.2.3.3 We are the biggest and the best but we tend to be bureaucratic**

Not only was Alpha highly regarded but members believed they were “the best in the field” (P 25); “the best in the industry without a doubt” (P 50); “better than the competition” (P 61); and “able to compete with the rest of the world” (P 46). One participant phrased it as follows: “Still the top in its class and we [are] just getting stronger and stronger by the day – look out for us!!!” (P 54). Staff members attributed its status as an industry leader to several characteristics including its size, service and technical excellence, as well as its involvement in high profile projects.

However, a note of caution was expressed by one of the participants. When asked about what he would tell someone at, for example, a cocktail party or on a plane, he responded: “I would certainly give some background of Alpha and would recommend the company for any consulting services to be rendered as I am proud to be part of the company, however I believe we are in a rebuilding phase and not all employees are up to standard as yet, so I would certainly refer him to the right person to get joy out of Alpha. I honestly believe some individuals are not on the level as needed be (sic) regarding their position” (P 51). This reflects the tensions present in perceptions of identity – in this instance, there was not necessarily disagreement about the company’s identity, but a qualifier was added about contextual issues that could have affected its image.

One participant suggested that this aspect of identity seemed to be a deliberate focus: “Alpha seemed to be very focussed on being the biggest and best, and the reputation for this in the fraternity” (P 16). Other members referred to “striving” or “driving” to maintain and even improve their status, again suggesting a directed and concerted effort in this regard. One participant indicated that Alpha was “a competent company based on sound values and striving to be better all the time” (P 17) while another suggested that it would “always strive to be the best amongst competitors” (P 27). In support of the drive to “be the best”, the culture was described as “performing to the best of our abilities” (P 49) and “doing the best that you could, up to standard and on time” (P 38). Descriptions of successful staff supported this idea and included “dynamic, clear-thinking people with constant drives towards success” (P 17) and “hard working, motivated and striving to be better” (P 49). Organisational

leadership was described as “striving to lead through example and becoming more people orientated” (P 55).

There was evidence of formal claims as to the size of the company: “We are part of one of the largest multi-disciplinary engineering consultancies in Southern Africa” (Transportation Capability profile) and this was also highlighted in other members’ responses. Several staff members made reference to the size of the company, both in the country, South Africa, and the continent of Africa. Alpha was viewed as being the biggest civil engineering company: “...The best – we are the biggest and the most well known civil engineering company in South Africa” (P 6). Another participant referred more broadly to a consulting company: “I am working for the biggest consultant firm in South Africa. We are also the leading consultant company in SA” (P 14). This suggests two dimensions with regard to identity – some participants had the company carefully positioned as having an engineering identity, others emphasised the consulting nature of the company’s organisational identity, while one participant merged these two facets by making reference to the “biggest consulting engineering firm, very old and distinguished” (P 13).

Mention was also made of its being the biggest firm in Africa: “We were the biggest firm in Africa and I was proud to be associated with the firm. I belonged to the firm” (P 19). The last statement highlights the importance of size as a source of pride in the organisation and identification with it to the extent that the employee “belonged to the firm”, identification at its most extreme.<sup>12</sup> Pride with regard to various aspects of the company was mentioned twenty-two times by nineteen participants. Some linked a sense of pride to specific aspects of the organisation, including a sense of pride associated with the quality and projects delivered (P 14), its history (P 38), being part of a winning team (P 23), the values of Alpha (P 2 /5) and with the name and the logo (P 41 / 42 / 45).

However, while the size of the company was a source of pride, this was seen as coming with a price, and in this case, the cost was sometimes perceived as a tendency to be bureaucratic. I have framed this identity statement as “tended to be” rather than “were”, as there were differing views on the degree of bureaucracy, imposed by a very elaborate management system. This evoked a considerable response from participants, and is an excellent example of how routine aspects inform the identity of the organisation (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Positive aspects of the system included the fact that it enabled

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<sup>12</sup> Because of the extreme identification associated with this statement, it is one I would have loved to explore in more detail, though, given the nature of the data-gathering process, this was not possible.

continuity (P 33), consistency (P 10), decision-making and maintenance of procedures (P 3). Furthermore, it was viewed as “useful” (P 52), “relevant” (P 61), “user friendly” (P 48), “easy to work with” (P 5), “well organised” (P 14) and “focussed on the desired outcome” (P 17).

While there was agreement on the importance and usefulness of the system, the tendency to regard it as too bureaucratic lay in the perception that at times it could be “too much” (P 15). The organisation was described as a “big company with a lot of red tape which is not required at all” (P 71) and that it was “nearly impossible to follow due to the sheer magnitude of systems. No priority is given to any of the systems, making the decision of what to use and what not to very difficult” (P 8). The management systems were described as “a necessary evil as they interfered with my tasks” (P 58) and “people management good but administrative system becoming a killer” (P 67). One participant also suggested that the emphasis on administration was stifling innovation in the company: “administration kills innovation” (P 29). Finally, one participant went so far as to say that the system was interfering with family life as, given the already heavy work load, administration was relegated to personal time: “ISO is taxing the managers and staff to death – “legal compliance” to the nth degree (and never expanding) means that work has to be relegated to personal times. Satisfying extremely heavy work demands plus the ever-growing system is in my view in many cases an impossibility which grinds managers and staff to/over the edge regarding health, family and life” (P 74). This represented a rather extreme view and has to be considered in conjunction with other voices which placed emphasis on the company’s appreciation of the value of people, both staff and clients, described in the identity narrative following this one.

#### **5.2.3.4 We are a multi-disciplinary firm with a global reach**

Several members mentioned aspects relating to the geographical dispersal and global reach of the company, an aspect that forms part of the company vision. It was described as: “a global organization which serves its clients satisfactorily and it is expanding timeously as a big company” (P 47). Another described the organisation as “a preferred and globally recognized professional service provider offering sustainable infrastructure solutions” (P 4), which reflects the vision statement of the company almost word-for-word, suggesting a close identification with the latter. One participant referred to the global opportunities he would mention in response to the cocktail party / plane question: “all the global opportunities out there despite the economical problems in the world” (P 29). While the formal claims regarding identity did not refer to a “global reach” as yet, the vision was to become a “globally recognised professional services provider”. Formal identity claims made mention of expansion “into

the rest of Africa and the Middle East” and of Alpha having “developed into a truly multinational consultancy”. Other staff members focused on its “roots” in South Africa” and expansion into Africa, with Alpha described as “a well known established engineering firm with 1600 personnel situated all over the RSA and Africa” (P 71). Another member also referred to the geographical dispersal, as well as the diversity of fields it is involved in: “...large consulting company and diverse in various fields ranging from transport to electrical to project management. We are active in lots of African countries as well as (the) Middle east”; (P 35) and its being “well founded, been in the market long, has offices in large portion of the country, has broad knowledge base with specialists in many fields” (P 22).

The word “multi-disciplinary” was often used in formal identity claims, and was highlighted in several of the participants’ responses. Reference was made to a “broad skills base, across most built environment sectors” (P 55), “numerous specialists” (P 55), its being “multi-disciplinary” (P 16 / P 37/ P 74) and a “one stop shop where you get all your engineering solutions” (P 23). The diversity of skills is important for two reasons in particular: first, it made possible the completion of high profile and challenging projects, because of the pool of expertise available: “Glad to have been part of a well organised and professional business where I had the opportunity to work and perform in an environment where a diverse group of skills was on hand whenever needed” (P 20). Second, this was a significant source of identification because it was perceived as having implications for employees’ own development and growth. Because staff were exposed to a diversity of projects, it was possible for them as engineers or technical specialists to grow and develop, a very necessary part of their professional development, for which the organisation was given credit: “Alpha is the one and only organisation I have ever worked for. Alpha made me the engineer I am today through exposure to a multitude of diverse projects. Loyalty best sums up the relationship.” (P 8). Another responded: “I credit Alpha with where I am today. Alpha allowed me the freedom to pursue my career path with support and encouragement. It’s the only company I have ever worked for. I have almost without fail enjoyed the projects I have worked on. I have built up many strong relationships in the workplace and through working. I have seldom been unhappy (and never seriously so) at work” (P 10). One participant went so far as to suggest the following motto: “Creating opportunities for employees” (P 29). This was a good example of where the organisation as social actor makes choices as part of its identity (“involvement in multiple, diverse fields”) that, in turn, organisational members identify with (“this enables me to grow and develop”), the result being that individual and professional identity become more closely aligned with organisation identity.

### 5.2.3.5 We are business-focused

A statement like “business-focused” may seem odd in an organisation that exists to generate profit. But this was a facet of identity that distinguished Alpha from Beta, organisations that were in many other respects fairly similar. While both companies were “in business”, it was clear that one emphasised the business side of things (as opposed to the professional and community/corporate responsibility) more strongly than the other. This difference in identity also had implications for various dimensions of organisational life which combined to produce an identity that was fairly coherent.

Alpha was described as being “more business-minded with a clear focus on leadership development, growth and development into new fields: “I think Alpha had a much stronger emphasis on thinking broadly and doing work with efficiency...”(P 10). In addition to “doing work with efficiency”, part of being a market leader meant having a clear business focus, with an emphasis on being “revenue driven” (P 54), “very hard on the finance side” (P 71) and controlling costs. One participant captured this focus succinctly as follows: “Do the best work possible using acceptable standards, maintain client relationships. Control costs. Streamline decision making” (P 22).

This facet of identity was also reflected in the descriptions of successful staff members who were described as “those bringing in work” (P 41), “bringing in projects” (P 33) and those who “brought in much work for the company (P 28). One participant described them in metaphorical terms as “rain-makers” (P 54). In business parlance, a rainmaker describes “an executive who is successful in bringing in business to his (or her) company or firm” ([www.audioenglish.net/dictionary/rainmaker.htm](http://www.audioenglish.net/dictionary/rainmaker.htm)). This theme featured strongly in the description of successful staff members, who were viewed as “those who could consistently produce projects that were successful to both the company and client and secure future work based on the company’s performance and client satisfaction” (P 26). To further support this business focus, successful staff were required to be hardworking (mentioned fourteen times), able to keep to deadlines (P 41), and careful with regard to cost control (P 22). The importance of the revenue focus was perhaps best captured by the following participant: “Money pays the bills for all, and it must be well spent, managed and made by all” (P 44), suggesting a common focus and requirement of all employees.

In the minds of some employees, the strong emphasis on the business side of things had implications for Alpha’s identity. They believed it had a reputation for being expensive and thus off-putting for

some clients: "...Alpha had a reputation for being expensive and being too big for clients – too remote, whether deserved or not" (P 66). Another participant suggested that because of the emphasis on the bottom line, service may at times have been sacrificed: "Exemplary in some instances but less so in others (quality sacrificed for bottom line)" (P 74).

### **5.2.3.6 We are always moving forward**

Part of Alpha's business focus that supported the idea of being a market leader was an emphasis on looking ahead, thinking strategically and having a strong focus on development. The organisation was described as being "...more dynamic and young" (P 61), "dynamic and aware of the need to change" (P 64), with successful staff being described as "dynamic, clear thinking people with constant drives towards success" (P 17), picking up the theme highlighted above. Reference was also made to the company moving forward and it was described as "professional, positive, moving forward" (P 41) as well as "always moving forward but still keeping our past in mind" (P 50). The idea of moving forward while relying on what was known to work in the past, was also highlighted by the following participant: "...forward thinking in that while we based our work on tried and tested methods and technologies we did not limit ourselves – the company always looked at being innovative and where applicable risked new ideas and approaches to both project work and company structure" (P 26). By doing this, the participant created continuity between past and future – grounding innovation in what was known to work in the past (which at some point must also have been innovative – as it was tried and tested), but at the same time suggesting that the company would continue trying and testing new ways of doing things.

In keeping with the idea of the past, but in contrast to being viewed as dynamic and forward moving, there were five references to Alpha being "conservative", and this was primarily in response to management style (three times), leadership style (once) and reputation (once). This conservatism was linked to being professional (a description of leadership)(P 15), and management style: "Sometimes conservative, fairly strict, but thus creating an environment where you knew what to expect and what was expected of you" (P 39). Alpha was also described as conservative with regard to reputation: "We are known for our solid and technically sound solutions – but we were conservative at times, and our fees are relatively high" (P 21). The word "conservative", as used in the last two descriptions particularly, has positive connotations where it was linked to the nature of technical solutions (as related to reputation) which were solid and sound, as well as management style which aimed at creating

an environment that was predictable and where employees knew what to expect. The constancy associated with conservatism provided a contrast to the dynamism associated with change.

Finally, in keeping with the idea of moving forward, one of the participants mentioned that Alpha was also at the forefront of new technology: “They have completed many large projects, are at the forefront of new technology and even though it is a large company, [it] still cares for the individual - whether employee or client” (P 39). The importance of caring for people, both client and staff as highlighted here, is discussed in more detail in the next two narratives.

Related to the theme of Alpha as always moving forward, were the participants’ observations on the nature of change as perceived “in the organisation”. In response to the question “In my heritage organisation, change is viewed as...”: five broad views on change were identified: change as natural; change as necessary; change as growth; change as a challenge; and change as an opportunity.

Some participants perceived *change as natural* and to be expected and it was referred to as “business as usual” (P 38), “constant” (P30 / P16), “ongoing” (P 72), “inevitable” (P24 / 55 / 68 / 72 / 73), “normal” (P 67) and as a “reality” (P 17). The ongoing nature of change was attributed to the nature of the environment: “something that is inevitable in a changing environment” (P68); as well as the nature of the work; “a continuous thing. Due to the type of work done change was a constant factor” (P 30).

Other participants viewed *change as necessary* while acknowledging that it was nevertheless a challenge. Change was viewed as essential because it kept people focused and ensured that the organisation would “...remain relevant, vibrant and on the cutting edge” (P 70). While it was accepted that change was necessary, one member cautioned that change should happen only if necessary and not simply for the sake of it; “good when really necessary. Our manager loved saying: if it’s not broken, don’t fix it. Mostly we were expected to do our jobs as good (sic) and fast as possible; not to re-invent the wheel” (P 41).

In similar vein, several participants referred to *change as growth*, which implied it was both natural: “a means to grow and learn new things” (P 18); as well as necessary: “progressive and necessary in order to advance, move forward and grow” (P 10).



There were many references to *change as an opportunity* and it was described as “opening new horizons”, “progress”, “a fresh start” and “making a difference”. Change was viewed as an opportunity to improve efficiency performance and staff benefits, increase diversity as well as “to explore new areas, processes and ideas that could potentially improve the company and work opportunities” (P 26).

A small number of staff referred to *change as a challenge* or sacrifice, and it was described as “difficult to accept” and “not always easy”. One member mentioned this specifically in the context of the unit s/he was part of which was described as “...old school and struggled to accept changes and new developments” (P 33). Another member acknowledged change as important but that it also entailed sacrifice, usually on the part of employees.

#### **5.2.4 We are client-focused professionals**

As indicated, promotional material described Alpha as employing “more than 1500 people with 1000 engineering and other professionals, technicians, training specialists, development planners and systems analysts”. In addition, (also highlighted in the description earlier) the company vision was: “To be a preferred and globally recognized professional services provider offering sustainable infrastructure lifecycle solutions”. Services were listed under the heading of “professional consulting services” with various fields mentioned. Company documentation suggested that projects “require an integrated approach, and that this approach should be flexible and adapted to suit the unique needs of every client and community” (community awareness and participation / company documentation). In a process describing sustainable infrastructural projects, the cycle was described as starting and ending with the customer. While the core business was “hard” engineering, that is, the provision of engineering and technical services and products, on some infrastructure projects, external stakeholders in the form of communities had to be taken into account. In these instances, experience had shown that “soft” engineering was also necessary, and that communities must be engaged during the design and implementation phases to ensure community participation, capacity building, infrastructure-linked training and labour-based programmes. Thus Alpha’s services included social intervention programmes (community awareness and participation).

##### **5.2.4.1 We are professional in our approach**

The code “professional” was assigned fifty-two times and “professionalism” twelve times, and as an identity theme traversed all the aspects of the organisation (as depicted in the various questions) except

as a response to the questions on change and emotional connection. Thus “professional” was used in some form to describe values, culture, successful staff, staff relations, client relations, stakeholder relations, reputation, service, management style, leadership, management-employee relationships, management systems, distinctive attributes and in answer to the party / plane question. It thus represented an important facet of identity. Given that a large number of the staff component were engineers (over a thousand were technical and engineering professionals), and thus considered “professionals” in their own right, this theme would align closely with their own work identity, and thus be a source of “identification”.

The organisation itself was described as a “a very professional company which offered a quality product” (P 50)(distinctive / motto) and as “highly professional and an organisation that can deliver’ (P 8) (reputation). The idea of being a leading organisation applied in a professional sense as well and Alpha was referred to as a “leading player in the profession” (P 16). One participant, however, referred to the organisation as “a collection of people” (rather than the social actor as in other instances) and suggested “professionals in development” (P 23) as a distinctive feature of or motto for the organisation. The importance of the company having a professional image and approach was a source of identification for professionals in the firm (much like the exposure provided by being a multi-disciplinary firm with a global reach) as it provided an environment for further professional development, and was described as: “a professional place where I learnt a lot” (P 53). It was mentioned that relationships with and involvement in professional bodies were encouraged, and that the organisation complied with the code of ethics of relevant institutions. It also supported academic institutions through the provision of bursaries and academic support. Alpha was considered to be an example of professionalism: “Alpha has been good to me stretching me to fulfil my potential. It has taught me excellence in my work and enabled me to build(ing) other staff members reporting to me towards their own goals. Alpha will live on as an example of professionalism in engineering” (P 58).

Professionalism extended to descriptions of culture as well, and was described as “professionalism above all” (P 6) and as “being professional in every aspect of service rendering” (P 51), a theme which was echoed in the client service question specifically. Client service was described as “professional” and the organisation was viewed as giving delivery “the highest priority, but keeping it professional at all times” (P 8). In keeping with the business focus described in the previous narrative, one participant observed that Alpha was “providing a professional and efficient service to its clients in accordance with fair competitive commercial practices” (P 42 / 45), thus linking these two key ideas.

With any profession come required standards as well as rules and regulations that govern various aspects of professional life and their outcomes. With so much at stake in terms of possible loss of life, injury and damage to property, the engineering profession is governed by very strict rules and regulations that form an integral part of an engineer's working identity. In this regard, reference was made to the importance of standards, rules and regulations as forming an integral part of professional service delivery. Two participants, in response to the culture question, highlighted the importance of standards, rules and regulations in the delivery of professional client services. The culture of Alpha was described as "a competitive structure delivering satisfying professional service while sticking to strict rules and regulations" (P 33), and "adhering to the highest professional standards with a prime focus on the customer" (P 70).

In support of the adherence to professional standards, participants mentioned the importance of management systems which set in place mechanisms to ensure that standards were maintained. Management systems were referred to in terms of being both a "safety net" and "a guide" in ensuring successful product delivery: "developed to be a safety net and to guide you towards a successful end product" (P 9). Another participant expanded on this metaphor and referred to staff as "trapeze artists" who were prevented from "fatal mishaps" by the "safety net": "the safety net to protect the trapeze artist (staff) from fatal mishaps" (P 31). Another member, in describing the organisation more broadly, hinted at a similar idea and described the organisation as: "the perfect environment to exchange ideas and to be able to do your work with the knowledge that there will always be a safety net below to prevent you from falling. (risk management)"(P 32) (cocktail party / plane). Having this "safety net" in place made it "easy to work" as staff knew that "systems were in place to minimize risk" (P 31).

In reflecting identity, successful staff were also described as being professional and it was suggested that they were "top professionals with the best brains in the business" (P 70). Furthermore, in the context of Alpha, professionalism in staff was linked to both a client orientation as well as a strong value orientation, with staff described as "professionals building client relations on trust and excellence" (P 24) and "professionals with good moral principles to staff and clients" (P 73).

#### **5.2.4.2 We are client-focused**

In the survey, many references were made to clients and client service, their priority as the basis of the business and the importance of ensuring that they were well cared for and their interests taken to heart.

In the same descriptions of the organisation's projects and contributions on a technical level, participants reminded the reader that what distinguished the company was its care and concern for people, amongst whom were the company's clients. While there were specific questions dedicated to client relations and service, aspects relating to client service and its importance emerged in general questions such as descriptions of values, culture and in response to the question regarding the cocktail party or plane, as well as the motto question suggesting that these were of central importance in the minds of participants when considering identity, seen in, for example: "to provide a top quality service with a focus on clients and how best to meet their needs" (P 10) and "we are a company that values client relations and do things the open and honest way" (P 30).

Client relations were considered important as they were "the backbone" (P42 / 45) of the company and for this reason excellent client relations were a priority. One member described client relations in metaphorical terms as "bonds between the organisation and the client" (P 46). Definitions of the word "bond" are numerous but likely meanings include "something that binds or restrains"; a "binding covenant"; or "a uniting or binding element or force" ([www.meriam-webster](http://www.meriam-webster)) – all of which emphasise a very close and necessary relationship between client and the organisation, with the constraints that such a relationship entails. The necessity of good client relations was stressed. Client relations were described as "important" (nineteen times) and "a priority" (four times). The reason was that they were "the core of our business" (P 61), and "... one of the key elements to ensure successful business" (P 57). One participant put it very succinctly: "No clients, no work" (P 19). Thus a link was made between clients and the revenue that was generated by doing work for them. It was for this reason that clients were valued and respected, and considerable effort was invested in ensuring their satisfaction.

While the income generated from clients was considered important, staff highlighted the fact that clients received value for their money and were given the service or product they were paying for. This meant working "...within a budget and time frame and delivering outstanding value to the clients" (P 32). Another participant maintained that "clients were treated with respect and a big effort was put into meeting their needs, answering their requests and performing a good service". Emphasis was placed on the fact that the best form of marketing was to "do the current job well" (P 10). Two others also highlighted the importance of good client service as "our best form of advertisement" (P 42 / 45). One participant suggested that the company's growth was testimony to their quality service. A dissonant voice suggested that while service was exemplary in some instances, quality was at times sacrificed for the bottom line.

The aim was to build relationships with clients so as to develop a platform of trust, from which the professional's advice and counsel would be accepted: "... building good relations with the client in order to ensure that you are trusted by them in what you do" (P 30). Furthermore, in an attempt to satisfy the client, staff members would make sure they kept the client's goals in mind (P 40), act in the client's best interest (P 58) and ensure that the work was executed in a professional way (P 22 / P 74). One member responding to the client relations question described clients as follows: "Strangers we needed to establish relationships with to become friends so that we could at least satisfy their needs in the work and responsibilities they entrusted us with" (P 26). This suggested a very deliberate and methodical approach to client relationships that were developed over time and designed to last.

In support of this facet of identity, successful staff were described as those who were committed, able to serve client needs and who made client relations a priority. They were described as "people that were committed to what they were doing. Putting client relations as a high priority but doing it with integrity" (P 30) and "persons that work hard, deliver high quality work with good relationships with clients as well as fellow staff members" (P 55).

Views on the responsibility for client relations appeared to differ, with one young engineer mentioning that it was "a very important part of day-to-day business" (P 75). Another participant (associate) highlighted the importance of nurturing and cultivating client relations but believed they were "the focus of established management" (P 16). One participant also suggested that client relations were exclusive: "Very important, to the point where certain people maintained the only link to the client and no others were allowed to approach the same client" (P 22).

There were some dissonant voices that indicated that client relations were not always consistent and differed from client to client. One indicated specifically that the importance of a client depended on the value of their business: "There was quite a focus on the relative importance of clients dependent on the value of business they could bring to the company" (P 10). This suggested that while all clients were important, some clients were more important than others. Finally, one participant suggested that while client service was a very important aspect, there were nevertheless cases of insufficient attention to some clients because of the time available.

### 5.2.4.3 We are driven to deliver quality service to clients

While the previous identity statement focused on the importance of the client this statement has as its basis the standard of service provided to the client in recognition of his/her importance, and this was considered to be of “quality”, “high quality” (P 68); of “value” (P 36), “high class” (P 17), “high standard” (P17 / 19), “superb” (P 47) “the best” (P 6) and “solution orientated”. To achieve the required standard of service, staff were required to have technical skill, expertise and a solution orientation. The idea of being “solution orientated” emerged a few times in the data and will be discussed below as a distinct element of quality service.

“Service” as value was mentioned three times, as was to “serve clients’ needs” (P 60). “Service delivery” was also listed as a value three times and one participant suggested as a motto: “Service delivery to satisfy client’s needs” (P 11). One participant suggested as a company motto: “Alpha was a very strong company and always committed in giving the best service and looking after the employees” (P 6). While this is not a motto exactly, the participant was conveying the point that what the company stood for was providing the best service. Another participant suggested that it was the quality of the service that was the basis of their growth: “The growth we have experienced is indicative of our quality service” (P57). Overall, it was the quality of Alpha’s service that was also highlighted in the data.

In response to the question on values, “quality” was mentioned eleven times, as was “quality client service” (P 28), “quality of service” (P 67), “quality of work” (P 60) and “quality service” (P 14). Furthermore, Alpha was described as having a “good reputation for the quality of work we delivered and the way we operated” (P 19). Reference was also made to quality in describing the organisation’s culture which was portrayed as “doing things with integrity and to the required quality” (P 68); “to provide a top quality service with a focus on clients and how to best meet their needs” (P 10) and “doing everything with care and without pressure to compromise on quality of work for the sake of production” (P 48). With a similar emphasis on the lack of compromise in quality, another participant described the organisation’s service as “of high quality whilst taking factors such as social environment, sustainability etc into account. We were not in it for the ‘quick buck’” (P 68). This painted a picture of an organisation that took quality seriously and was known in the market for this. However, this was disputed by one dissonant voice which suggested that quality had deteriorated over the last few years due to lack of staff: “Adequate, but of a lesser quality in recent years when compared with the past. This is most certainly a result of us taking on all work available without being able to keep up with staffing demands” (P 9).

Successful staff were described as having “technical ability” (P 36), being “technically strong” (P 15), “technically adept” (P 74) and “members with the correct technical skills, managerial skill and happy doing what they were” (P 36). The focus of the expertise was to do good work and to satisfy clients: “Those with good expertise who did good work and satisfied clients” (P 72), were “pleasant to work with, committed to deadlines, were good communicators and technically proficient” (P 21), This focus was repeated in: “Those who have the technical expertise and those who have the freedom to express themselves through their technical expertise. Also those with the old school ties have proved successful in terms of market penetration” (P34).

One element of being service- driven was an emphasis on being solution- orientated, and this was mentioned in response to various questions. In response to the question on the cocktail party / plane, the company was described as “...a one stop shop where you can get all your engineering solutions” (P 23). As a value, participants made specific mention of providing “suitable solutions” (P 71), “distinctive solutions” (P 21) and the organisational culture was described as providing “cost-effective solutions according to client and site conditions” (P 39). With regard to reputation, the company was described as being known for “solid and technically sound solutions” (P 21) and being able to “take on challenges and come up with unique solutions” (P 30). In response to what is seen as distinctive about the organisation, participants mentioned “providing engineering solutions to clients’ satisfaction” (P 36), and described Alpha as being an “innovative solution provider” (P 18). The company’s service was described as “professional, high quality and solution driven”. These solutions were developed so as to provide effective service and client satisfaction, bearing in mind conditions on the client’s site. The fact that a solution orientation was mentioned in response to various dimensions of organisational functioning suggested this was an element of identity. It was also a mind-set often associated with engineers and their approach to the world.

The idea of a solution orientation was also evident amongst descriptions of successful staff who were described as “open-minded and able to find solutions for any challenge” (P 59) and as “...down to earth and solution orientated. No place for pretences or arrogance” (P 21). Another linked staff relationships and a solution orientation, describing Alpha as: “the place where colleagues became friends and where solutions were found to problems. It was easy to work and to feel that systems were in place to minimise risk” (P 31). The reference to the systems also related to the identity statement discussed above, viewing systems as a positive element designed to minimise risk.

#### 5.2.4.4 We are committed to working with relevant stakeholders

Stakeholders were described as “All people who have the right to an opinion and who can make valuable inputs” (P 39), and while the focus was on stakeholders as affected parties and the recipients of services, professional and academic institutions were also included as stakeholders. Stakeholder relationships were described as “professional” (P 30 / P 35), “important” (seven times), “necessary” (P 25), “high on the agenda” (P 38), “partnerships” (P 61), “a priority” (P 29) and “valuable” (P 31 / P 32). One participant also highlighted the importance of external stakeholder relationships as part of the image- building of the organisation, suggesting this was “a critical area of public relations that needed to be dealt with as one would with a client” (P 26).

Some participants alluded to the involvement of stakeholders as part of key processes: “External stakeholders were on board at all times through consultations and frequent meetings for updates. Project Steering Committees were established to ensure all stakeholders were involved in decision making processes” (P 27); another indicating that an “effort was made to consider all stakeholders” (P 41). One participant reiterated the view of stakeholders being involved, but also highlighted other stakeholders, namely academic institutions and professional organisations: “...the company looked after relevant stakeholders in projects. The company also took the views of stakeholders seriously. The company capitalised on its strengths by sowing back into academic institutions through support, bursary programmes and lecturing in courses. There could have been more emphasis on company involvement in professional organisations (eg I am not aware of staff being involved in SAICE professional registration examiners)” (P 10).

A few participants referred to the nature of the stakeholder relationships, one indicating: “We were warm and friendly towards our stakeholders” (P 23), though another indicated that: “these were more working relationships – not so close as with colleagues nor possibly even our clients as well” (P 68). One of the civil-technicians described stakeholder relationships as “wonderful and full of priceless experiences” (P 44), an interesting comment in the context of what is often viewed as mere necessity<sup>13</sup>. This suggested that for some employees, this dimension may have been more important in their own construction of organisational identity than for others, possibly because these relationships played a more central role in their experience of organisational life. It also contrasted with the claim discussed

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<sup>13</sup> This is one of the comments I would have loved to explore further, but given the nature of the data-gathering, I was prohibited from doing so.



below that external stakeholder relationships were limited to directors. Finally, a participant described them as “healthy and meaningful as is proven by the many awards in which stakeholders rate us” (P 8), drawing on the “authority” of an award to substantiate this particular claim.

Several dissonant voices existed with regard to stakeholder relationships and these centred around two main elements. First, there was a view that stakeholder relationships were inadequate in some way. External stakeholder relationships were described as “lacking” (P 65), with one participant suggesting these were given insufficient attention: “Good but not too much focus was placed on these relationships” (P 70) and finally, one participant suggested they were “adequate but perhaps because of time constraints and associated costs should have been improved” (P 64). Second, it seemed that not everybody was responsible for stakeholder relationships. A technical director indicated stakeholder relationships were “non-existent at my level” (P 63), while an associate indicated that only directors were involved: “Non existent as only directors are involved” (P 33).

### **5.2.5 We are a people-orientated company**

There were many statements in the data that referred to the nature of the work, the client focus and concern for staff as characteristics of the organisation. The two previous narratives addressed the aspects of work and technical expertise and the focus on clients. It is to the employees that I turn in the third narrative. In this narrative there are three broad foci: the first, care and concern for people; second, the favourable working environment; and finally, the values by which the organisation was governed (as stated officially), which should underpin all other aspects of identity.

#### **5.2.5.1 We are a company that cares for its people**

The company was described as “caring” (seven times) in response to questions on leadership, external stakeholders, culture, staff relationships and management-employee relationships. The leadership style was described as “progressive and caring. Strongly business minded and focused. Approachable, interested and inclusive of opinions, even when divergent” (P 10). This extract underlines the element of being “business minded” that was described in a previous identity statement but here it was combined with an emphasis on care. The term “approachable” was used six times to describe leadership style, management style as well as management-staff relations. Leadership style was also described as “structured and forward thinking but approachable and consultative” (P 26) as well as “good and approachable. They always had time to listen to listen to you and help you” (P 19). Being approachable and having time for staff supported the idea of a company caring for staff.

The extract for which this identity statement was named also indicated a care for people: “The company that cares for its people and quality of work and client satisfaction is most important factors (sic)” (P 60). The company was also described as being “concerned about their staff” (P 28) and one participant suggested “One company for all” (P 3) as a motto, reinforcing the idea of everyone having a stake in the organisation.

In addition to caring for its staff, the company was also viewed as looking after their employees as indicated by five participants. A few of these comments are captured here: “Alpha was a very strong company and always committed in giving the best service and looking after the employees” (P 6); “I am happy at Alpha as they look after their staff – especially the engineers” (P 7) and “we looked after our employees not only in work but in most areas of life” (P 35). One staff member suggested as a company motto: “ A company that believes in their people” (P 54).

This had the consequence of generating loyalty from staff members, something mentioned by eleven employees. One participant suggested: “I was very loyal to Alpha (possibly too loyal) but that is how I felt and I won’t regret it. Alpha was a company one could be proud of (both on account of its achievements as well as the way in which it looked after it’s (sic) people” (P 68). This extract reinforced the market leader narrative discussed earlier, which focused on technical achievements, as well as the “We care for people identity statement”. It suggested that the achievements and looking after people had the consequences of engendering pride in and loyalty towards the company . This feeling of loyalty, according to one participant, was directed not only towards the company as a whole but also towards the people with whom she dealt on a daily basis: “I had a feeling of loyalty towards Alpha, especially the people I worked with everyday” (P 39). In addition to loyalty, it also generated a sense amongst employees of having a viable future within the organisation. Participant Four described Organisation A, in response to the cocktail party / plane question, as: “an organization that you can plan your future with”(P 4), and as a motto, Participant Nine suggested “A place to reach your dreams” (P 9).

With regard to the identity statement “We are a company that cares for its people” there were few dissonant voices challenging the idea of caring for people. One participant proposed that leadership was becoming more people orientated (insinuating that perhaps they actually hadn’t yet achieved this): “Striving to lead through example and becoming more people orientated, but lacking sufficient

transparency at times” (P 55). Another indicated the management style was “old fashioned. It has “the boss is always right” attitude. There is transparency between seniors and I feel juniors are distanced way apart” (P 46), contradicting the picture of leadership being approachable and inclusive of opinions, discussed earlier.

One element of the identity statement: “we are a company that cares for people” manifested in the emphasis on the development of people. The term “development” was used ten times to describe values, culture, emotional connection, management style, leadership style and management-employee relationships. Management-employee relationships were described as “collaborative and inclusive. Information was disseminated well to all levels of management. Higher levels of management were always open to be approached by lower level employees. Directors usually had time to train up and develop younger staff members. Employees were encouraged by management to develop well-rounded approaches to the business environment beyond pure technical skills” (P 10). This suggested a commitment to development by management, as time was invested in doing so. In this extract, development was described as something both personal and holistic, as it was focused on various skills, not only technical ones.

In response to the question on emotional connection, one participant commented: “As the only organisation I have worked for I feel that I have learned a lot (put in positions where I had to take responsibility from an early age) and grown a lot as a human being” (P 20); another suggesting that Alpha “is the best organisation to learn and have good experience ....Courses offered encourages (sic) staff to learn more” (P 3). One staff member described management-employee relationships as “a learning channel for new employees” (P 49) while another suggested as a company motto: “Learning through growth” (P 53).

#### **5.2.5.2 We are happy working together**

There were many quotations referring to the work environment of Alpha, and the fact that this was comfortable, friendly, energising, personal, respectful and compassionate. A few even used the metaphor of a family to describe how they felt about staff relations.

Staff relationships were described as “cordial” (four times) and “friendly” (fifteen times and linked to concepts such as “professional”, “informal”, “motivated”, “meaningful”, “treated with dignity”, “compassionate” and “welcoming”. In addition, relationships were described as “warm” (four times)

and one participant indicated this was because staff had worked together for many years: “warm and excellent because most people have been working together for 10-20 years” (P 34). Another indicated that staff had “walked a long way and still respect each other” (P 67). The longevity of collegial relations had evidently led to close-knit relationships that were warm and based on mutual respect.

Staff relationships were likened to “family”, a term that was coded four times, with one member indicating they were: “close and even like a big family” (P 5). Other references to family included: “it was a big happy family” (P 38), “like family to me” (P 44) and “a second home” (P 4), while one staff member in response to the cocktail party question stated: “I think I've said it all in the above, but to my friends I'd point out how the company managed to make every employee feel at home and a part of the company's achievements, rather than being a number in the army” (P 48). There were two elements in the afore-mentioned that are worth noting: first the emphasis on the family, as discussed, and second, the fact that people were made to feel part of the company's achievements. This suggested a feeling of inclusiveness and belonging, not least because of the perception that people were recognised as contributing to the success of the organisation, and there was evidence that this was so. Staff relationships were described as “an integral part of our business” (P 75) and “crucial for success” (P 61). Similarly, client relations were constructed as critical to the business, both for the organisation and the employees, as one participant stated: “Staff that works well together can achieve so much more” (P 55). Thus staff who work well together were viewed as achieving more for the organisation, though these were deemed to benefit employees well., One participant described staff relations as “friendships and a positive contribution to my career” (P 18).

Staff relationships were described as “friendships” (six times), as friends: “good working relationships, also friends” (P 39), and as “friends with same vision and ethics (P 59). This was largely due to the local office structure, which meant that people engaged locally on a more personal level despite a large organisation nationally: “generally good and happy working environment. While we knew we were part of a large organisation, the size of our team and local office allowed us to interact on a personal level and relate as friends with our colleagues” (P 10). While not referring to friendships specifically, other staff members also mentioned good working relationships: “We work well as a unit together and have good working relationships” (P 15), also seen in “the organisation was dependable, conducted its business in a professional manner and had good staff relationships” (P 4), the latter also alluding to the identity statement “We are professionals”. The positive working relationships contributed to a positive working environment, which was described as supportive and encouraging: “a conducive environment.

One could be helped, lifted and energized by fellow workers when you needed help” (P 46). Some staff members suggested there were positive relationships even between the various units though many of the dissonant voices challenged this view. One participant suggested there was “good interaction between all the different offices and individuals regardless of their position and/or seniority” (P 75).

Successful staff were constructed as those people who could support and contribute to constructive relationships and a favourable/positive working environment. Participants suggested successful staff were “people who deliver on time and who have relationships with others” (P 14), and people who “know what they want and how to get it in a happy helpful way” (P 53). Such a person also had to have “interpersonal skill” (P 47) and be “an intelligent person who can interact well” (P 67).

Few dissonant voices challenged the existence of positive staff relationships and a favourable working environment but some indicated that these could be capitalised on even more, strengthening the idea that staff relationships were good for business and, for this reason, should be encouraged. One participant suggested that Alpha had a “generally good and a happy working environment. While we knew we were part of a large organisation, the size of our team and local office allowed us to interact on a personal level and relate as friends with our colleagues. Unfortunately the company did not provide as many opportunities to capitalise on this as it could have - there was certainly room to increase and facilitate social interaction between staff with a view to team building and increasing employee satisfaction” (P 10). The other theme that constituted a dissonant view was the idea that while relationships within units were good, this was not always the case between local units or offices, with participants suggesting that relationships were “honest in units, often artificial between units” (P 63) and “internally reasonably good but some tension existed between offices” (P 22).

### **5.2.5.3 We are a value-driven company**

As indicated earlier in the chapter, at the time of the merger, there were five stated values: integrity, excellence, teamwork, embracing diversity and people empowerment. Of these five, three of the values came through strongly enough to be categorised separately; these being teamwork, excellence and integrity. Each of these has been formulated as an identity statement.

#### *5.2.5.3.1 We are a cohesive team*

Teamwork was mentioned fifteen times in response to the questions on values, culture, staff relationships, management-employee relationships, as a description of successful staff and in response

to the cocktail party / plane question. As a value it was described as a “team” (P 74), “teamwork” (P4 /P50 / P70) and “employees working as a team and assisting each other” (P 3). Company culture was described as “working together as a team to achieve the goals of the company” (P 44) and “working as a team” (P 7).

In response to the question about what to say at a cocktail party or on a plane, at least three participants referred to teamwork. The first stated: “We are a talented company. Our working environment is excellent as we always have company to keep us going. We all socialise and everyone is familiar with each other. We strive for perfection and we are a well motivated team” (P 40), highlighting the constructive working environment and describing the organisation as a well-motivated team. The second suggested: “We were fortunate to be part of a very good team of specialists who had honest and generally open and caring relationships” (P 73), highlighting the specialist nature of the team and reinforcing the suggestion of open and caring relationships. The third indicated that the people are warm and comfortable to be around. We also have an excellent team who works as one” (P 52).

Team work was described in the context of the company as being progressive, as suggested in “we are always moving forward” and; “excellent company to work for. Modern ideas and ways to do business. Vibrant, good team spirit” (P 18). Team dynamics were also credited with playing a role in positive staff relationships: “Staff relations were good. Our team dynamics played a huge role in this” (P 30). Finally, much like the dissonant voice suggesting that relationships were less positive between units, the same applied to teamwork: “Good teamwork, but some sensitivities due to unit / division bottom lines & interactions” (P 74).

Successful staff were described in conjunction with team and team work. Participants described them as “people that made a positive contribution to the team” (P 18) and “People who can work together as a team, share ideas that everyone can benefit from. People who work hard and enjoy what they do” (P 39). Success as a staff member was thus viewed as the degree to which each was able to make a positive contribution to the team. Finally, successful staff were described as “Something to celebrate and be proud to have as part of the team” (P 32), suggesting that staff members who were “team players” were highly valued.

#### 5.2.5.3.2 *We are a business with integrity*

While there were many references to integrity (mentioned nineteen times), ethical / ethics (twelve times) and honesty / honest (eighteen times), this dimension is difficult to explain in detail, as many of these were limited to one- word answers or very brief descriptions. Integrity was linked to being professional and culture was described as “professional at all times with the utmost integrity” (P 75). It was also described as “conducting yourself with integrity and acting in transparency” (P 21). One of the participants listed as a value: “to conduct business honestly and with integrity” (P 45). Successful staff members were described as: “people that were committed to what they were doing. Putting client relations as a high priority but doing it with integrity” (P 30), linking the way client relations were conducted to the value of integrity. Successful staff members were also described as: “professionals with good moral principles to staff and clients” (P 73). As indicated, integrity is defined as “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles” ([www.oxforddictionaries.com](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com)), thus suggesting professionals exercise the value of integrity towards fellow staff members and clients. Culture was also viewed in terms of reflecting integrity: “Doing things for the good of the company as a whole. Being transparent and doing things honestly with due regard for local and international norms of conduct” (P 45). Descriptions of “ethics” and “being ethical” were also brief and included the phrases “high degree of ethics” (P 8), “high ethical values” (P 9), “high ethical standards” (P 31 / P32) and “professional company, great values (ethical)” (P 56). While these were not particularly descriptive, the idea of being professional was once again linked to the value system of the organisation – namely integrity.

#### 5.2.5.3.3 *We are dedicated to excellence*

Excellence was mentioned nineteen times, fifteen of these in reference to core values, and culture was described as “striving for excellence” (P 25). Here again descriptions were not lengthy but a few of the more lengthy descriptions included one of reputation, which was described as: “One of excellence and to which other companies could aspire” (P 68). In response to the party / plane question, a participant stated: “Alpha is a company that prides itself on Integrity, Accountability, People empowerment and Excellence” (P 5). Here participants were allowed to respond in any way and this participant chose to focus on values, also reinforcing the ideas of excellence and integrity as values.

In addition, participants linked excellence to various aspects of organisational functioning, including excellent client service which was mentioned seven times: “Offered excellent service to the client and made follow-up” (P 3) and “far reaching and excellent by way of the level and diversity of the types of work it undertook” (P 26). Both products and services were described as “excellent” (P 72) and

“engineering excellence” was suggested as both a core value (P 22) and as a motto (P 66). The company was said to be striving for excellence: “Quality, integrity and striving to (sic) excellence” (P 39), also seen in “we strive for excellence in our service” (P 57). Finally, mention was made of performance excellence: “responsible, work ethics, performance excellence” (P 13), as a description of culture, and Alpha was described as “an organization dedicated to excellence in which employees were given room to exercise their initiative” (P 24).

By way of a dissonant voice, Alpha’s reputation was described as “representing excellence but not always as reactive as we could be” (P 24). Although not contradicting the dominant narrative, this suggested that Alpha’s reputation could be improved upon.

## **5.3 Beta**

### **5.3.1 Background to the company**

The following section is summarised from the book *Beta Head: The Man, The Practice* by Tony Murray, and I have not included references unless these come from another source or where I have quoted directly from the book. I have chosen to indicate this at the beginning, as to reference each sentence seems rather superfluous.

The background to the Organisation Beta narrative lies in the context, South Africa, and the person of Beta Head, without whom the richness and detail of the identity cannot be understood. The story begins with South Africa and unfolds with this as background, as described in the first chapter of the book: “The country would forever be short of water, but dam sites were available to store water for domestic consumption and irrigation, which would boost the economy enormously. Judicious exploitation, combined with imaginative engineering, would serve the country for many years” (2010:10). It is against this backdrop that the larger-than-life figure of Beta Head, the founder of the firm, is described, as well as the practice he founded and built. Unlike Alpha, whose founders in the minds of current employees have little impact (at least as reflected in the survey), the founder of Beta continued to play a significant role in shaping the identity of the company. The following extract from *Civil Engineering* (1 June, 2007:8) highlights this fact: “Despite the modern outlook, the philosophy of the firm’s founder is still very much part of their character”. For this reason, I begin this section with a brief background on the founder himself. Because the founder and the organisation both have the same name, I refer to the organisation as Beta, and to its founder as Beta Head.



### 5.3.1.1 Background to the founder's life

Beta Head was born on the 19<sup>th</sup> of January 1899 in the Karoo town of Middelburg. His father was the local magistrate, and this meant that the family moved frequently, which impacted on the young boy, Beta Head's, education. He spent much time as boy in the *veld* constructing roads, bridges and waterways. He completed his education at SACS in Cape Town and went on to study engineering, graduating with a gold in his final year. He worked for a few years in South Africa before travelling to the United States to work for the US Bureau of Reclamation, the national body responsible for dams and irrigation. Returning to South Africa, he was involved in various water-engineering projects.

In 1932, Beta Head joined Stewart and Shannon, (the latter being his uncle). The Stewart part of the practice operated in Johannesburg whilst the Cape Town branch was not particularly active and Beta Head set about changing this. In an attempt to secure work, he covered large distances on roads that were at that time not very well developed in South Africa. He nonetheless engaged in an intensive and wide-spread search for work – at one stage covering an average of 4800 km a month in his quest for clients. His hard work soon paid off and the name of the firm was changed to Stewart, Shannon and Beta. His uncle moved to Knysna and he was in sole charge of the Cape Town practice. Because of the economic depression at the time, various family members were enrolled to help out at the practice. These included his brother-in-law, Eustace Powrie, a draughtsman; his sister, Iona, PA, secretary and accountant; his father John, a retired magistrate; and his nephew, Walter, a young engineering graduate. In 1945, shortly after World War II, the partnership with Stewart was dissolved and Beta Head set up a practice on his own, employing twelve qualified engineers (Beta: Archive History of the Firm). The firm continued to consider 1932 as their founding date, however.

Beta Head was passionate about engineering, particularly in the area of water-engineering, and even his honeymoon proved an ideal opportunity to learn more about the latest engineering practices and included (inter alia) visits to many dams in the USA. While much of the firm's early work centred on the building of dams, in various small towns in what was then known as the Cape Province, and various other water projects, the firm was known to take on any other work that came their way. Beta Head was involved in the professional association, the South African Institution of Civil Engineers (hereafter referred to as SAICE), and was elected President in 1946. He was also involved in the legal world, providing input in many water-related cases, in one of which he was reported to have flooded the courtroom as part of demonstrating a particular point. Despite the judge not being altogether approving

of this demonstration, he was nevertheless “well known among leading counsel at the Cape Bar for his reliable and insightful evidence” (Murray, 2010:30). This work enabled Beta Head to build up a valuable network of influential people and was continued by several of his colleagues, who proved equally able.

Over the ensuing years, the practice expanded and offices were established in various parts of the country, the first being Bloemfontein, Pretoria and Port Elizabeth. For many years Beta Head was the sole proprietor of the firm, with a group of competent engineers who were considered his “assistants”. However in 1963, he invited eleven of his senior engineers to form a partnership, known as Beta and Partners. While at this stage most of the work revolved around water projects, as new partners joined with additional expertise, the firm began to move into other sub-disciplines within civil engineering.

During 1968, while on a trip to Lesotho, as part of the (then) potential Oxbow Scheme, Beta Head contracted pneumonia, and while he recovered and resumed his official duties, did not, in the eyes of those who knew him well, seem to do so completely. In July 1969, he had a relapse and passed away. According to Murray “tributes came in from overseas consultants, government officials, contractors, clients and a great many colleagues in the consulting sector – which had grown enormously since Beta Head had entered the Chambers in St Georges Street 37 years before. It was not simply a case of esteem for a fellow professional – the genuine affection for Beta Head, as a man and a friend, was apparently in every message. The industry and country had lost a favourite son” (2010:97).

In an obituary for Beta Head, he is described by S.S. Morris, City Engineer, Cape Town as “possibly one of South Africa’s most knowledgeable and experienced engineers, particularly in the sphere of water engineering. He had a wide and vast experience of water problems in the Republic and his stamp will be left on many of the developments from which South Africa will benefit for years to come, notably the Orange River Scheme and the Oxbow project.... I learnt to appreciate his outstanding competence as an engineer and his rare qualities as a man and colleague” (ICE Proceedings, 1970:380). In 2004, Beta Head was voted South African Engineer of the Century in a leading construction magazine.

The project for which the Founder and Organisation Beta (both the man and the practice) was best known is the Lesotho Highlands Project, an ambitious scheme that would see the building of dams in the independent Kingdom of Lesotho to supply water to various parts of South Africa, thus developing

a source of income for the small landlocked Kingdom. While the idea was contested by the South African Department of Water Affairs (inter alia) for many years, eventually a water shortage changed opinions and the necessity of the project was realised. In the intervening years, the scope of the project grew, and what began as the Oxbow scheme in 1956 developed into the Lesotho Highlands Water project, which not only supplies water to South Africa but in the process generates hydroelectric power that meets almost all of the small Kingdom's needs. It was for this project that the company was awarded the SAICE "Project of the Century" in 2003 (Civil Engineering News, 2007; Beta Archive, The History of the Firm, 2007:4).

Beta Head and the integral part he has played in the history of the firm, coupled with his status as engineering icon (in South Africa at least) play a key role in the mythology and legend of the organisation, invoking a sense of wonder and admiration, something that is difficult to capture in a brief summary of the organisation (Watson & Watson, 2012).

### **5.3.2 Beta at the time of the merger**

At the time of the merger, Beta, as an organisation, was described as follows: "With over 75 years experience, Beta is a well-established and dynamic firm of consulting engineers and environmental scientists with nearly 600 professional and support staff. We offer clients across the African continent exceptional service delivery combined with innovative thinking and strategic insight" (Project Review Document, 2008). While the company was described as 'having a foothold in many countries' (Civil Engineering News, 2007; Beta Archive, The History of the Firm, 2007:4) offices were located in various cities and towns in South Africa.

The organisation operated in both the public and private sectors within the following sectors: heavy civil engineering; water resources and supply; infrastructure services; structures and buildings; transportation and roads; and purification and environmental. Within these sectors, Beta's areas of expertise included bridges, industrial structures, water and waste treatment, water quality and management, geotechnical projects (including road pavements), roads, airstrips and airports (Project Review, 2008; Service information sheets).

Beta values at the time of the merger were highlighted in the following section. Each of these was described in a fair amount of detail and I include them as it provides a foundation for the narrative that follows (Betabrief, February).

#### *5.3.2.1 We value our people above all else*

“We recognize that people are our most important treasured assets. Therefore we treat each other with respect and dignity. We listen to each other at all times and are committed to workplace fairness, caring and transparency. We celebrate our diversity as well as the exceptional talents and skills among us. We have a proactive approach to coaching, training and development as we know this enables us to excel in our work” (2009:1).

#### *5.3.2.2 We always act with integrity and professionalism*

“Our actions are founded on strong moral and ethical principles. We are reliable and honest. Our foresight and commitment to the best possible outcomes and solutions shapes our professional behaviour – in our technical, scientific and support work – whether we are interacting with our clients, co-professionals, each other or society at large” (2009:1).

#### *5.3.2.3 We are accountable for our actions*

“We are aware that our actions in our workplace and in society directly impact both the performance of the Firm and its public profile. We gladly embrace the opportunity to act responsibly, ethically and professionally at all times, and to perform at our best. We hold ourselves accountable for ensuring that the Firm remains a prosperous, sustainable and rewarding place to work” (2009:1-2).

#### *5.3.2.4 We are committed to service excellence*

“The multi-disciplinary services we provide add value to the quality of life of many, many communities in the countries in which we operate. We are driven to provide these services with high energy, passion and a steady focus on outstanding quality, and are always mindful of the impact our work and conduct has on others” (2009:2).

As with Alpha, there were three identity narratives, each of which will be discussed:

- We are the “grand old lady” of South African consulting engineers;
- We are the consulting engineering company with a heart;
- We are family working to engineer a better future for all.

### **5.3.3 We are the “grand old lady” of South African consulting engineers**

The name of this identity narrative is drawn directly from one of the responses to the question regarding reputation: “highly professional and well respected, some times termed ‘the grand old lady’ of South African consulting engineers” (P 136). This feminine metaphor is interesting as I noticed, while I was paging through the Beta Head book, that female faces are scarce and appear mostly in the form of sisters and wives (in the early days particularly). Yet somehow this metaphor captured quite aptly how I have come to understand Beta and its identity in the market. The phrase “grand old lady” captures the image of something stately, elegant and old, almost timeless. The firm is certainly one of the oldest in the country and despite being predominantly male-led, promotes “old fashioned values” such as providing excellent services even if this is not always profitable; building close relationships with clients; keeping the family close and, like many old ladies, struggling with transformation, as it attempts to adapt to a changing environment.

#### **5.3.3.1 We are a well-known engineering firm**

Staff members believed the company was “well-known” and “highly regarded” in the industry, and it was described as “a well known firm that was very well respected” (P 103). Other descriptions made reference to being “very highly regarded”, “highly respected” (P 106) and one even referred to its iconic status “An icon, dependable” (P 113). Another participant also mentioned the bond with Beta Head, who was named Engineering Icon of the Century: “the emphasis will be on the opportunity we had to be involved with very interesting and ‘one of a kind’ type projects in the water field and our bond with Engineering Icon of the century, Beta Head. For a technically orientated engineering mind highly rewarding!” (P 131). One participant maintained that many appointments were influenced by the Beta Head name / brand: “Technical standard of work was first priority, above profit on projects. Many markets were very well established and we received many appointments just on the Beta Head name. My career development was looked after very well (Pr Eng and further growth). In our Cape Town Water Department though planning on staff resources and strategic issues was done. Excellent team building also. I felt a great sense of belonging. It was by far the best company I have worked for” (P 98). The importance of the Beta Head name was also highlighted at the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Client Function, in a speech by Hannes Kritzinger (Chairman of Beta Holdings) “Firstly, we are proud of our name, and I mean it quite literally in this instance: the name “Beta” is synonymous with civil engineering in this country and our founder, Mr Beta Head, was in 2004 voted the engineering icon of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the civil engineers in South Africa” (Betabrief, April/May 2007:8). The importance of a name or brand in the context of a professional firm is particularly important given the nature of the

industry that - in the absence of clearly measurable evaluative criteria or where these are only possible over an extended period of time- often relies heavily on a strong brand identity to retain clients (Alvesson, 2001).

While emphasis was placed on the esteem in which the company was held, the exact domain in which this resided seemed to vary between participants. One participant specified that it was a well-known engineering company and provided some background to the company: “Beta was a well known engineering company all over South Africa that offered very professional and experienced advice and service. Beta was over 75 years old. They merged with two other engineering companies Alpha and Gamma, which is (sic) known across the globe for their engineering services and is now known as the new company Delta. I believe these two companies together will reach new heights. It was a pleasure working for Beta, but I am looking forward to being an employee of Delta for many years to come” (P 82).

Another participant maintained it was highly regarded in the profession with specific reference to the field of water: “Respected in the water field. I consider that Beta were (sic) highly acclaimed in the profession and government trusted our credentials” (P 121), while another focused on the water field specifically: “Beta had such a strong heritage of technical excellence in especially the water field. Everywhere in SA people which (sic) have worked with consultants would know the name” (P 98). Finally, one participant referred to a well established civil engineering company, highlighting broader infrastructure development as the company focus: “The company I am working for is a well-established Civil Engineering company. We do work in both the private and public sector and specialise in many areas such as structures, buildings, roads, transportation and even more. We are a good team and work well together” (P 87).

A project review document (2007) which represented the more formal presentation of identity provided the following description: “Beta is a well-established and future- focussed Firm of consulting engineers and environmental scientists, with a staff complement of over 550 professionals and support staff active in a wide variety of disciplines and interests. The firm was founded in 1932 by Beta Head, the man who first envisaged the Lesotho Highlands Water Project” (back cover). The reference to the founding date “1932” reinforces the history of the firm, and this is something participants highlighted as being important to them: “All the above, with a sense of pride at its history, achievements and ethos, and my own role in its success on various large projects over the years in different regions” (P 125).

Here the participant linked the success of the firm to his/her own involvement therein. Another participant described it as: “... one of the oldest and most reputable companies in South Africa and one from which you will always receive professional, top quality service and products” (P 104). Participant 126 described the importance of heritage, in response to the question on emotional connection: “It was part of the very make-up of who I am. I believed strongly in the organisation, valued its heritage, and strove to build on that. Most importantly, I was and am deeply committed to serving the people with whom I work everyday, and to growing together with them”. Participant 87 also used the idea of heritage, in the construction of a motto: “Being inspired by our people, our diversity and our powerful heritage” (P 87).

Among the perceptions of being well known, one dissonant voice suggested that while the company was well known, it was perhaps less so than staff assumed: “Beta was well known and respected. However, I sometimes think we thought we were better known than we were” (P 93).

#### **5.3.3.2 We are numbered among the best in our field**

Much as was the case with Alpha, several participants made reference to the company being “the best”. While some used this phrase specifically, others made use of similar wording with the same meaning. The title of this identity statement was taken directly from one of the participants who stated: “...we love our work and by Providence, have been numbered amongst the best in our field” (P 126). Once again there is some variation as to the standard/ benchmark against which “the best” is determined; some indicating the “best in the water field”, another more broadly referring to the “best in the business”, another using civil consulting engineers as the mode of comparison. I deliberately retained the more generic “best in our field” as this was consistent with the original quotation from which the title was drawn, and it allowed for some of the ambiguity often associated with identity (Gioia, 1998). Company documentation recoding organisational discourse highlighted a similar trend. An extract from the Cape Town office’s 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary function’s speech by Hannes Kritzinger (Betabrief, April/May 2007) also referred to the idea of the firm being better than others, though in typical discursive fashion reflects back on itself (Parker, 1992): “We are immensely proud of the quality of our work and we certainly believe it to generally be better than that of other firms (although I have to admit to some bias in this respect)” (Betabrief, April/ May 2007: 9).

While some participants simply stated the company was the best, others provided a more detailed description of why this was so. One participant linked their being the best to their technical expertise

and involvement in significant projects: “Due to our depth of civil engineering knowledge, especially in the water field, we can provide the best consulting engineering service in South Africa. I would definitely inform the other person of the instrumental role which we played in the Lesotho Highlands Project” (P 77). Another participant highlighted the reputation of the company and the legal defensibility of their products, while acknowledging that their work came at a price: “My experience in government tender committees bears out the reputation of Beta as the best company, albeit the most expensive. Where top quality work was needed, in particular where a legal challenge may occur, then Beta would be the company of choice because the products would be technically and legally defensible and this was widely known in government” (P 94).

If one considers that culture underpins a given identity, then elements of culture should support identity claims. Two descriptions of culture underpin the idea of being the best, and the Beta culture was described as “always striving to be the best among competitors” (P 108) and as “doing it to the best of your ability” (P 119).

One dissonant voice, while agreeing with being technically amongst the best, regarded the company’s reputation on transformation as more lacklustre: “technically among the highest of civil consulting engineers in SA, with lower reputation on transformation” (P 125).

### **5.3.3.3 We are a leader in the field of water engineering**

Given the history of the firm, and its roots in the field of water engineering, an identity statement reflecting this should not be surprising. The identity statement captures two key areas; the first related to leadership in the field generally, and then more specifically, in the field of water engineering. The firm is described by participants as a “class leader” (P 113), “...leaders in the profession” (P 81)(also reinforcing the idea of professionalism in the next narrative) and “acknowledged for excellence and leadership in our field” (P 124). Two other participants referred to the company as being “a leader in its field”, one of them citing the awards it had achieved as evidence: “a leader in its field as depicted by the several awards for professionalism by client bodies” (P 132).

Other participants focused specifically on Beta’s role as a leader in the field of water and municipal engineering, a theme that is evident in the Beta Head book as well: “One of the leading consulting engineering firms in SA, especially with its knowledge in Water and Municipal engineering” (P 139). Part of being a leader meant changing the way things were done: “The leading water consultancy in



South Africa that pushed the barriers of innovation, technology and planning processes. Society would have been much poorer without it” (P 140). Importantly, it was also linked to the company’s impact on society, which is a reference to civic-mindedness, a facet of identity that will be discussed shortly.

Another participant who mentioned Beta’s being a world leader, linked this to Beta Head the founder, and his being voted the Engineering Icon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. “Beta Head has been recognized as a world leader in water engineering with its founder named ‘Engineering icon of the 21<sup>st</sup> (sic) Century’. It has a proud heritage of serving its clients over the full life cycle of its projects” (P 132). In this statement the participant underpinned the legitimacy of his or her claims, also reinforcing the importance of Beta Head (or any leader / founder) in the formation and continuity of organisational identity. Other participants referred to leadership in the field more generally, declaring: “Within the water division, leadership was world class with insightful managers who are internationally acknowledged masters within their domain” (P 94). This was a source of identification for participants who observed that it was “a privilege to have been able to work for and with such leaders in the field of engineering while always maintaining an unwavering level of honesty and integrity and understanding of staff needs” (P 136).

Finally, in response to the motto question, one of the participants replied: “We strive to remain at the leading edge of the sector in rendering the best quality products, at all times and in all applications” (P 94), suggesting that quality was the result of continual and deliberate effort on the part of the firm.

#### **5.3.3.4 We are reputable purveyors of engineering expertise**

As indicated in the discussion of the construction of the narrative, this identity statement has its roots in an extract from one of the participants who, in responding to the question on reputation, described Beta as a “reputable purveyor of engineering expertise” (P 13). The aim of this identity statement was to capture the many references to the standard of products and services provided by Beta and the expertise and skills that made these possible. This is to be differentiated from the previous identity statement in that it did not attempt to claim “leadership” or “being the best”, but rather emphasised the skill and expertise making leadership possible.

The first aspect included as part of this identity statement was the provision of cost-effective and quality products, services and design, as highlighted in the following extracts: “cost-effective and practical design” (P 115), “provides a thorough and cost effective consulting service to your client” (P

77) and “being a provider of quality engineering services’ (P 135). It was for this reason that clients chose Beta: “Our clients regarded us as delivering a very high quality product (that was why they came to Beta)” (P 98). One participant suggested that clients appreciated this: “A people-orientated company that went about things in an inclusive way, producing quality work that was *always appreciated* by our clients” (P 112).

The second aspect captured in this facet of identity was the idea of being solution- orientated, which meant providing “appropriate” (P 132), “cost-effective” (P 125), “integrated” (P 95 / 125), “innovative” (P 122) and “multi-disciplinary” (P 122) solutions. In addition, the products were lasting, as indicated by participant 132: “providing our clients with the most appropriate solution and to deliver a product that stood the test of time”. This was particularly important in the context of a knowledge- intensive firm, where one of the critical measurements for an engineering firm’s products, would be its capacity to endure. Two participants also referred to the nature of the staff required to produce such solutions, highlighting empowerment and technical skills: “building on empowered staff, the organization provides cost-effective integrated civil engineering solutions that ensure long-term client satisfaction” (P 125); and “we are a great group of technical people that produce innovative solutions that are multi-disciplinary and integrated” (P 122).

The third element included here was the references to general standards that products and services should meet, such as “excellence”, and “quality”. Participants suggested “engineering excellence” (P 131), “pioneering excellence” (P 122) and “technical excellence” (P 98) as possible mottos, and “engineering excellence” (P135 / P 139), “excellence in engineering” (P 144), “technical and service excellence” (P 120) and “technical excellence” (P98 / P 107 / P 110 / P 131) as core values. However, one of the latter, Participant 131, observed “...these 3 core values were unfortunately not applicable across all the Beta business units”, highlighting the fact that identity is not always consistent throughout an organisation. Participants also made several references to “quality” in various aspects of organisational functioning including “high quality work (P 79), “quality project management” (P 111) and “quality advice, designs and solutions to clients” (P 142). “Highest quality” (P 95) and “the pursuit of high quality product delivery” (P 103) were suggested as values.

Successful staff should (ideally) display identity characteristics, and many descriptions of successful staff underpinned this identity statement. Staff were described as “focussed, dedicated and conscientious” (P 96); “innovative, driven by excellence, high producers” (P 83), delivering “high

quality of work and well equipped staff” (P 79); and “working together to deliver a product of excellence” (P 99). The importance of relationships and teamwork were highlighted by two other participants who suggested, “those who excelled in technical work, worked well in a team environment, and shared their knowledge and experiences easily” (P 95) and were “well qualified, dedicated, hardworking. A desire to become one of the best. Good relationships and always prepared to do more than expected” (P 115). Also of relevance here was the ability to share “knowledge and experiences easily” as this related to the identity statement: “We are development orientated”. Other characteristics that made excellence and quality possible were being “dynamic and able to resolve issues logically and analytically” (P 104); knowing “how to best utilize the resources available in making successful projects” (P 140); being “committed to their work and clients and delivering the goods on time and within budget” (P 106).

#### **5.3.4 We are the consulting engineering company with a heart**

The wording of this narrative originated in one of the participant’s responses to the question regarding the distinctiveness of the organisation, with an emphasis on devising a possible motto. The response was: “The Consulting Engineering company with a heart” (P 93). I have chosen this quotation as it captures a distinctive nuance of Beta as a company that upholds the value of engineering combined with an emphasis on the importance of people. This was also captured in the Chairman, Hannes Kritzinger’s 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary speech (Betabrief, April/ May 2007:9) in which he stated: “We are less commercial but more democratic than most, we talk longer before we decide but then we generally reach consensus. We care for each other and for our own, and *we have heart*” (P 9).

While I deal more specifically with the people issue in the next identity narrative: (“we are a family working to engineer a better future for all”), it is important to remember, as we discuss elements of business, that the value of people remained a constant priority in all that was done. This idea was promoted in the Chairman’s report of 06/07 by Hannes Kritzinger: “Beta will never chase profits above everything else, but it is nevertheless important for us to remain sufficiently profitable, because only then will we be able to pay market related salaries, spend enough on bursaries and training and contribute to society in the way we would like to” (2007:3).

Included in this identity narrative are the identity statements: “we are firstly engineers”, “we are professionals”, “we are a company that puts the client first” and “we are civic minded”, each aimed at addressing various elements of the broader narrative.

### 5.3.4.1 We are firstly engineers

The identity statements to this point have centred on the business of engineering and the reputation and high regard in which Beta was held in the industry. This identity statement was closely related to the previous ones in that it had to do with the core business. However, the difference lay within the primacy and focus of engineering, regardless of the profit generated or not. The emphasis of this identity statement was then on the importance of doing excellent work, even where business interests may have been compromised. Underpinning this facet of identity was a belief that the provision of services was crucial and almost a civic duty. This belief appeared to have its roots in the person of Beta Head and his passion for engineering. Sir Peter Ballenden, the Director of Public Works for Basutoland from 1953-1956, recalled approaching Beta Head to consult on the Lesotho Highlands Project: “Having met Beta Head many years previously, and being greatly impressed by his analytical mind and his knowledge of water affairs, I went to Cape Town to talk to him. He said he would be very glad to act as consulting engineer to Basutoland. When I told him that I hadn’t any money to pay him, he answered: ‘that isn’t important – I enjoy doing these things’” (Project review, 2007:8).

A similar sentiment emerged from the survey as well. Several participants emphasised the importance of the engineering work and its quality, with the profit motivation associated with business taking second place, as described in the next extract where Beta was seen as a: “large family environment to provide excellent service to valued clients. Staff were valued as the important means to serve the client. Systems were viewed as the requirement to facilitate higher achievement and efforts were made to prevent it from burdening the service delivery. Service excellence was the highest priority. We were possibly *in our conduct firstly engineers and business was a close second*” (P 121). In the next quotation, the participant emphasised the importance of loving what you do, suggesting a balance between being profitable and maintaining a pleasant work environment: “The organization was a home for those who loved what they do. Excellence was valued. Above all people were acknowledged and respected. I believe that we achieved running a viable business where most people enjoyed what they were doing. There was a balance between being a profitable business and creating a pleasant work environment” (P 135).

In addition, participants highlighted the importance of reputation rather than profit as suggested by participant 95 who saw Beta as: “focussed on long term growth and protecting the reputation of the firm rather than chasing short term profit”. This meant that clients were provided with a high level

product: “Very very thorough. Often did more than we needed to and didn’t make money. Product driven and not profit driven” (P 93). Beta was repeatedly viewed as a company where technical excellence took precedence over profit: “Speaking with regard to the water division in Beta, Beta was a specialist company where technical excellence sometimes affected profitability” (P 102). In some instances, this even meant sacrificing profit: “Going beyond the call of duty. We would rather make a loss than provide an inferior product” (P 97) and “...high service levels provided not always providing adequate profit” (P 103). One participant summed up the relative importance of the bottom-line quite succinctly: “Although the bottom line still mattered in Beta, it was not the ISSUE” (P 97).

This view, which has its roots in the philosophy of its founder, is that income is a natural outcome of good quality work, and this was captured by one of the participants in the following extract: “Regarding income generation as a by-product of top quality work, but not the reason for work” (P 94). An overview of the firm, on its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, published in Civil Engineering News, attributed this view to the founder of the firm: “Beta Head believed that technical excellence was paramount and that good business was simply an outcome of good engineering” (June 2007: 8). This is an excellent example of the enduring influence of the founder in the identity of the firm.

#### **5.3.4.2 We are professionals**

Although the idea of being “professionals” was not distinctive to Beta, it was central to their identity as an engineering company. Its centrality was reflected in its occurrence as a response to almost all the categories of questions, and was used to describe values, culture, external stakeholder relationships, client relationships, leadership, reputation, successful staff, management systems, external stakeholder relationships, staff relationships, management style, leadership and emotional connections. It was also used in the context of a distinctive characteristic or motto for the organisation, as well as the question regarding what would be described at a cocktail party or on a plane. The term “professional” was assigned thirty-eight times and, as a code, professionalism was assigned nineteen times, mostly with regard to the company’s values and culture. These concepts were used as descriptors without any prompting, with regard to the company’s professionalism or lack thereof.

Beta’s culture was described as “an organisation in which staff were an important asset with whom open communications were important, professionalism and integrity were a way of life and team building was promoted. There was a sense of family and recognition of all staff” (P 138). Another participant described it as “being committed in providing excellent professional services to our clients

and are inspired by our people” (P 87). Finally, one participant referred to: “executing projects in a professional manner with due regard for the client’s requirements while operating with honesty and integrity” (P 127). In considering the idea of professionalism, the concept of integrity came to the fore, something that will be considered in the final identity narrative. This highlighted the inter-textual natures of narratives and reinforces their constructed nature, for purposes such as this thesis.

In devising a company motto, one respondent suggested “professional in all we did” (P 138), another recommending “professional and service-driven” (P 96), and yet another “professional in providing excellent service” (P 90). What was significant in these extracts was the consistent link with the other identity statements not only regarding the nature of the service, but also the professional dimension of the business. It was also significant in that the answers were in response to a general question, and not to one relating directly to service. Furthermore, they had to do with devising a motto, something that should ideally capture a central element of the company’s identity. In response to the question on the cocktail party / plane, a participant responded as follows: “Beta was a well known engineering company all over South Africa that offered very professional and experienced advice and service....” (P 82). In response to the same question, another participant mentioned the projects s/he was involved in, highlighting the supportive team of quality professionals: “Beta has been involved in major infrastructural planning and development in South Africa and Southern Africa over many years with significant contributions in the water, transportation, municipal and environmental fields. The Lesotho Highlands Project was a hallmark project in working cross-border and in major international consortia. Beta have a supportive team of quality professionals and it has been a special organisation to work for” (P 123).

External stakeholder relationships were also described as professional: “Relationships with external stakeholders are very professional and a good relationship has been formed with all clients” (P 82). However, on a slightly dissonant note, one participant suggested: “Professional, courteous, never condescending with few exceptions, honest and above bribery and reproach” (P 93), challenging a monolithic narrative of integrity, and suggesting contrasting positions or antagonisms (even though these were the exceptions) (Clark et al, 2009).

The idea of successful staff as embodying the identity of the firms was described as being professional: “Those that acted in a professional manner, interacted well with clients and were respected by their peers” (P 141), and were also seen as “people who were prepared to work hard, invest in themselves,

had a balanced outlook, had a good professional standing” (P 102). Reinforcing the idea mentioned in the previous identity statement about loving work, another participant linked both excellence in the discipline and fun at work, echoing something of Beta Head’s response when asked to consult on the Lesotho Highlands Project, quoted earlier: “Those who excelled in their chosen professional discipline and who had fun doing it” (P 123).

#### **5.3.4.3 We are a company that puts the client first**

While this is the first identity statement to address the issue of clients directly, the importance of clients is something that was suggested in several of the identity statements already discussed. As indicated, quotations that relate to this identity statement were drawn primarily in response to the questions on client service and client relations. However, many references to clients were made in response to other questions as well and, for this reason, it was considered to be a valid identity statement. The title of this identity statement is an adaptation of a response to the motto question, to which the participant responded: “Service excellence, together we put the client first” (P 121).

As with most businesses, clients are the foundation stone of success, and this was acknowledged by participant 112: “Consistently outstanding and one of the foundation stones of the success of Beta”. Long established client relations, which ensured a consistent stream of work, were perceived to be critical in ensuring success: “Exceptionally good in the case of our major clients. The long established relationships with senior client staff over many years have been very fruitful, resulting in a large number of appointments” (P 141). Another participant suggested that client relations were “a major component in the success of the firm. Previously, many projects had been given to the firm due in large part to the excellent relationships enjoyed between Beta Head and our clients” (P 112). Because the person used the term “previously”, suggesting a history, I am assuming the reference was to Beta, the man, highlighting again the importance of the founder in establishing the identity of the firm.

Furthermore, client relationships were viewed as valuable, and a source of satisfaction, as suggested by one participant: “To be guarded and cherished. My greatest satisfaction was building the relationship to the point where the client trusted us, would do all they could to have us as their consultants, and continuously came to us for advice” (P 126). This suggested not only a value for the company but also a source of individual identification, as the client came to rely on individual and collective expertise. This statement also revealed a mingling of personal and organisational identity.

In addition to the importance of client relationships to the company, participant 94 suggested they were equally important for the country: “Of critical importance, long established client relations based upon trust have been built with the major employer within the sector ie the Dept of Water and Environmental Affairs. Also several provincial and local government Departments rely on us for on going assistance in the execution of their line functions and without which the collapse in service delivery would be far more advanced than we know” (P 94). Another participant expressed a similar sentiment in which the company was viewed as an extension of the client’s own team: “Extremely important to maintain at a level where the client accepted you as an extension to his own team where he could rely on top quality professional work being delivered on time and as fair value” (P 136).

This type of relationship implies a significant degree of trust in the organisation and client relationships included this dimension, as suggested in the following two extracts: “Generally good with a high level of trust displayed” (P 123); and “Based on mutual respect and trust” (P 121). Finally, it was believed that clients felt safe with the firm: “A personal people-orientated company where staff were content and produced very good work for clients who appreciated the working relationships and felt ‘ safe’ with the firm” (P 112). One participant also mentioned the high levels of accountability that accompanied this trust relationship: “Excellent with high levels of accountability transferred to us” (P 140).

The company was viewed as delivering the best value service to clients: “giving the client fair value for money. Providing clients with sufficient information to allow them to know progress and cost implications. Providing opportunities for individuals to develop” (P 142). Thus fair value was viewed as empowering the client with sufficient information to understand the progress made, as well as its cost implications. Value services were also seen to include good advice. The company was believed to: “provide quality service to all clients large and small. Maintain good relationship with clients. Use experience in organization to provide the best advice to clients. Reward staff who perform well” (P 111).

References were made to excellence (P 85 / P 121), quality (P 142) and “providing a world class service to our clients” (P 106). “Going the extra mile” was mentioned nine times with regard to various dimensions of client service and relations. Client service was portrayed as “being very good and ... always ready to find solutions where required and going the extra mile” (P 87). This view was repeated in the statement that the company would “go the extra mile to exceed client expectations” (P 95).



Underpinning this aspect of identity was the culture that was described as: “People orientated, supportive, and going the extra mile to delight clients” (P 95). Finally, in response to the cocktail party / plane question, participant 95 described the company as follows: “I’ve always found Beta a very supportive company to work in where the focus is on providing the best solutions to clients and where cutting corners was not accepted. There is a very positive team spirit where people are prepared to go the extra mile to help colleagues that have deadlines to meet” (P 95). While supporting the idea of going the extra mile, this also highlighted the characteristic of being solution orientated (“we are purveyors of engineering expertise”), as well as being supportive (a theme found throughout the data).

Qualities associated with successful staff in the realm of client relations were described by one participant as follows: “In the technical domain, relatively sound (given their level) in (i) getting quality work done (ii) meeting deadlines within budgets (iii) interfacing well with clients, (iv) being a constructive and helpful presence in their work environment or in the wider firm, where appropriate” (P 143). It was thus believed that staff should have technical expertise as well as social skills to benefit both clients and colleagues.

In addition, staff were required to be able to market the firm and ensure its profitability, as indicated in the view that successful staff were “those who contributed to the growth of the firm; usually those who were skilful in marketing and selling” (P 77). Two more participants also mentioned the importance of profitability in the process of meeting client needs: “Meeting the needs of our clients whilst maintaining a sound viable business practice” (P 130) and “people who could meet client expectations while making a profit and enjoying what they did” (P 135). The importance of “enjoying work” echoes other statements already highlighted (and some still to be discussed), including those made by the founder. One participant remarked on this and indicated that this was a great opportunity: “...At Beta, so far as I could ascertain, clients knew we were in this business because we love it, and we had the great opportunity of making a good living and a profit from that which we so enjoy...” (P 126).

There were several dissonant voices which included the expression of doubts about the scope of offerings, as well as those that did not always meet program and budget requirements: “Technically sound, offering a full range of civil engineering services, but not offering the wider range of services that could have been beneficial. Service did sometimes meet the programme and budget requirements of the clients” (P 138). Some doubts were also expressed about client relations and two participants (P 105/P 115) suggested that these could improve without specifying exactly how. Client relations were

also described as “lacking adequate business management” (P 138) and were seen to be “in general good, but maybe we have not done enough to keep relationships going after completion of projects” (P 131).

#### **5.3.4.4 We are civic-minded**

The Chairman, Hannes Kritzinger, in his speech at Beta’s 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary function (Betabrief, April/May, 2007) highlighted five aspects the company should be proud of, and third on the list, after pride in their association with Beta Head and their reputation as “Beta” in the industry, he mentioned: “...we are proud of the contribution we have made to the development of our country and to the improvement of the quality of life of so many people and especially those living in our poorer communities.... The remarkable thing is that often on small projects where we are in direct contact with the people who will actually be drawing water from the standpipe, or who will be living in the 30m<sup>2</sup> RDP house, where we can see the gratitude with which they receive these services, and is where one gets the greatest satisfaction from being a civil engineer” (2007: 9).

The importance of making a difference in society is a theme that was evident in the survey responses as well. Three of the participants used this as the basis for a company motto, stating that “working together we can make a difference in meeting the needs of our society” (P 123). Another suggested that “sustainable solutions through integrated professional services in development and management of infrastructure, make a positive social and environmental impact” (P 116), and finally: another respondent stated that “we make a positive difference to the communities we work within...” (P 100). The fact that the outcome of the work for the communities involved was important to the company, suggested a civic-mindedness in their approach. One participant indicated that this was more than simply an approach, but actually a duty: “...Beta had profit targets but would take projects on that were not profit but actually our duty” (P 84), and would be carried out, even if unprofitable.

Other participants spoke of the part Beta had played in building the country, and the importance of their services, as water is a basic human need: “I would speak with pride of Beta and the valuable part they play in building the country” (P 81);, while another commented on the value of: “...providing voluntary value to the water sector, recognizing that water is a basic human need and an essential requirement for the sustainable future of mankind” (P 94). Another participant explained in more detail the type of work Beta was involved in as part of their contribution to water engineering as well as the field more generally: “...Beta was regarded as a source of expertise, always ready and willing to serve

for example on Steering Committees for Water Research Commission research projects and thus playing a leading role in determining the direction and usefulness of research within water in the country. Beta staff also serve on ISO inspection teams, assist the Green Scorpions in identifying illegal activities even providing expert testimony to the State Attorney's office on a voluntary basis. Beta staff serve as examiners for professional engineer registration and have enjoyed a reputation as a quality institution always willing to contribute knowledge, experience and skills to the sector and society as a whole" (P 94).

The latter part of the last extract also highlighted Beta's contribution to the profession as a whole, as a vehicle that aided society in general. This view was supported by another participant who indicated: "...the organisation supported and fostered development in community groups and was particularly proactive in initiatives to promote engineering and mathematics initiatives within community groups. The organization was always deeply involved with furthering the aims of the professional associations although they were not as supportive (at a corporate level) of environmental groups as they could have been" (P 103). One of the company's newsletters contained an article on Beta as an affiliate sponsor of "SA Wom Eng", a non-profit student-run organisation aimed at supporting women studying engineering and encouraging them to stay in the field (Betabrief, Aug/Sept 2007). Another article described the provision of engineering periodicals and magazines for high schools in Centurion (Betabrief, April/May 2006). While the latter was done to prevent these being thrown away, the value of these types of resources in underprivileged schools is significant, especially in a country where career guidance in many schools is minimal or non-existent, and exposure to a profession like engineering is critical.

In addition to uplifting the community through their professional work, there was considerable evidence of community involvement in other ways. The company newsletters included inserts of various community projects undertaken primarily by the larger offices. These included sponsoring members of a cricket team from underprivileged backgrounds (Centurion), sponsoring transportation costs for youngsters to attend a judo championship (Cape Town), collecting items of food on a "random act of kindness day" (247 items in 24 hours)(Cape Town), and sponsoring an underprivileged local primary school's sports day (Centurion). I include two extracts from these newsletters: "Empty buckets were given to Centurion's secretaries to distribute among their colleagues. The list of essentials was drafted and sent out to individuals to see what they were to buy. The response was overwhelming: people took up a challenge and bought groceries which resulted in 72 full buckets" (Betabrief, June

2008:11). A colleague wrote from Bloemfontein about her experience gathering money for shoes for forty-seven children with HIV/Aids in a shelter : “I waited for a fax with all the names and shoe sizes of the children from Lebone Land and, on Tuesday morning, it came through. I did a few small calculations to see how much money was needed and then went straight to Fanie van der Linde. He was very supportive and gave the first donation to kick-start events. He sent me around the office to get more donations and, within an hour and a half, I was back with 68% of the funds needed – all donated by twenty-five openhearted colleagues. Fanie was so impressed that he said the company would donate the rest. Thank you Beta!” (Betabrief, October 2008: 8).

The importance of civic duty, even at the cost of profit sometimes, was a distinctive feature of the Beta identity, and one that in the merger would come to the fore, especially as it was contrasted with the sharper business focus of Alpha (“We are business minded”) (personal communication).

### **5.3.5 We are family working to engineer a better future for all**

One of the clearest narratives emerging from this study was the family orientation that characterised Beta. As indicated, the title of this particular narrative’s wording was an adaptation of a organisational motto suggested by one of the participants: “A family working to engineer a better future for all” (P 144). The family theme was referred to in the company documentation as well, and Arnie Mohr, the managing director, in the last Betabrief (the Staff News and Information letter) before the merger, wrote as follows: “Beta has, from the day I first joined the Firm 30 years ago, been more than a place of work. It has been, and is, my home. And its people are my family. Indeed, the Beta family is one that I feel both proud and privileged to belong to. It is characterised by a fierce loyalty to the company and an uncompromising belief in our intrinsic value to our clients, society at large and each other” (2009:1).

While the family element played an important role in this narrative, the value of people, and the importance of integrity and honesty also played a role. Because of its broad scope, the extract below was difficult to place as part of one theme, but I have included it here as it set the scene for the narrative to come, as well as echoing identity elements already discussed. *“The culture was determined by the values mentioned above\* (the participant listed: ‘We loved our work’, ‘We prized, trusted and empowered our people’, ‘Integrity as values’). We loved our work, and strove to be the best and to deliver the best for our clients. Mixed in with this was the high esteem and respect for our colleagues and their whole life stories. Our emphasis was not so much on making a profit. Not that this was unimportant and neglected. Rather our focus was on excellence, and because of this we were known by*

*our clients as the best in our field, were trusted and prized by them, and we were continuously profitable and busy. Importantly, in valuing our people, we trusted them. This was reflected in a flat organisational structure, wherein very few decisions and policies were centrally imposed. In some instances this may have appeared as a lack of organisation; but I found it to be our strength, as it brought out the best, the maturity, and the resourcefulness of our people. Our value of integrity was not just in the context of honesty, which is clearly imperative. We valued the wholeness it speaks of. We had considered and knew what was important to us, and we actively lived out these things each day in harmony with our beliefs. They were not mere words written somewhere on an office wall” (P 126).*

The narrative included the identity statements “we are a family”, with sub-theme of “we are an ethical respectable family”, “we are a company that values our people” and “we are focused on the development of our staff”.

### **5.3.5.1 We are a family**

The metaphor of the Beta “family” was perhaps the clearest identity statement in the data. I have pruned the number of quotations slightly but what remains will nevertheless give an indication of the strength of this particular identity orientation.

Participants described the company and aspects thereof as “family” (twenty-four times), “almost family” (P 92), “a family organisation” (P 80), “happy family” (P 110), “family orientated” (P 91), “close knit family” (P 116), “family type environment” (P 111), “a family culture” (P 99), “family spirit” (P 140), “a family touch” (P 105), “sense of family” (P 109 / P 138), “an extension to the family” (P 136), “family connection” (P 123), family atmosphere” (P107) and “family and my life” (P 134).

The participants identified with this sense of family and it was part of what drew them to the organisation, making Beta an employer of choice. It was regarded as being: “like a family. It was really nice to work for Beta. Being there for more than 10 years shows that the company was excellent. I never thought of leaving the company” (P 83) the company was viewed as: “always striving for perfection.... and achieving it. Loyalty amongst the staff and a sense of “family” was one of the key factors that made Beta an employer of choice” (P 81). One participant highlighted the relational aspect of being “a family”: “...we worked hard but also had time to relax and enjoy each others company and we have been like a big family in our branch” (P 87), while another highlighted the support offered by

the organisational family seeing Beta as: “a family who supported each other at all times” (P 142). One staff member described “belonging” to the firm which they saw as “caring and homely. One was made to feel to belong in the firm such that you perform not to impress the boss but because you are doing it for the company (which is part of your family in a sense)” (P 105). Here a particular aspect of family was highlighted and that was the feeling of belonging, an important dimension of work identity and identification with the organisation (Kreiner et al, 2006; Saayman & Crafford, 2011). From a management point of view, this was extremely valuable, as the feeling of belonging reaps its own benefits in terms of performance as the extract in the introduction also pointed out. The importance and benefit of the family metaphor as a means of achieving cohesion and performance will be discussed in Chapter 7 in more detail.

In addition to the metaphor of family, staff members also used the concept of “home” to describe the organisation and their perceptions of it. Participants referred to Beta as “an organization that felt like home” (P 92), “always feeling at home” (P 83) and “it was my second home” (P 135). One participant suggested as a motto: “Let our people feel at home and express themselves with their work” (P 97). One employee explained that the company had been good and supportive to him / her, and this had created a feeling of “home”: “Beta has been very good to me since I started as an employee. They have been very supportive and positive in me being a part of the organization and that has made me feel at home and made it easy to adjust to the new environment” (P 82). Two participants went so far as to describe the organisation as “home away from home”, indicating a very close bond with the company: “We felt like people cared and did not only come to work to work but because it was fun. Beta was..... theirs (sic) no better way to describe it than home away from home” (P 79). Employees felt that “during working hours it was acceptable to have a chat and crack a joke or two with a colleague, a lot of laughter took place. It was home away from home - help was readily available. Everyone had time to assist you in fulfilling a task. Work was taken seriously but so was interacting with one another. It was easy to speak to directors or associates - one even played pool with them. Socials were fantastic – we loved it – young and old - all departments interacted with one another. I knew almost all and we consisted of approximately 250 staff” (P 79). The picture that was painted was one of work and fun, in an environment that was social, relationship-orientated and supportive. No wonder that two participants expressed regret at the loss of the company and nostalgia for the past (Brown & Humphreys, 2002) seen in: “I used to work for a company, always feeling at home. If there was a second chance, I wouldn’t hesitate going back. The management, staff and generally all the colleagues were like family” (P 83), and “I consider myself most fortunate to have been part of the Beta family,

and while I recognise the need for the company to grow, I am profoundly sad to see it disappear into the past” (P 81).

Two participants who described the organisation as a family, highlighted that there were exceptions or “lapses” in the promotion of the family ethos, either based on location or as the other participant indicated, “high level management”: Beta was seen as “committed to a democratic South Africa; strong in responding to the Firm’s strategic challenges; generally striving to maintain a “Family” ethos amongst employees – although of course, there were lapses occasionally or in specific locations, where local leadership were not consistently engaged in facilitating a “lekker”<sup>14</sup> working environment for staff” (P 143) and also as “a wonderful experience, open, honest, based on trust and integrity, respect for each other, technical knowledge and ability, promoting a family culture (this is for our department, not applicable to high level management)” (P 99). These dissonant voices remind us that even where a narrative or discourse may be dominant, it is rarely (if ever) monolithic.

#### *5.3.5.1.1 We are an ethical, respectable family*

An element I have included with the family metaphor is the value orientation, as at least three of the participants referred to both the ethical dimension and the family within the same context. The first described the organisation as “my second home” in which “...in most areas the values of an ethical respectable family was (sic) still prevalent” (P 135). Another participant linked the “family business” culture with delivering professional, best value as well as ethical service: “Highly professional, ethical and delivering the best value service to clients while retaining ‘the family business’ culture” (P 136). Finally, participant 138 described the organisation as one in which “professionalism and integrity were a way of life” and in which “a sense of family prevailed”: “an organization in which staff were an important asset with whom open communication were (sic) important, professionalism and integrity were a way of life and team building was promoted. There was a sense of family and recognition of all staff” (P 138).

The word “honest” was coded twelve times throughout, with “honesty” coded nine times as a value. The word “integrity” was coded thirty-six times primarily as a value, as were the words “ethical and honesty” (P 124), as well as “ethical practices” (P 100), “ethics” (P 122) and “business ethics” (P 131).

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<sup>14</sup> “lekker” is an Afrikaans word that is officially translated as “nice” or “pleasant” in English but in colloquial terms can mean anything from tasty food to sexy or hot. “Nice” cannot really do justice to the richness associated with “lekker” ([www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com) / [forum.wordreference.com](http://forum.wordreference.com), downloaded 20/11/13).

The dimension of ethics has been discussed as part of family but what is important is that it was linked to narratives already discussed, namely in connection with technical excellence: “One of high ethical standards, a company that is recognized for its technical excellence” (P 99), professionalism: “striving to provide an excellent professional service acting always in an ethical manner” (P 129); and “they were professional and operated with integrity” (P 142); and were seen as being leaders in the field of engineering: “a privilege to have been able to work for and with such leaders in the field of engineering while always maintaining an unwavering level of honesty and integrity and understanding of staff needs” (P 136). Honesty and ethical practices were also linked to client service: Beta was seen as “a firm with uncompromising ethics offering the highest quality, while providing appropriate, engineering services at fair value to the client” (P 136). In addition to the latter which was an extract from the survey, Hannes Kritzinger, the Chairman in his 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary speech included the following: “We are only human, and we do make mistakes, and I know I should not be admitting to this, but yes, we do actually “stuff up” now and then. But when we do, we do not walk away from the problem and we do not try to convince our Client that it isn’t really a problem. Instead we get stuck in and sort it out” (Betabrief, April/ May 2007:9). Given that the speech was made at a client function, it represented a fair degree of honesty and humility and suggested that the leadership may have driven this dimension of identity. An extract from the data suggested that in some cases, this might have been so: “There were many men and women whose lives displayed an integrity that was inspiring. There were obvious exceptions, but generally, the leaders lived lives that were worth following” (P 126).

### **5.3.5.2 We are a company that values our people**

As indicated in the Construction of the Narrative (Appendix A), this identity statement (dissonant voices aside) included the importance of people, the element of care of employees, respect for all, and the equal treatment of people.

In the survey, “People” (P 92 /P 112 /P 113), “people first” (P 84) and “people- based organisation” (P 109) were used to describe values. “People came first” was also stated as a value and described as follows: “People definitely came first; both the Co towards its employees and very much employees towards each other” (P 93). “People- orientated” was used three times to describe the values (P 120 / P 132 / P 139), and as part of a description of both culture and a proposed motto. Another participant referred to “a people-orientated company that went about things in an inclusive way, producing quality work that was always appreciated by our clients” (P 112). While supporting the idea of a people



orientation, it also linked these to previous identity statements, seen in “we are a company that put clients first” and “we are reputable purveyors of engineering expertise”. Finally, with regard to people orientation, one participant described the culture as: “a people-orientated company that went about things in an inclusive way, producing quality work that was always appreciated by our clients” (P 112), which also linked to the identity statement: “We are reputable purveyors of engineering expertise”. This highlighted the fact that facets of identity are interlinked and in fact dependent on each other. Quality work is meaningless without the clients for whom it is produced, and a people orientation without the shared focus of work, is equally futile.

One participant linked the idea of being personal and people- orientated and suggested the following as a proposed motto for the company: “A personal people-orientated company where staff were content and produced very good work for clients who appreciated the working relationships and felt ‘safe’ with the firm” (P 112). Another, alluding to the reputation and name of the company, highlighted the importance of people as well because of Beta’s: “long standing reputation and name. Not just business focused, people are important too” (P 92).

Finally, one participant simply referred to “people driven practice” (P 139) as a possible motto. The fact that people were regarded as important made an impact on employees who felt valued: “I appreciated the way people came first, that made me feel valued” (P 112) and “I always felt valued as part of Beta not only the unit. I felt our directors were approachable. We always worked hard as a team no matter what level you are at you felt valued” (P 84). While not referring to value per se, one participant expressed a similar sentiment in his / her description of leadership, which s/he saw as: “Consideration for the being of people. Sometimes it could be viewed as too tolerant on mediocrity and slow to implement change” (P 135), highlighting the possible downside (from a business point of view) of this type of orientation.

In addition to the importance of people, participants mentioned care for people. “Caring” was mentioned fourteen times by eight participants and in response to questions on values, staff relations, management style and management-employee relations, the cocktail party / plane, motto, leadership and successful staff. I include two of these here: in describing staff relations, one participant mentioned the following: “Generally there was an atmosphere of team work and co-operation amongst all staff on a work level, as well as a sense of caring on a personal level” (P 81). In response to the cocktail party / plane question, one participant mentioned: “A great engineering firm, with excellent engineers.

Traditional, conservative but dynamic in its approach to work. Open and caring and people centred” (P 105). In this particular response, technical excellence was combined with being caring and people centred, as echoed in the next extract as well which saw Beta’s ethos as: “The strive (sic) for technical excellence with a strong focus on business ethics, caring for staff and building internal relationships based on trust and integrity with all working together to the benefit of the department” (P 86). In this extract there was mention of integrity as well, highlighted in “we are an ethical respectable family”.

Furthermore, the element of care extended beyond the work environment and manifested in practical ways. One participant, in response to the question on emotional connection described the care and support she received from fellow employees on being diagnosed with cancer, and this as a relatively “new” staff member: “I am still rather emotional about my emotional connection to Beta. I worked for Beta under a year when diagnosed with cancer and had to be off work for some time. The support, hospital visits from directors and fellow staff members renewed my faith in companies. Beta did not just say they valued their staff they actually did” (P 84). In this extract, she explained how the care for people, manifested by fellow staff members, led to a changed view of organisations and resulted in a deep emotional connection with Beta. In valuing people, allowance was made for their whole selves: they were treated holistically in both their professional and private capacities, and the response was a strong identification with the organisation. There was, however, a downside of such consideration, and, as one participant suggested, this could be misinterpreted as being too tolerant and slow to act, as explained in the next extract: *“Having consideration for the being of people. Sometimes it could be viewed as too tolerant on mediocrity and slow to implement change (P 135.)*

In keeping with the focus on people, aspects relating to respect were also mentioned several times. Respect was referred to four times to describe aspects such as management style, management-employee relations, values and a possible motto. In addition, the following were also suggested as values: “Respect for employees and clients” (P 135), “respect for others” (P 143) and “respect for staff” (P 138). The company’s culture was described as having “respect for all”, seen in: “hard work, good working conditions and respect for all as human beings with problems, fears, aspirations etc” (P 109). This idea was supported by another participant, who stated: “Everyone treated each other with respect and communication was very good between everyone. Concerns were easily expressed and dealt with as soon as possible” (P 82).

Placing value on people had its own rewards, in terms of loyalty and commitment, and thus made business

sense: “I felt loyal and committed to Beta, because Beta accommodated me and recognised my needs and made allowances for my circumstances as a result I was prepared to go beyond the 8hr work day and contribute my skills, knowledge, imagination and full mental and psychological resources to the benefit of the company” (P 94) This was expressed by one participant in the following way: “Placing people above systems and raw business will produce its own results in allegiance, productivity and profitability, recognizing that our staff is our most important asset, with due recognition and rewards to those who perform to their best. The recognition of spouse and family as key motivators thread through the company’s DNA” (P 125). The underlying assumption here was that when people felt valued, they automatically responded in ways that enhanced commitment, productivity and profitability. A similar sentiment was echoed in the extract I quoted at the introduction to this narrative, where the respondent explained how valuing people as one aspect of a successful business led to particular ways of structuring the organisation and its practices which in turn elicited the best in people, bringing out their maturity and resourcefulness. This is characteristic of knowledge intensive companies that rely on the expertise and knowledge of staff and are thus considered more important than systems, structures, technologies and products (Alvesson, 2001).

However, like most identity statements, the idea of valuing people was also challenged, and this appeared to be in the area of discrimination against non-white employees. The participant who raised this issue acknowledged the warm relationships that were present but highlighted that there were exceptions and some employees made their non-white colleagues feel less than welcome: “Very warm in most cases, with some exceptions of people who were really cold towards the other non-white groups and/or undermining their intelligence” (P 97) and “Good although some people from non-white groups sometimes feel out of place” (P 97).

### **5.3.5.3 We are focused on the development of our staff**

One particular manifestation of the value of people was the emphasis placed on their development. Given that the organisation aimed at providing professional services, and that professions are usually characterised by a distinct path of training, professional registration and socialisation, this would appear to be a necessary feature of identity, and thus statements like “We are professionals” constitute a central element in identity.

In the survey participants referred to various aspects of development as values, namely “development of staff” (P 94), “development of the individual” (P 142), “developmental” (P 100) and “continued

professional development” (P 102). More concretely, one participant suggested the company had an “above average technical library” (P 103).

Having a vast amount of expertise (highlighted for example in the identity statement “We are purveyors of engineering expertise”) provides a solid basis from which development can take place, as indicated in the extract that follows: “My heritage organization, although comparatively large, always had a family feel and ethos. One felt part of the organization and, if you were loyal to it, it would be loyal to you. It was ahead of its time in terms of “equal opportunity” in that, even prior to 1994, all employees were treated equally within the framework of the country’s laws of the time. The organization had experts in almost all fields of its endeavours who were willing to impart their knowledge to those who were less experienced. Where at all possible, the organisation always went out of its way to try and accommodate an employee’s particular wishes such as office transfers, engineering discipline department changes etc.” (P 103). This obviously had an effect on at least, some employees, and one participant highlighted the resulting loyalty and pride: “Beta was a very supportive employer providing a stable, pleasant and challenging working environment with excellent opportunities of development. This inspires loyalty and pride that I would like to take forward into the merged entity” (P 120).

Participants highlighted the opportunities for growth, especially for those starting out in the profession, and their view was that Beta was a: “wonderful place, gave me all opportunities to travel, to grow and become a good engineering geologist. Many excellent memories” (P 93), and “it was a great company to work for. Especially for a young graduate who found it easy to approach people in the company and ask for advice and guidance in career matters as well as technical matters. I learnt a lot from my time there and would never have considered leaving the company prior to the merger” (P 144). In addition to professional growth, participants also highlighted the freedom people were given to develop within their own area without excessive managerial control: “The company gave you responsibility and encouraged commitment to doing the job well, enhancing the image of the company, and treating one another fairly and with respect. You are not ‘watched’ and monitored continually, but had a line manager or superior to whom you could go to ask for guidance etc” (P 93).

While the participants highlighted the benefits for themselves, they were aware that this ultimately benefitted the company as well, with one suggesting that development improved performance, and helped to maintain high levels of motivation and loyalty: “Development of each individual to attain

their best performance, maintain high levels of motivation and consequently loyalty to the company” (P 94). Another participant suggested that without its staff, the company “would be nothing”: “Staff are important, how can we help them to develop to their full potential to benefit both the company and themselves. The company would be nothing without them” (P 142). One participant made a direct link between employees and clients, suggesting that development enabled employees to better serve their clients: “Beta empowers and serves its employees to better serve you” (P 110). While development was a crucial part of identity, this appeared to serve a very specific purpose and as Brown (2004) points out, learning and development play an important role in controlling work identity. We can thus assume that this dimension of organisational identity serves a definite control function.

In line with the importance of development, successful staff were described as those who were willing to develop others. Specific aspects that were mentioned, were giving advice: “Members of staff who are willing to give advice when needed concerning work as well as people who are a pleasure to work with in the office” (P 82); providing guidance and support: “those that developed to their full potential and provided guidance and support to more junior staff” (P 142); and recognising weaknesses and helping people overcome these: “One who works under a good boss who recognizes weaknesses and strengths of a staff member and also who will now be able to give direction or overcome the staff member’s weaknesses” (P 116). In addition, successful staff were those who played a role in their own development, as indicated by the following participant: “Motivated, loyal, fulfilled, self-determining their own development and facilitated in every way by fellow staff as well as the company” (P 94).

There were two extracts which challenged the dominant narrative concerning development, though these emerged from a single participant who described Beta’s values in the following way: “There was only limited room for growth” (P 118) and “its always out to sabotage young candidate technicians” (P 118).

#### **5.4 Concluding remarks**

A detailed discussion of the implications of these organisational identity narratives is provided in Chapter 7. By way of concluding this chapter, I would like to make a few observations regarding organisational identity.

In each of the heritage organisations, identity was described around three core elements or narratives, each of which was composed of related identity statements which, together, comprised the larger

narrative. In Alpha, the narratives centred on industry leadership, the organisation comprising client-focused professionals and the company being orientated towards people and their needs. In Beta, the narratives centred on the heritage associated with the provision of engineering services; the importance of “having a heart” as an engineering company; and, finally, the importance of “family” as a binding mechanism in improving engineering services.

By capturing organisational identity in related identity statements, I have attempted to capture the multiple facets associated with the heritage organisations’ identities. These facets allow members freedom of interpretation, and flexibility in projecting a perspective of organisational identity, and reflect the multiplicity associated with the concept (Albert et al, 2000; Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998). Nevertheless, the identity statements made sense when grouped in over arching identity narratives, and the latter acted as binding mechanisms, supporting the notion of structural centrality identified by Corley et al (2006).

The first identity narrative in both organisations centered on the organisation standing out in some way within the industry though this was expressed various ways. In Alpha, I used the idea of an industry leader to capture an organisation with an excellent reputation, a strong business focus and always moving forward to retain this position. All these various facets of identity worked together to support the notion of being an industry leader. In Beta, the “grand old lady narrative” captured the heritage associated with the organisation, and the standing they enjoyed in the market, particularly in the field of water engineering.

The second identity narrative captured the centrality of the engineering profession in both organisations. In Alpha, the importance of being professional was always in relation to the strong business focus of the previous narrative, and included an element of delivering quality services to clients and other important stakeholders. In Beta this was captured as “the consulting engineers with a heart” as there was a clear focus on being firstly engineers, with a close client relationships and a strong sense of civic duty. For both firms, being professionals was central to organisational identity from a depth perspective, and a deeply rooted part of identity (Corley et al, 2006). It was also central from a structural perspective, in the sense that if you were to remove professionalism as a factor, many other elements would also fall away (Corley et al, 2006).

The third organisational identity narrative dealt with beliefs about people and the values around which behaviour in the organisations was organised. In Alpha, the final identity narrative centered on the company as caring for people in a warm, friendly environment and demonstrating a strong value

orientation. In Beta, the metaphor of the family was a central factor around which much of the organisation centered, with a strong value placed on people, and their development. The concept of ethical behaviour and value orientation was also placed in the context of the family. The family narrative in Beta, played a central role from a depth perspective, and was a deeply rooted part of organisational identity (Corley et al, 2006).

## CHAPTER 6: REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF AN INTERNET-BASED ORGANISATION IDENTITY SURVEY

### 6.1 Introduction

The aim of the following discussion is to reflect on the effectiveness of the web-based qualitative survey as a means of accessing organisational identity. In doing so, I will discuss the design and analysis of the survey, as well as the usefulness of the different questions in accessing dimensions of organisational identity. I will also consider juxtapositions in perspectives of organisational identity, in the light of the type of knowledge generated by the qualitative survey. Finally, I reflect on the usefulness of the internet-based format of the questionnaire, as well as the limitations of the design.

### 6.2 Reflecting on the Qualitative Survey Design

After reviewing the organisational identity literature in Chapter 2, I developed a conceptual framework that included the sense-giving institutional claims of the organisation as social actor, as well as the sense-making processes of organisational members as they construct meaning around these and other important elements of the organisation. Because organisational identity is a broad and often nebulous concept, I decided to “operationally define” it by asking for descriptions (in members’ own words) of commonly accepted organisational dimensions, as well as sketching a few scenarios to which participants could respond. The logic underlying this decision was that organisational identity underpins various elements of organisational life, and should emerge as common “themes” or “patterns”, traversing these facets. The dimensions on which I drew were informed by previous studies (Brickson, 2005; Empson, 2004; Alvesson & Empson, 2008) as well as elements typically found in organisational literature. Questions centred around aspects such as values and culture, responses to change, client service and relationships, views on leadership, management styles and systems, and ideas of successful staff and staff relations. In this process, I reasoned *deductively*, working from a conceptual framework to highlight dimensions considered critical to organisational identity. In no way were formal identity claims included as part of the questions, as I did not want to influence responses, but rather to give members the freedom to respond in a manner of their choice.

These dimensions were included in open-ended questions in an internet-based qualitative survey, and participants from two newly-merged organisations were asked to respond to questions regarding various dimensions of their heritage organisation. In responding to the questions, participants tapped into words, phrases, metaphors and discourses in which, in their view, the organisation’s identity was located. While



some elaborated on the meanings of words or descriptions, others simply invoked a location within a classification scheme (Albert & Whetten, 1985). The responses included a wide-ranging assortment of statements of ideology, management philosophy and beliefs, culture, values and practices as well as the recollection of meaningful experiences and brief anecdotes (Albert & Whetten, 1985). The responses were at times emotionally loaded, indicating a fairly intense emotional identification with the organisation. I include examples in the discussion of the question regarding emotional connection. These responses were chosen by the participants on this occasion, and are assumed to be neither perfect nor “completely elaborated and defined” (Albert & Whetten, 1985:267). By allowing participants to describe the organisation in their own terms, the qualitative survey allowed for the participants’ perspectives in describing their organisation’s identity. Furthermore, the qualitative survey was effective in accessing a diverse range of members’ responses, making it possible to capture the ambiguity, multiplicity and plurivocality associated with organisational identity (Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998; Parker, 1992).

The statements were made by internal participants in response to a particular intervention, in this instance an online survey aimed at gathering information about their heritage organisation. The survey was conducted approximately three months after the merger and, given the salience of identity in the face of a threat, the responses are assumed to serve particular purposes, aimed at informing, as much as at persuading and influencing (Brown, 2006; Coupland & Brown, 2004; Anataki & Widdicombe, 1998). The responses can thus be regarded as a political-strategic act (Albert & Whetten, 1985) and serve as “political action, moral story telling and identity work”, as participants produce and reproduce “favourable truths”, or “institutionalized standard talk about a specific theme” (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007:1269).

Written after a merger, many participants’ responses were an exercise in nostalgia, allowing them to recall the positives of their heritage organisation, thus providing emotional support, and evoking feelings of pride and affiliation (Brown & Humphreys, 2002). While there were exceptions, most participants took the opportunity to reaffirm how valuable and meaningful their heritage organisation was to them, in addition to providing insights into organisational identity. Thus, far from being static, the responses to the survey can be regarded “as sites of action” (Coupland & Brown, 2004:1239) which involve an exchange (of sorts) between the researcher and participant – the researcher posing questions via an internet-based survey, and the participant engaging in the act of constructing a version of his or her organisation.

The survey responses enabled me to consider both individual and collective meaning-making and identification. Responses to the survey included descriptions of organisational characteristics assumed to be describing elements of organisational identity (Corley et al, 2006). Furthermore, some of the responses could be described as individuals' organisationally- based identity as members expressed their connection with the organisation (Harquail, 2005; in Corley et al, 2006). For example: "As the saying goes - we are connected to the hip! - I am extremely proud of being an employee of Alpha" (P 6). Finally, there were responses which could be defined as organisational identification, as members explained the reasons for their identification with the organisation (Corley et al, 2006). For example: "The company I work for is very important and especially its values and what it stands for and I have always been proud to work for Alpha" (P 5).

Responding to various questions about the organisation also gave me the opportunity to understand that identification is seldom complete and even in the case of employees who identified positively with many elements of the organisation, there were nevertheless aspects with which they did not identify. It allowed for diverse views and experiences to be voiced, given that employees, experience organisational identity differently, depending on their own personal circumstances as well as their unique organisational context. For example, an element that came to the fore in one of the heritage organisations was that of transformation. While one of the formal identity claims, expressed through a statement of values, was "We celebrate our diversity as well as the exceptional talents and skills among us", one of the participants suggested that this was certainly not embraced and demonstrated by all organisational members. He described the organisation as "Lilly (sic) white, with some people still clinging to their previous rights. An organisation trying to transform but finding it difficult in the new era, with some people who have embraced the spirit of the new era wholeheartedly..." (P 97).

### **6.3 Reflecting on the analysis process**

Answers to questions ranged from one word to lengthy paragraphs, the longest being 243 words. Despite the fact that many answers were only one word, these gave me a sense of where participants positioned their organisation with regard to various dimensions, which were then often described in greater detail in the other questions.

From these words, phrases, and metaphors locating each organisation, and from supporting documentation, I worked retroductively to develop second-order categories and broad themes, descriptive

of each heritage organisation. These descriptors lie at varying levels of abstraction. I have termed these “identity statements” and “identity narratives”. By developing identity narratives, I was able to capture broad trends in identity, which are then described in more detail in each of the identity statements. Furthermore, using identity statements enabled me to capture the various elements of identity as suggested by the participants, thus reflecting the diversity in these features. In this way, I tried to capture the multiplicity and complexity associated with identity, even though discernable meta-themes were present (Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998; Parker, 1992). The identity narratives provided coherence and a context for similar but distinct identity statements. Together, they provide a set of “crucial qualitative distinctions” (Taylor, 1989:19) describing each heritage organisation.

While in and of themselves, the responses to the survey were mere narrative fragments, they gained meaning when placed in the context of other fragments as well as within the organisational documentation (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Ochs, 1997). Here the temporal and social contexts of the fragments were of particular importance. From a temporal perspective, a merger had recently taken place and since awareness of identity is triggered in times of crisis (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996), this would have been a salient issue for participants at the time. I suspect the relative richness of the data and the length of some responses was in part due to this fact. The social context of the narrative fragments was primarily the organisation, and words and phrases gained meaning in the context of the general data set. This was possible because the study was focused on one environment and there was a common context. This would not have been possible in, for example, a survey conducted on the general population without a common context. This is in contrast to standard survey designs, which are aimed at decontextualising respondents. In fact, it is because the context is not taken into account when analysing the results, that standardisation and quantification is possible in such designs. In contrast to the survey’s tendency to decontextualise, ethnographic studies and case studies are context-sensitive and data generated through these designs must be understood within the respondents. The emphasis on context means that the qualitative survey on this dimension is located closer to qualitative, ethnographic studies than the standard sample survey.

Given the nature of data collection, the data set was relatively rich. While it cannot be compared with a “thick description” gained in case study or ethnographic research, the internet-based survey proved valuable in gathering data about the organisation’s identity, from a wider range of members, drawn from all levels of the organisation and representing various geographical locations. This is significant for organisations that are geographically dispersed, and where accessing people from various locations can prove challenging and / or costly. Working with the assumption that all members of the organisation

potentially influence organisational identity, the internet-based survey ensures access to a broad range of participants and from all levels of the organisation. In this way, many participants were given a “voice” with which to express their views of organisational identity.

In the ensuing organisational identity narratives, I paid particular attention to what I have termed “dissonant” voices, to ensure that all participants were given the right of expression. By “dissonant” voices I mean those statements that contradicted or provided an alternative view to the dominant identity narrative or statement, and various types of dissonant voices could be identified. First, there were a few dissonant voices that contradicted the dominant narrative outright. For example, in the identity statement “We are a company that cares for its people” a dominant narrative emerged suggesting that the management style was collaborative and inclusive, but one participant suggested otherwise, indicating rather that the management style was “Old fashioned. It has ‘the boss is always right’ attitude. There is transparency between seniors and I feel juniors are distanced way apart” (P 46). Here the participant voiced a distinctly different view of identity, suggesting distance, rather than inclusivity, and an autocratic rather than collaborative approach. This response was then included as a dissonant voice.

Second, there were those dissonant voices that highlighted an element of disagreement with the dominant narrative, but this could be traced to a specific reason. For example, the level of the participant in the organisation may influence the salience of a particular dimension, suggesting an issue of relevance rather than a negation of this element of identity. For example, in the narrative: “We are committed to working with relevant stakeholders”, two participants suggested that these relationships were non-existent but indicated that this was related to his or her level in the organisation: “non-existent at my level” (P 63). Another voiced a similar idea and suggested this was applicable at the level of director: “Non existent as only directors are involved” (P 33). This highlights the role of job level or place in the hierarchy in the perception of organisational identity, a finding that is consistent with the work of Corley (2004).

Finally, I included as dissonant voices those participants who supported the dominant narrative, but pointed to contextual factors influencing the operation of the identity statement in particular situations. For example, in the identity statement: “We are the biggest and best but tend to be bureaucratic” one of the participants suggested that while he would certainly recommend Alpha’s services, he would ensure the prospective client was referred to “the right person” in order to get the best service. Here the

dissonant voice acted as a qualifier to the broad identity statement: “I would certainly give some background of Alpha and would recommend the company for any consulting services to be rendered as I am proud to be part of the company, however I believe we are in a rebuilding phase and not all employees are up to standard as yet, so I would certainly refer him to the right person to get joy out of Alpha. I honestly believe some individuals are not on the level as needed be regarding their position” (P 51).

#### **6.4 Reflecting on the value of the questions**

Not all the questions were equally useful in accessing identity, some proving particularly helpful, and others less so. Responses to the question on values were typically restricted to one-word answers, though this nevertheless gave me a good idea of what each participant viewed as critical in their heritage organisation, and these were clarified in responses to other questions. The question on culture was particularly useful as many participants provided a brief description – typically a sentence or two describing their organisation, usually picking up key issues. The question regarding successful staff and staff relations was also particularly valuable in clarifying identity dimensions, as there was a close relationship between the description of the organisation and the qualities or characteristics that were required by staff to achieve these. This was in line with expectations, as exemplary members of groups usually represent the core beliefs, attitudes, feelings and behaviour of their group (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Questions related to clients and stakeholders also proved helpful in understanding identity and led to some very surprising answers, for example: “strangers we needed to establish relationships with to become friends” (Clients: P 26) and “full of priceless experiences” (Stakeholders: P 44). These unusual responses to what can be considered a “normal” part of organisational life, led to these elements being included as facets of identity. The questions regarding management, leadership and management-staff relations were particularly relevant in understanding the dynamics surrounding employee relations, but also opened up the themes of development related to the professional environment. These questions also highlighted more than any others a mixed identification with these facets of the organisation. I attributed this to the fact that participants were from many different sections and thus reported to different managers. There is considerable diversity within personal management style and this meant that that some participants identified closely with the management style, while others did not.

Many participants compared their sections / departments both favourably and unfavourably with others, indicating that they had their own section in mind when answering the question. Others referred more

generally to the management and leadership style in the organisation as well as staff relations generally. There were thus different interpretations given to the meaning of “leadership”, “management style” and “employee relations”, some focusing on their immediate section, others on the organisation more broadly. Future versions of the questionnaire would need to clarify on which level participants should focus when answering the questions. In addition, the meaning of the terms “management” and “leadership” were interpreted in numerous different ways and would certainly benefit from more detailed clarification in future versions of the survey.

The question regarding differences was not perhaps as helpful as expected, as many participants responded as “unsure” or “don’t know”, or “very little difference”. Given that the organisations were chosen precisely for their similarity, this is perhaps understandable. Furthermore, it is likely that not all of them knew the other company well enough to comment in detail about differences. Nevertheless, some participants provided a very detailed “analysis” of the differences, which proved very informative, while others highlighted one or two aspects of difference. These were helpful in “checking” the differences that emerged when comparing the narratives. Interestingly, the question regarding management systems was particularly helpful in highlighting differences between the companies, even though this was hardly the intention. The reason was that Alpha’s strong business orientation was underpinned by generally excellent management systems, and the obvious difference in the systems reinforced the difference in business orientation.

The questions that were helpful in “getting to” identity were those related to what is distinctive about your organisation (company motto), emotional connection and the cocktail party / plane question. Several participants who had provided fairly short responses (usually a word or two) to the previous questions, often responded far more fully to the latter questions, writing a sentence or even a short paragraph. The question regarding what was distinctive about the organisation, gave participants the opportunity to highlight key issues they felt set their organisation apart, and was thus helpful in understanding the distinctiveness of the identity. It didn’t require knowledge of the other heritage organisation, so participants were able to respond more easily. Some went so far as developing a company motto, though these were in the minority, and often resorted to more formal identity statements.

The response to the question regarding emotional connection was revealing as it gave an indication of just how strongly members identified emotionally with their heritage organisation. Some indicated little or no emotional identification, for example: “No emotional bond to speak of” (P 21). This was often linked to

the merger that had taken place and the subsequent need to move on, as illustrated in the next extract: “Well it was nice to say I love going to work, however change is part of life and you cannot attach to (sic) much emotional value to an organisation” (P 79).

The data from both heritage organisations included responses indicating a deep and almost profound emotional connection with the organisation, and often included anecdotes and stories as to why this was so. I include two extracts below:

- “I have a deep emotional connection towards Alpha - I will always be grateful (sic) because they accepted me when I was in a difficult period in my life” (P 2).
- “I am still rather emotional about my emotional connection to Beta. I worked for Beta under a year when diagnosed with cancer and had to be off work for some time. The support, hospital visits from directors and fellow staff members renewed my faith in companies. Beta did not just say they valued their staff they actually did. Honesty also to me is something of great value, the management never lied or tried to beat around the bush, even if it is not what you wanted to hear at least you knew you could trust it” (P 84).

These were useful as they not only provided insight into the nature of the participants’ emotional connection with the organisation but also helped build a picture of the organisation’s identity more broadly as these were linked to responses from other questions.

This strong emotional connection to the organisation is in keeping with other researchers’ findings, for example Clark et al (2009) who found that the participants in their study, also in a technical and engineering environment, demonstrated a close emotional connection to their organisation. The question regarding what they would say to someone at a cocktail party or on a plane, was one of the most effective questions as this allowed members to reiterate issues, already mentioned, that were particularly salient to them, a summary of key factors, so to speak. However, in some instances, participants introduced completely new insights, with some using anecdotes to illustrate their responses. The following example is included to illustrate my point: 1. “My heritage organisation, although comparatively large, always had a family feel and ethos. One felt part of the organisation and, if you were loyal to it, it would be loyal to you. 2. It was ahead of its time in terms of ‘equal opportunity’ in that, even prior to 1994, all employees were treated equally within the framework of the country's laws of the time. 3. The organisation had experts in almost all fields of its endeavours who were always willing to impart their knowledge to those who were less experienced. 4. Where at all possible, the organisation always went out of its way to try

and accommodate an employee's particular wishes such as office transfers, engineering discipline department changes etc “ (P 103).

### 6.5 Reflecting on the use of the internet- based survey

The relative richness of the data generated by the open-ended questions of the survey is consistent with the findings of Simsek and Veiga (2001) who suggest that internet-based surveys provide a safe and anonymous context for gathering data and people are thus inclined to express themselves more openly. This certainly appeared to be the case, and many participants highlighted aspects of concern in their heritage organisation. This was particularly the case with the former Beta employees who expressed dissatisfaction about elements of their organisation or raised questions regarding the merger. The honesty of many responses led me to believe that the anonymity of the internet-based survey did provide a safe context for honest responses. I include several examples of these below, taken from respondents of both organisations:

- “I am leaving in three weeks time (resigned); my emotional attachment to Beta, a company that no longer exists was immense. It is a great pity that the merger did not take into account the Beta staff's feelings and how hard it would be to be pushed into Alpha, a company's who's culture is a pole apart (because that is what happened). I only found out after I resigned how much I was being underpaid, but this was not such an issue cos I was really happy!!” (p 93).
- Participant 118 described the following as the values of his heritage organisation:  
 “It was always out to sabotage young candidate technicians (sic)  
 There was only a limited room for growth  
 Always being told empty (sic) promises”.
- “Old fashioned. It has ‘the boss is always right’ attitude. There is transparency between seniors and I feel juniors are distanced way apart” (P 46).
- It is easy to ignore or bypass junior employees. Communication is only on higher levels and if any decision is questioned by junior level employees they are just ignored, cut out of the system, bypassed” (P 51).



Furthermore, the internet-based survey provided a context where power differences related to race, class and position are less visible, and thus of minimal impact (Shields, 2003). This is of particular relevance in South Africa, where the politics surrounding race are particularly sensitive. In addition, for participants who felt strongly about an issue, the open-ended question format allowed for fairly lengthy responses (Kierman et al, 2005), attributed to the ease of typing and the capacity to edit, made possible by the combination of open-ended questions and internet format. This is in keeping with the findings of Shields (2003) who received longer responses to an internet-based survey than the oral equivalent. Also consistent with her findings were the use of rich metaphors and at times the intense expression of emotion (Shields, 2003). This is significant given the importance of emotion in organisational identity (Albert et al, 1998).

The costs associated with the survey were minimal and expense was limited to the time of those involved in the study. This is consistent with the general view in the literature (Fleming & Bowden, 2009; Cook et al, 2000; Tourangeau et al, 2004; Kaplowitz et al, 2004; Schleyer & Forrest, 2000; Shields, 2003; Smith et al, 2007; Wyatt, 2000; Simsek & Veiga, 2001; Blank, 2008). Finally the survey was developed in a relatively short period of time, and the collection of data was quick and easy (Fleming & Bowden, 2009; Simsek & Veiga, 2001; Shields, 2003; Wyatt, 2000).

### **6.6 Reflecting on the nature of knowledge generated by the qualitative survey**

In the conclusion to Chapter Three, I considered the nature of knowledge regarding organisational identity as constrained or made possible by the various research designs. To illustrate my point, I used certain juxtapositions, which emerged from an overview of perspectives of organisational identity, suggested in Chapter 2. In this chapter, I will consider the same juxtapositions in the light of the qualitative survey in a general fashion, and in more detail per heritage organisation in the next chapter.

- **Organisational identity as a property of organisation and residing in formal institutional claims as opposed to being the outcome of collective meaning-making by members**

Because participants were encouraged to respond in an open-ended way to the various questions, the qualitative survey made it possible to access members' perspectives regarding organisational identity, and formal institutionalised claims in this regard. While some of these were brief, they nevertheless gave me an idea of how *members* viewed the organisation with regard to various dimensions of identity. Naturally the more detailed responses gave additional insight, and some even hinted at how these shared beliefs came about. The company documentation provided insight into the formal institutionalised identity claims and I was able to compare these with members' own responses. Many of the beliefs regarding identity

coincided with formal claims (as presented in the documents), indicating a large measure of success of the formalised identity claims.

- **Organisational identity as widely shared and collectively agreed-on as opposed to the possibility of its being fragmented and contested**

While individual responses contained narrative fragments, there was a significant amount of overlap amongst these, and it was possible to discern broad patterns and themes in the data, even before considering the formal documentation. Considering common themes in the data allowed me to access elements of organisational identity that were widely shared and collectively agreed on. While members often used different terms for similar things, the meanings underlying these were similar and thus represented patterns or themes. The openness of the qualitative survey permitted me to access dissonant voices, which I have discussed in some detail earlier in the chapter. These voices, although in the minority, did provide a challenge to the dominance of the shared narratives, but were insufficient in number and coherence to suggest the organisational identities were contested or fragmented.

- **Organisational identity as having temporal continuity as opposed to its being fluid and continually constituted**

The organisational identity survey was conducted synchronically and the aim was not necessarily to track changes in organisational identity. Participants' responses to the survey did however suggest a view of organisational identity as having temporal continuity rather than as being continually constituted. At the time of data collection, the two heritage organisations had been merged for about three months. While a merger in theory, in reality, the smaller Beta became part of Alpha and was absorbed into the larger company. Participants from both organisations, though especially those from Beta, mourned the loss of the previous identity: many viewed the merger as a continuation, and especially an improvement of what had come before. This suggests that even in the face of a merger, participants viewed organisational identity as having a sense of continuity as elements of the past were retained, improved upon and adapted for the future. This is captured in following extract: "always moving forward but still keeping our past in mind" (P 50).

### **6.7 Disadvantages of the open-ended survey and internet-based format**

While the qualitative survey, in an internet-based format, was certainly helpful in accessing organisational identity, and had time and cost benefits, there were some disadvantages as well.

The qualitative survey cannot capture the “richness” associated with case study, ethnographic and narrative research and while it allows for a description of organisational identity, it is unable to provide a detailed analysis of how identity “works” in each organisation. A particularly frustrating element was not being able to follow up any of the statements; for example, the comment “I belonged to the firm” (P 19) is a fairly passionate declaration of identification (or control) and I would have loved to explore what lay behind this statement, especially where the participant responded quite critically to a number of other statements. Not being able to follow up with participants also meant that those involved in the survey could not check my own interpretations. While I could have had these checked by a contact at the organisation, this would have presented their view, rather than those of the participants. The nature of the survey design also meant that I was unable to follow up on responses that were unclear, and these had to be excluded from the analysis.

## **6.8 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to reflect on the value and effectiveness of the internet-based qualitative survey as a means of accessing organisational identity. In doing so, I discussed the design and analysis of the survey, as well as the usefulness of the different questions in accessing dimensions of organisational identity. I also considered the juxtapositions in perspectives of organisational identity, in the light of the type of knowledge generated by the qualitative survey. Finally, I reflected on the usefulness of the internet-based format of the questionnaire and the limitations of the design.

## CHAPTER 7: REFLECTIONS ON THE ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY NARRATIVES

### 7.1 Introduction

In the conclusion to Chapter 5, I considered the key elements around which identity was structured in the two heritage organisations, drawing on the elements of identity as identified by Corley et al (2006). In this chapter, I will discuss the two firms' identity narratives, highlighting key elements originating from each organisation. These I will interpret in the light of the juxtapositions I identified in Chapter 2, as well as the framework I outlined at the end of the same chapter. Thereafter, I will address the issue of distinctiveness as a characteristic in organisations.

### 7.2 Reflecting on Alpha's identity

Alpha's identity was constructed around three key elements: being market leaders; being professionals who focus on their clients; and being an organisation that is people-orientated. These narratives are based on a "triangle" I viewed in the data, emphasising the nature of the organisation, the importance of the client and the value of people in the organisation. Each of these plays an important part in marshalling the interest and focus of organisational members towards the goals of the organisation.

#### 7.2.1 *We are an industry leader*

The first narrative: "We are an industry leader", acts as an umbrella covering a number of identity statements, in which I attempted to capture a range of facets constituting the company as an industry leader. These included "We are a leading company"; "We are a highly regarded engineering company"; "We are the biggest and best but tend to be bureaucratic"; "We are a multi-disciplinary firm with a global reach"; "We are business-focussed"; and "We are always moving forward".

The first identity statement: "We are a leading company", is a good example of a formal identity claim (made in the marketing brochure and company documentation) that has been accepted by members and continues to be reproduced in descriptions of the organisation, even where these are not directly about identity. This identity statement is also a good example of members "locating the organisation" in some form of comparison – in this instance – within the "market" they are "leading" (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). Neither the classification scheme – "leading" nor the location therein – "the market" is defined in detail, substantiating the claim that identity is often ambiguous, permitting people scope to define themselves and their organisations in their own way (Craig, 1995, Gioia, 1998). It also substantiates the claim of members constructing elements of identity that are salient in a "working" definition of organisational identity

(Corley et al, 2006). Much like the claims to being a leading company, the claim to be “the best” also contains an element of imprecision with various references to “the field”, “the industry” and “its class”.

In line with formal claims of size (marketing brochure, company documentation) members viewed the organisation as being “the largest”, both nationally and on the continent. Size was critical as it has important implications for other aspects of the social actor, for example, management systems and the degree of bureaucracy experienced, which was another key differentiating factor. The tendency to bureaucracy caused by the myriad of management systems was mentioned by several participants and linked to the size and strong business focus of the organisation.

One of the biggest sources of identification was the multi-disciplinary nature of the firm, as this implied a broad skills base with multiple specialists. A broad skills base, coupled with the size of the organisation, made it possible to tender for large and distinctive projects, the completion of which enhanced the organisation’s reputation. This had two implications, one being that employees, both professional and administrative, experienced a measure of pride in being associated with an organisation with an outstanding reputation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al, 1994). The second was that involvement in high profile and distinctive projects allowed for professional development and strengthened an engineer’s (or other professional’s) CV. Close identification with the organisation because of the prestige associated with it is one means by which organisations exercise hegemonic control (Alvesson, 2001; Brown et al, 2005). Employees identified very closely with the image of the organisation, for the very good reason that it benefited them, not only in terms of self-esteem because of the profile thereof, but in concrete, career advancing ways. It was suggested that there was a deliberate attempt by the organisation to ensure that employees carried through the proper image and hinted at a lengthy socialisation process (King et al, 2006). The organisation was nevertheless viewed as supportive, allowing members freedom to develop their career paths and become professional engineers. Thus, in addition to the many management systems, control was exercised more subtly and perhaps successfully through the identity of the organisation.

One of the distinctive elements of the narrative: “We are an industry leader”, was the strong business orientation, which manifested in practical ways such as being efficient, managing revenue and costs, and ensuring that performance was always high. Bringing in work and the successful completion of projects, led to increased company performance, which in turn supported its reputation as an industry leader. This too had implications for employees’ own professional standing, and for this reason, people were willing to put in long hours of unpaid overtime, and “go the extra mile”, as this led to office or unit performance

which in turn led to company performance, and the associated benefits for reputation. In this way organisational identity and image influenced peoples' input and contribution to the organisation.

### 7.2.2 *We are client- focused professionals*

The idea of being professional was a central theme in the data, as it was widely shared, and was raised as a salient issue in responses to almost all the questions. In addition, it formed the basis of the company vision, and as such constituted a formal identity claim. There was a strong focus on professional development, and this was considered a priority, with older, more experienced engineers open to developing younger, more junior staff. The ECSA Rules of Conduct highlight the importance of development and engineers are expected to “continuously improve their professional skills and those of their subordinates” (2006:1). This element of professional identity is closely regulated and appeared to be an important element in the organisation as well. Participants reflected on the role their heritage organisation had played in shaping the people they had become: “Gratitude for the shaping of my outlook and understanding of how society works” (P 17). This was attributed to the strong focus on professional development by senior staff, and this formed a cornerstone of their identification with the organisation. Participants commented on the fact that directors and management were approachable, and that task-related help and support was available when needed: “Directors usually had time to train up and develop younger staff members. Employees were encouraged by management to develop well-rounded approaches to the business environment beyond pure technical skills” (P10). Evident here is the influence of the activities (in this case development and mentorship) associated with a community of practice, and their role in shaping identity (Robichaud, et al, 2004).

However, professional development includes an element of socialisation into the organisation (Pratt, Rockman & Kaufman, 2006) and the role of the organisation in professional identity is highlighted. Claims like “Alpha made me the engineer I am today” (P 8) and “I credit Alpha with where I am today” (P 10) suggest a close link between the organisation and the professional identity of members. Comments like these are examples of *organisationally based identity*, which refers to that part of a person's self-concept linked to the organisation (Harquail, 2005; in Corley et al, 2006). Whilst development takes place within the broad parameters of the profession, there is also a sense in which the person is socialised into a version of the “Alpha engineer”, reinforcing the hegemonic control of organisational identity.

Clients formed an integral part of the triangle on which identity was built, and relationships with them were considered important. Many of the company brochures and in-house magazines provided an

overview of company projects that included mention of the client, and in this sense clients were an integral part of formal identity claims. Furthermore, the client also represents an integral part of the engineering profession. The Engineering Council Rules of Conduct for engineers specifies that engineers “discharge their duties to their employers, clients, associates and the public with integrity, fidelity and honesty” (2006:2). Within a professional framework, client relationships were viewed as important, with one participant going so far as to suggest these were “bonds”, signifying a very close relationship, and hinting at the obligations associated with these relationships. Beyond the professional requirements, participants espoused a firm belief that clients were an integral part of the company’s success as they represented the source of income, and without them there would be no work. The unsaid implication of this would be that the organisation would cease to function and their own careers would be in jeopardy. It is the client for whom the long hours of work and unpaid overtime are done, and it is their needs, desires, interests and problems that need to be met, addressed, taken seriously and solved. They are, to a large extent, the reason for the company’s existence and thus form an integral part of the company’s identity.

Similarly, stakeholders were seen to form a vital part of the organisation’s rendering of services, and there was an indication that the organisation had to adapt to the requirements of stakeholders with an emphasis on “soft engineering” (marketing brochure, company documentation). In these instances, organisational identity was influenced and shaped by the requirements of the context, and the organisation had to be sensitive to these issues (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Given the dynamics of the South African political context, particularly for what is viewed as primarily an “Afrikaans company”, the issue of stakeholders was particularly salient for identity, so as to promote an appropriate organisational image. Service delivery, especially to the previously disadvantaged, is a critical part of attempting to address the imbalances of the past, and companies seen to be doing this effectively are able to strengthen their image in the political field.

### *7.2.3 We are a people-orientated company*

Despite being a professional and strongly business- orientated company driven by revenue and performance, the characteristic that members really appreciated was what appeared to be a real sense of care and concern for staff, and a strong value orientation (Clark et al, 2009).

Both the value orientation and the care for people were a source of pride and meant that employees could envision a viable future with the organisation. This is significant as the engineering profession, globally but locally in particular, is characterised by a shortage of skilled graduates (Daniels, 2007). Engineering in

South Africa has been identified as a “priority skill” with the development and retention of engineers being critical to developing infrastructure (<http://www.infrastructurene.ws/2014/05/30/national-scarce-skills-list-sa-needs-engineers/>). At this point, the need for the services of engineers outweighs the number of available engineers and retention of engineers remains a problem. If the nature and identity of an organisation is one that appeals to members and results in loyalty to and tenure with the organisation, this places the organisation in a competitive space with regard to attracting scarce human resources.

Members clearly appreciated the working environment and whilst a few referred to the metaphor of a family, there was no evidence of an (almost) monolithic narrative of family, as was evident at Beta. Nevertheless, the working environment contributed greatly to their experience of the organisation, and this was perceived to be motivating, energising and meaningful. Many of the relationships were built over an extended period of time, and were based on warmth and mutual trust, manifesting in care that in some cases extended beyond work hours as well.

One notable element was the ability of management to make members feel as though they were part of the company’s achievements, and is perhaps one of the greatest “achievements” of this company’s identity. This was evident even with administrative staff, who spoke about “our clients” and referred to the reputation of the company and their part in creating it. By making people feel part of the company’s achievements and the resulting positive reputation, they become in part responsible for maintaining it. This ensured work remained of a high standard, justified long hours of (sometimes unpaid) overtime, and created unity of purpose. Whilst the professional narrative would ensure that professionals at least maintained a certain standard of performance by making everyone responsible for the outcome, the behaviour of even the administrative staff was regulated.

In the Alpha case description, I described the five stated values: Integrity; Excellence; Teamwork; Embracing diversity; and People empowerment. Of these stated values, three came through strongly enough to be categorised as distinct values, again suggesting the fairly strong influence of formal identity claims. Two of these are also to be found in the ECSA Rules of Conduct (2006), namely Excellence and Integrity. I will discuss each of these but will first consider the value of “teamwork”.

Teamwork is one way through which organisations promote the discourse of participation, a practice encouraged and endorsed in a variety of contexts, for example Business School programmes, practitioner magazines and textbooks (Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2004). Over time, it has acquired both ‘moral and



ontological status and in the process, has influenced future dealings and actions (Barley & Tolbert, 1997:99). Discourses around teamwork are a means of identity regulation, and thus also produce particular effects in the organisation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). This, in turn, poses a distinct challenge to the possibility of identity being original because if there is a moral imperative to be participative, then all organisations are under pressure to adopt a mind-set and practices associated with participation. In so doing they become more like other organisations, rather than distinct from them.

Excellence is one of the five objectives of the ECSA Conduct of Conduct and reads as follows: “The objectives of this schedule are to ensure that Registered Persons.. ‘encourage excellence within the engineering profession”” (2006:1). Whilst in this context excellence refers to a standard required of the profession, participants used the term more broadly to refer to the reputation of the organisation; its values; client service; products and services; and performance excellence, as a description of its culture. By including excellence as a formal value of the organisation, members’ behaviour is regulated according to the standards and expectations of the profession. In addition to excellence being part of the professional engineering discourse, it is also part of popular business discourse, originating in part in the popular business book *In search of excellence* (Peters and Waterman, 1982) . Much like the teamwork discourse, which provides a moral imperative for how companies should be run from a relational perspective, the excellence discourse sets a standard from a business perspective. Excellence is defined in specific terms and according to exact standards, thus further constraining the possibility of a distinctive identity.

Like excellence, integrity is one of the objectives of the ECSA Code of Conduct, with the aim of ensuring that registered persons: “execute their work with integrity, sincerity and in accordance with generally accepted norms of professional conduct” (2006:1). In defining integrity in more detail, professionals “must discharge their duties to their employers, clients, associates and the public with integrity, fidelity and honesty” (2006:2). This is followed by a fairly detailed list of practices that professional engineers must comply with, as well as those that are forbidden. These too, provide a set of constraining factors with regard to identity. In addition to integrity as a regulator of professional conduct, the use of moral discourse is a key source of regulation for organisations in general, orienting identity in a specific direction (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

#### **7.2.4 Concluding remarks**

In concluding the discussion on Alpha, I would like to highlight a few aspects, alluding to the juxtapositions I highlighted in Chapter 2, and used to discuss the qualitative survey in Chapter 6.

#### *7.2.4.1 Identity as collective meaning-making by members*

The data generated in the study consisted of members' individual and collective constructions of their heritage organisation's identity. However in these descriptions, members drew on elements of the social actor and echoed formal identity claims, represented by company documentation. In the preceding discussion, I have shown how formal claims have been used in the data, and will now comment on the use of the social actor in identity claims.

In line with Nag et al, (2007), members alluded to the nature of the business, drawing on elements such as "an engineering company", "industry leader", "professionals" "bureaucratic", and "clients". Organisational routines that were mentioned included: stringent management systems; routines associated with clients and stakeholders and building relationships with these; professional gatherings; as well as routines associated with development (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Robichaud et al, 2004).

In Alpha, a consulting firm, services formed the crux of the business, and the latter featured prominently in the survey responses, often being linked to a particular standard, for example quality services (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). Central to the provision of services were technical skills, expertise and a solution orientation, all of which are associated with the routines of the engineering profession (Robichaud et al, 2004). The geographical location of the business was highlighted with reference to market leadership as well as the countries in which the organisation was operational. It was also linked to how well the company was known in different locations; for example, Alpha was perceived to be less well known in the Cape, which has implications for organisational image.

The nature of the business, providing professional engineering services, implied particular types of members, primarily engineers and associated professions. The requirements of the professions to which these members belonged gave rise to constraints relating to standards of delivery, the importance of clients, as well as the values associated with the business (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). Furthermore, the organisation as a social actor, functioning in a particular socio-political context, had to adapt to the realities associated with the latter, and this had implications for their relationships with stakeholders, (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009). These factors emphasise the importance of the social actor in members' constructions of their organisation's identity. At the same time, these constructions varied between members, depending on the salience of a particular identity for a respondent at the time. These led to the development of multiple identity statements in the context of identity narratives, to capture the various facets of identity salient

amongst members. This supports the idea of members having a working identity of the organisation drawn from elements of the social actor salient at a particular moment in time (Corley et al, 2006).

It is the descriptions drawn from members' working identities, which brings us to the next juxtaposition: organisational identity beliefs being shared and collectively agreed upon, versus fragmented, contested identity beliefs.

#### *7.2.4.2 Identity as widely shared and collectively agreed upon*

Despite the imprecisions and ambiguity associated with a working identity, I would suggest that the beliefs regarding organisational identity were shared. This enabled me to develop identity statements within broader narratives which lent coherence, whilst the statements allowed for the various facets of members' working identity to be heard. Whilst not all respondents referred to exactly the same facets of identity, there was sufficient agreement to suggest collective beliefs regarding organisational identity, and, as indicated in Chapter 5, the professional engineering narrative could be regarded as central from both structural and depth perspectives (Corley et al, 2006). Although dissonant voices were identified, these were in the minority and did not suggest fragmentation of a serious nature.

There was also evidence of coherence between the various facets of identity. The "Industry leader" narrative "worked well" with the "Professional" narrative as the opportunities provided by an industry leader were seen to present an ideal context for close mentorship and coaching, as part of developing professionals. The "People orientated" narrative supported both the "Industry leader" and "Professional" narrative, as when people felt cared for they were willing to go the extra mile in the interests of reputation and the professional care of clients. Organisational identity thus served as a fairly effective mechanism of control, in the broader context of professional regulation and constraint.

#### *7.2.4.3 Identity as having temporal continuity*

The survey was conducted once both organisations had technically ceased to exist, and were part of the new entity, Delta, into which another entity, Gamma, would soon enter. The aim of the survey was not to address the issue of continuity (or lack thereof in identity) specifically, though some of the comments made did hint at members' views in this regard. While in theory the change constituted a merger, in reality, the smaller Beta was absorbed into many of Alpha's more sophisticated systems, resulting in a loss of individual identity. Because the firms were chosen for their similarity, at the time of the survey, there

was in Alpha a belief that things would stay much the same, and one member commented: “[It was] a very big boat to turn. Cumbersome and sometimes difficult (P 13)”.

Some members expressed sadness at losing the identity associated with Alpha: “I’m still more comfortable referring to 'Alpha' than 'Delta'. I keep explaining to people: We used to be Alpha... there's still pride in using the 'old' name” (P 41). Another indicated: “It was a honour, and [I was] proud to have been associated with the VWL and Alpha brands and it would be sad - as was the case with the VWL logo - not to see the Alpha logo on contract name boards any more” (P 42).

Many respondents, however, viewed the merger as a continuation, and perhaps an improvement on what had existed before. Because Alpha was to a large extent the dominant partner in the merger, Alpha employees perceived there would be little change to their culture and practices, and thus the loss of identity was felt to be less significant. This is line with Corley’s (2004) finding that for lower-level employees and middle-management (who are required to stay connected to them), an organisation’s identity is strongly influenced by perceptions of culture.

### **7.3. Reflecting on Beta’s identity**

Beta’s identity narratives centred on being the “Grand Old lady of South African Consulting Engineers”, being a “Consulting Engineering company with a heart”, and a “Family working to engineer a better future for all”. It is evident that each of the descriptive titles, which were taken directly from the data, is a metaphor of sorts, and in the Beta data several metaphorical descriptions were used. Some of these recurred in different members’ responses; for example, the organisation was seen as a family, while other descriptions were used by single individuals, as they tried to express some element of their organisation’s identity. I tried where possible to include these in naming the categories, in line with Kendall and Kendall’s observation that: “Using metaphors empowers the speaker and listener to transform reality from the pedestrian to the remarkable” (1993:149). Instead of trying to “capture” elements in my own phrases, I allowed participants to express, in their own way, their sense of the remarkable in their organisational world.

#### *7.3.1 We are the grand old lady of South African Consulting Engineers*

In Beta the metaphorical space had been opened up as “The Grand Old Lady of SA Consulting Engineers” – a rich metaphor which attempted to capture the heritage, status and legacy that participants viewed as

being inherent in their organisation's identity. The heritage was linked to the identity of Beta Head, the founder, and the age of the firm, which turned 75 in 2007.

Like Alpha, the company was considered to be a well-known engineering firm though this was linked in particular to the brand of Beta Head. As a person, Beta Head had by all accounts been a larger than life figure, a man with a vision to make a difference, guided by strong principles and beliefs; an excellent relationship builder with a passion for engineering (particularly dam building); and the drive to create a context for these to be achieved. The identity of the person Beta Head had a strong influence on the company Beta, and the characteristics that set him apart were influential in the "set of qualitative distinctions" which set the firm apart (Taylor, 1989: 19). Included in these distinctions were a passion for engineering; a conviction that in doing excellent work rewards would take care of themselves; and a belief that engineering is a duty and engineering professionals should serve the country in their field of expertise. Many of these distinctions also lie at the heart of the ECSA Rules of Conduct and reinforce the nature of the organisation as a professional engineering firm.

The firm actively promoted the link to their founder, with the title of Engineering Icon adding weight to their claims. The brand Beta was viewed as being well known in the market and the source of many appointments. Members also identified with the claim, as to be associated with someone who was known for pushing the boundaries in engineering had positive implications for their own identity. Furthermore, these characteristics were attributed to the firm as well, and it was known for being in the forefront of innovation, technology and planning as well as for "one of a kind projects", like the Lesotho Highlands project. This was an important means of identification as organisational members were an integral part of making these projects successful, and the firm's and members' success were closely entwined, as were their identities. Whilst organisational image most certainly performed a hegemonic function, this was less evident in the data than the family metaphor, as a means of control.

In addition to the founder, mention was also made of leaders who were "internationally acknowledged masters in their domain" (P 94) and "leaders in the field of engineering" (P136) and what a privilege it was to work with them. In the development of professional identity, observing role models is an opportunity to "try out" possible "identities" associated with being a professional (Ibarra, 1999). Members valued the opportunity to learn from acknowledged experts who were open to sharing their knowledge and thus creating a context where development thrived. I will discuss this in more detail as part of the final narrative, "We are a family".

Within this identity narrative, mentioned was made of “excellence” as part of the organisational identity. As with Alpha, excellence was defined in various ways but was considered significant as this is one of the objectives of the ECSA Rules of Conduct which aims to: “encourage excellence within the engineering profession” (2006:1). Much like Alpha, excellence formed the basis of one of the stated values, and so members’ behaviour was regulated according to the standards and expectations of the profession. As indicated earlier in the discussion, “excellence” as a goal is also part of popular business discourse, setting a standard from a business perspective.

### *7.3.2 We are a consulting company with a heart*

This identity narrative entails a strong focus on the centrality of the engineering profession with an emphasis on the enjoyment of the work and the duty associated with the latter. Whilst business and profitability were obviously important, they were not “the issue”, in the words of one of the participants. Members viewed excellent or quality work as central to the Beta identity even if this meant a reduction in profit. The centrality of quality engineering is captured in the identity statement: “We are firstly engineers”.

Clients were regarded as a foundation stone of success and thus extremely valuable. For this reason, relationships with them were guarded and cherished, and viewed as a long-term commitment. Employees took the ECSA requirement to “discharge their duties to their employers, clients, associates and the public with integrity, fidelity and honesty” (2006:2) very seriously. These relationships included a personal element, and resulted in the appointment of the firm in many projects. The founder, Beta Head, had played a large role in building relationships that continued to prove fruitful. The company strove to provide excellent service and to be seen as an extension of the client’s team, relied on and trusted for their expertise. There is even a suggestion that without the support of the firm, the collapse in service delivery in provincial and local government would be more advanced<sup>15</sup>. Clients were thus viewed as almost an extension of the organisation and in this way were seen to form an integral part of identity. This was closely related to the belief in the firm, originating in the founder, that as an engineer one has a duty to the community to make sure water resources are managed properly, and it is this belief which is captured in the identity statement “We are civic minded”.

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<sup>15</sup> This claim is not unrealistic and had been spontaneously verified by two independent engineers, unrelated to Beta and working in the field of water engineering.

This facet of identity was underpinned by the belief that as an engineer, one has a civic duty to provide services for the greater good of all. This is particularly so in the provision of water services, which is considered a basic human need and essential in so many endeavours necessary to building a successful nation, successful farming and mining sectors being two South African examples. Because of this, the company was viewed as making a difference in society and having played an important part in building the country. This extended beyond the delivery of services and also included broader community involvement; for example, the promotion of women's interests in engineering, as well as advancing proficiency in mathematics and the engineering profession in community groups. Furthermore, organisational members played an important role in professional associations, an integral part of an organisation that was both knowledge- intensive and professional (Alvesson, 2001).

### *7.3.3 We are a family working to engineer a better future for all*

One of Beta's four stated values was: "We value our people above all else" and this manifested as a formal identity claim and as part of the survey responses, as the "Beta Family". It was also the most widespread identity claim in the data. The family metaphor is fairly common in organisations, providing a sense of comfort and friendliness for members (Kendall & Kendall, 1993), and many participants referred to the sense of caring and support in the Beta family. It is a metaphor that promotes order, as each member has a role to play, and in so doing keeps the group together (Kendall & Kendall, 1993). The sense of family had the important effect of encouraging cohesion and belonging, and many participants had long service records. Furthermore, it kept members moving towards common organisational purposes, and they performed not to impress their superiors, but rather for the common good of "the family" (Alakavuklar, 2009). In this way effort was channelled to the firm and, much like the nuclear family, everyone was expected to help and support others (Kendall & Kendall, 1993). In Beta, shareholding was devolved to a fairly low level and whilst the actual financial benefit was relatively small, the psychological effect was significant and accentuated the idea of "equality" and belonging.

The family metaphor is successful in organisations characterised by a strong leader. In the company Beta, the strong leader role was "played by Beta Head" the figurehead, who, formally speaking, was no longer the leader but remained the figure on which leadership was modelled.

Alakavuklar (2009:1) argues that the family metaphor aims to construct, in addition to the usual pragmatist and rational organisational relations, "an illusion of an intense emotional experience", and the Beta data was full of fairly powerful emotional expression. The sense of family helped members cope with

working far from home, working late into the night to meet deadlines, and with personal problems and misfortunes, as they had the support of fellow staff members. For this reason, the company was regarded by some as “home away from home”, and relationships were experienced as easy and egalitarian, with various levels of employees mixing comfortably. Many participants made mention of “Beta Shack”, a Friday afternoon tradition of socialising. This aided social bonding and promoted the sense of egalitarian values, though, as Watson and Watson (2012) remind us, a company like Beta remains a bureaucratised work organisation based on division of labour and a hierarchical structure. Nevertheless, the family metaphor, which helped to create a safe and supportive work environment, also served as a powerful part of identity regulation (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Related to the family metaphor was the value placed on people, and their “whole life stories” (P 126). Whilst the work environment was considered to be caring, this extended beyond the work environment as well, and participants referred to the care they had also received in their personal lives. Personal circumstances were accommodated, and this made a huge impact on members in terms of loyalty and the contribution they made to the organisation. One Beta respondent referred to this directly: *“Placing people above systems and raw business will produce its own results in allegiance, productivity and profitability, recognising that our staff is our most valuable asset, with due recognition and rewards to those who perform to their best”* (P 125). This explains quite clearly how placing people above systems and recognising their value, generates allegiance, productivity and profitability. In addition to this, respondents from both companies referred to the fact that they were made to feel part of something bigger, suggesting that their efforts and value were recognised in relation to the achievements of the organisation as a whole.

Several staff members made the connection between employees being valued because of their ability to serve clients, and their status as a resource on which the company was dependent. There was a belief that when people feel valued, and when placed above systems and business, they would automatically respond in ways that enhanced commitment, productivity and profitability. Furthermore, it was suggested that in valuing, trusting and respecting people and the decisions they make, the need for close monitoring of their activities was no longer necessary, and explains the obvious lack of systems, particularly when compared to Alpha. Control in this context was thus exercised in a more indirect fashion, using the process of identification and its outcomes (Alvesson, 2001).



### 7.3.4 Concluding remarks

In concluding the discussion on Beta, I would like to highlight a few aspects alluding to the juxtapositions I highlighted in Chapter 2, and used to discuss the qualitative survey in Chapter 6.

#### 7.3.4.1 *Identity as collective meaning-making by members*

The data generated in the study consisted of members' individual and collective constructions of their heritage organisations' identity. However in these descriptions, members drew on elements of the social actor and echoed formal identity claims represented by company documentation.

In providing descriptions of Beta's identity, members drew on their individual and collective constructions of the social actor, and the context within which it functioned. They alluded to the nature of the business, drawing on terms such as "engineering firm", "the field of water engineering", "projects", "engineering expertise", "consulting engineers", "professionals" and "clients" (Nag et al, 2007). Organisational routines that were mentioned included those associated with clients and stakeholders and building relationships with these; decisions and policies; the standard of work; professional gatherings and practices; as well as routines associated with development (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Robichaud et al, 2004). Geographical location was most notably the context of South Africa, a country in which water would always have to be carefully managed. Based on the geographical requirements of the context, the company was constructed as civic-minded and (almost) indispensable in some cases, to ensure the continuation of service delivery with regard to water. I would suggest that this had its roots in the socio-political context, where service delivery post-1994 has or is perceived to have deteriorated to the point where some municipalities are no longer able to supply a high standard of water. Important here for identity are the implications for the relationship between the organisation and its context (Pratt & Kraatz, 2009).

Beta Head, as the founder of Beta, featured more prominently than any of the individual Alpha founders and leaders, and demonstrated the significance and impact of leadership in the construction of organisation identity (Brown et al, 2005; Empson, 2004; Albert & Whetten, 1985). In this case, the leader in question has a high profile in the engineering profession and there was considerable lore and myth surrounding him. Much like the founders of Laskarina holidays (Brown et al, 2005), he had woven much of his own identity into organisational identity. The difference, however, was that he continued to play an important role in identity construction, even though he was no longer present.

Whilst members drew on elements normally associated with a social actor, the use of metaphors in doing so was more marked. It has been suggested that metaphors are “cognitive lenses” through which we make sense of reality and are thus fundamental in shaping it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kendall & Kendall, 1993). Metaphors play a role in producing, understanding and communicating human thought and action, and as such create knowledge and provide guidelines for behaving in particular settings (Smith & Eisenberg, 1987; Alakavuklar, 2009). It is this “lens-like” characteristic of organisational identity that has led to its being referred to as a metaphor (see Chapter 2). The purpose of a metaphor is to take a word that people understand and link it to a context that is new and unfamiliar, so that people are able to see the world in a new way (Kendall & Kendall, 1993; Smith & Eisenberg, 1987; Alakavuklar, 2009). As such, metaphors create particular effects, and promote ideologies and worldviews.

If one considers the metaphors participants used to describe their organisation, there was careful weaving together of the “hard” and the “soft”, and the “technical” and the “emotional”, but, importantly, each of these metaphors was built around the idea of engineering, the core business. In the first metaphor, the company was referred to as “The Grand Old Lady of SA Consulting Engineers.” Here engineering, which is traditionally a male-dominated field and viewed as a “hard” science, is partnered with a “Grand Old Lady”, capturing the feminine usually associated with the “soft”. In the second metaphor, the company was constructed as “a consulting engineering company with a heart”. Once again “hard” engineering was linked to a heart, the symbol and seat of emotion, used in this context to symbolise the caring nature of the organisation. In the final metaphor, a family, which is associated with nurturing and caring, was described as “engineering” a better future for all, also capturing the importance of duty that runs as a theme through the identity narrative. In each of these metaphors the “soft and feminine”, the “emotional” and the “nurturing and caring” were woven into the core of the business, which is engineering. What is traditionally taken to be a “male”, “clear cut” and “hard”, was transformed into something that was perceived to be caring and nurturing, and engineering “[was seen to be] done” in a particular way.

#### *7.3.4.2 Identity as widely shared and collectively agreed upon*

Like Alpha, Beta’s identity comprised various facets, though I would argue it was still largely coherent. Beliefs were fairly widely shared and Beta Head formed an important rallying point around which identity was constructed. Other aspects were the heritage associated with the organisation, the strong professional identity and the family metaphor, which acted as an effective binding mechanism. There were a few dissonant voices, but these were insufficient to suggest fragmentation of identity.

There was also evidence of coherence between the various facets of identity. The “Grand Old Lady” narrative (emphasising the heritage of the firm) “worked well” with the “Professional” narrative, constructing Beta as an organisation of professionals whose history was bound to the country they had served for many years. The “Family” narrative supported both the “Grand Old Lady” and “Professional” narratives, binding members into a coherent group and motivating them to give their all to the clients they served. Organisational identity thus served as a fairly effective mechanism of control, in the broader context of professional regulation and constraint.

#### *7.3.4.3 Identity as having temporal continuity*

The survey was conducted once both organisations had technically ceased to exist, and were part of the new entity, Delta, into which another entity, Gamma, would soon enter. As indicated, the aim of the survey was not to address the issue of continuity in identity (or lack thereof), though some of the comments made by former Beta members did hint at their views in this regard. While technically a merger, in reality, the smaller Beta was absorbed into many of Alpha’s more sophisticated systems and some members expressed concern over the loss of what was regarded as a unique identity. Participant 81 described this as follows: “An exciting opportunity to become global and to expand our horizons. At the same time there was apprehension and concern that we would be ‘taken over’ and lose our unique identity”. Another member indicated: “Very sad about loosing [sic] the name Beta” (P 131).

Some members expressed sadness at losing the legacy associated with Beta’s identity: “...we honoured our past and the legacy handed to us and were reluctant to lose that” (P 120). Because the company had been in existence for so long, members struggled to conceive of it not being there: “The way Beta was we never thought something like this will happen. My view was that Beta will be there forever...” (P 83).

Despite the sense of loss experienced by some, one respondent viewed the merger as a continuation of what had been: “I enjoyed working for Beta and feel that the qualities that attracted me to the firm will survive and continue in Delta. These qualities reside in the people that work in the firm” (P 95). The suggestion here is that what really matters with regard to an organisation’s identity, resides not in the organisation per se but rather in the people who make up the organisation, reinforcing the idea of identity as a property of members’ meaning-making.

#### **7.4 The distinctiveness of organisational identity**

Having considered each organisation's identity, I will now discuss the possibility of the distinctiveness of organisational identity. As indicated, distinctiveness does not mean having all elements of identity as unique: rather, the sum or configuration of identity facets is what makes an organisation's identity unique. Let us now consider how these two firms differ so the question: Can the identity of similar professional firms be unique? can be answered.

In these two organisations, it becomes possible to begin answering this question, as they were chosen as merger partners precisely because of their similarity. In the emerging identities (as constructed by the participants and myself) there are many similarities: both view themselves as located in the upper-end of consulting engineers; both are professional engineering firms; both have a strong client focus and concern for people. Yet what makes them distinctive is the meaning constructed around these elements. Whilst both firms considered themselves to be leaders in their respective markets, Alpha was characterised by a very strong business focus and many of the systems, practices and routines were shaped to achieve this end. In Beta, identity was built around being engineers first and foremost, and while profit was important, engineering was considered a duty and at times took precedence over profit. . The belief that governed behaviour in this regard was that if one produced excellent work, profitability would be a natural consequence. In Alpha, there was a far more deliberate focus on managing the business and performance through the use of systems and management practices.

Another distinguishing feature was the size of the organisations. Alpha was much larger than Beta, but was consequently more bureaucratic as well (also related to the strong business focus requiring management systems). It did however allow the firm to take on large multi-disciplinary projects and this was a particular source of identification for organisational members because of the associated benefits to their own professional and work identity. The distinguishing feature of Beta (the company) was its age and the heritage associated with the Beta Head persona. The Beta identity was woven very closely around the person of Beta Head, and many of his beliefs, management philosophies and antics formed an integral part of company lore and myth. Because of his notoriety in the engineering world, and the potential linked to the name, the company continued to build on the relationship and heritage as part of their unique identity.

Both organisations allowed for the development of professional engineers, though in Alpha, there was a clear balance expected between professional engineering and business acumen, both as part of formal

identity claims, and in the minds of participants. In Beta, however, the duty of professional engineering was considered paramount, and was considered more important than profit in some projects. There was a belief that the company had a vital role to play in the development of the country as water is a basic (and often in South Africa, a scarce) resource. For this reason, the company, as part of the engineering profession was seen to have a civic duty towards clients, and the country as a whole.

Both companies placed much value on their members, as in a knowledge- intensive environment, they played a crucial role in making the business successful. In Beta this manifested in the form of the “Beta family” and this served the purpose of ensuring belonging and identification. There was a strong “social” thread that ran through the organisation and this promoted a sense of equality and connectedness, and contributed to the feeling of belonging. Most members generally felt cared for, respected and valued, and this in turn led to loyalty, productivity and profitability. There was considerable emotion attached to members’ identification with the firm. In Alpha, there was a strong value orientation that echoed several of the formal value claims, at least two of which were related directly to professional values. So while both firms had similar orientations towards people, the way this manifested was slightly different.

The question thus exists: can similar organisations have distinctive identities? The answer would seem to be, yes they can. While the elements constituting the organisations are similar, the way these elements are “worked with”, both with regard to formal claims as well as the responses of members as they make sense of them, are different. The image that comes to mind is that of an artist or, in this case, multiple artists. While each makes something similar, a vase, a plate, a painting, whatever the art form, they bring to the material they use in the project, a sense of themselves – a unique vision, a particular colour palette and a distinctive sense of form – thus making something unique. So too, organisational identities, are constructed from similar material (often originating in the social actor) but much like the bricoleur, are given unique treatment and a distinctive identity.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

In this Chapter, I reflected on the identities of the heritage firms I studied, considering key facets of each. Thereafter, I discussed these in the light of the juxtapositions identified in the literature review. Finally, I considered the possibility of the distinctiveness of organisational identity in similar organisations.

## CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

### 8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the research objectives as outlined in Chapter 1, and consider whether these have been met, and, if so, what the implications of these findings are for the study of organisational identity. The topic of organisational identity has been widely researched from many perspectives, and the aim of this study was to consider both methodological and substantive aspects of organisational identity. First, from a methodological point of view, the aim was to provide an overview of research designs used in studying identity, and consider the impact of design type for what can be learnt regarding organisational identity. Second, I wanted to explore whether a internet-based, open-ended qualitative survey could provide a suitable description of organisational identity, and whether this data could be used to develop descriptive identity narratives. Finally, I wanted to explore whether it is possible to identify distinctive features of similar organisations using a qualitative survey.

I have structured the conclusion around addressing each of these research aims.

### 8.2 The influence of research design on the “type” of knowledge constructed about organisational identity

In considering this question, I reviewed a wide range of empirical studies of organisational identity, categorising these according to design type. I then explored the nature of each of the research design types over time, and carefully teased out distinctive features of each. I quickly realised that there is considerable overlap between some of the designs, which was partly due to the nature of the topic. Because organisational identity is most likely to be studied in an organisation, this unit of analysis forms a natural case study, and studies in this field are often described as case studies, even where another design type is employed. This suggests some confusion surrounding case study design, and the case as a unit of observation.

Using the distinctive features I had extracted, I then analysed a few studies of each design type, according to its distinctive features highlighting similarities, and indicating where researchers had included novel elements as part of their use of the design.

From a review of the definitions of identity found in the literature, I postulated three juxtapositions regarding the nature of organisational identity. These can be viewed as:

- a property of the organisation, residing in institutional claims *or* the collective meaning-making by members;
- widely shared and collectively agreed-on *or* fragmented and contested;
- having temporal continuity *or* being fluid and continually constituted.

Bearing these in mind, I discussed the likelihood of each of the designs giving rise to a particular kind of knowledge about identity. I concluded that the choice for a particular research design does constrain or make possible the generation of different types of knowledge regarding OI. The design type has particular implications for the nature of claims made, and whether these are related to formal OI claims, or a reflection of members' own constructions of organisational identity. Some designs, for example, survey design and content analysis, are more limiting particularly where researchers rely on a pre-determined set of questions or codebook. However in these designs, it is possible to diminish the impact of the latter by gathering qualitative data and analysing the responses before conducting further analyses. Whilst not allowing for an in-depth exploration of context and meaning, they do allow for accessing organisational member's perspective. Other designs, such as case study, ethnography, narrative design and discourse analysis are more likely to allow for open and in-depth exploration of organisational identity. It must be noted however, that in addition to research design, the way a research question is formulated will, along with the design, influence the nature of the knowledge generated. A follow-up study could explore the relationship between research design and research question as mediating factors on the way knowledge is generated and structured.

The effect of design type has long been suspected and argued for. This study provides further substantiation for this view. The choice of research design is not a neutral one but plays an integral role in the nature of the knowledge generated, and should be taken seriously as part of the research process. Whilst many research textbooks discuss various research designs, few highlight distinguishing features (Mouton (2001) being a notable exception). Outlining the distinctive features of research design is helpful for both researcher supervisors and students, as they grapple with choices regarding research projects. This is particularly so, for research and students entering the field of social science research. There appears to be an increased need for researchers outside of what is traditionally viewed as social science research, to explore people related matters for example engineering, the medical field (doctors

and dentists) and veterinary sciences, to name just a few. For example those in the medical and veterinary sciences have to explore community related matters with regard to their fields of interest, and must thus engage social science research discourse. In engineering there is a need to explore organisational and management related issues, and increasingly engineering management students are turning to topics that lie within the fields of social science research. These supervisors and students have had little exposure to social science research methods and find the wide array of designs overwhelming and confusing. Providing distinguishing features of various designs can help facilitate choices in research design in these instances.

### **8.3 Exploring the use of a internet-based, open-ended qualitative survey for studying organisational identity**

A further methodological aim was to explore the use of a internet-based, open-ended qualitative survey in accessing organisational identity in the two heritage organisations of a merged South African company. The organisation in question was geographically dispersed and required a medium that would allow for participation from a wide range of locations.

The internet-based format allows for data to be gathered from any location (with internet access), with relative assurance of anonymity when answering, and this encouraged a fair degree of honesty and expression of emotion for those participants who wish to communicate their feelings. The internet-based format allowed participants to answer as they see fit whether their answers consist of one word, a short phrase or a lengthy paragraph. Those members wishing to exercise their creativity were able to do so, describing their organisation in terms that were meaningful to them. An aspect that needs to be further explored is whether the same survey would produce the same amount and quality of data under normal organisational conditions, where identity is not under threat. I do believe the timing of the survey may have influenced the nature of the data gathered and this is something that should be explored in future studies.

Given the pervasive nature of technology, and that work in many corporate and professional settings is conducted via the web, an internet-based qualitative survey allows information regarding organisational identity to be gathered fairly easily. Furthermore, it allows for a wider range of voices to be heard, and does not discriminate on the basis of location. In this study, I was not able to access all employees as, due to the merger process, there was a concern that they may be “survey- and questionnaire- tired”, as they were exposed to many of these during the merger process. Depending on the size of the staff, it



would certainly be a possibility to include all employees, assuming they were comfortable using the Internet. However, this may not apply in all organisational contexts, and would not be equally practical at all levels in organisations, especially in South Africa with its eleven official languages and with part of the population being semi-literate and / or computer illiterate. A careful analysis of the organisation in question would be necessary to ascertain whether it would be feasible to use.

The research undertaken in this study thus adds to the body of knowledge surrounding the use of an internet-based qualitative survey in accessing organisational identity, and suggests that this form of data gathering in the organisation can be successful, provided that participants are computer literate and have access to the Internet.

### **8.3.1 Analysing the qualitative survey according to the logics of Mouton (2012)**

When analysing the qualitative survey according to the dimensions of Mouton (2012), it would be viewed as following a *logic of contextualisation* as it allows for a more detailed exploration of organisational identity, with consideration given to the context. The internet-based format employed in the current survey did however not permit an exploration in the degree of detail made possible by a case study or ethnography (I discuss this further under limitations), and these findings could not be generalised analytically to other contexts. Furthermore, the qualitative survey follows a *logic of discovery* as it allows members to describe organisational identity from their own perspectives rather than according to predefined criteria. Finally, the qualitative survey follows a *logic of synchronicity* as it considers organisational identity at one moment in time, rather than tracking it over an extended period.

### **8.3.2 Limitations of the design**

Limitations of the design, as used in this study, include the lack of access to respondents to follow up on interesting responses or answers that were unclear. It would be possible to develop a means of interacting with survey respondents in an anonymous way, to further explore elements of the data. This could function in a similar way to the internet-based forum used in the Coupland & Brown (2004) study, though care would need to be taken to maintain anonymity. Another option would be to explore the possibility of online focus groups, but here again, the aspect of anonymity would have to be given careful consideration.

Whilst the internet-based format allowed me to access a wide range of (potentially) diverse

perspectives from organisational members, the nature of the data gathered has placed limits on what the findings can be used for. Whilst they allowed me to provide descriptive narratives of the organisations in question (an issue I discuss in the next section), they did not permit an in-depth understanding of how these meanings had come into being, as would have been the case in an ethnographic or a case study design. Importantly too, these perspectives have not been confirmed through participant observation, as would have been the case with ethnography. Whilst some of the participants' comments gave insight into their perspectives on how organisational identity functions, these were not sufficiently detailed for theory development, though they did confirm existing theories. This does not mean the qualitative survey could not be used for theory development, but that the nature of data collection in this particular study did not permit an in-depth analysis which would have been possible by case study or ethnography. This is because the "thick description" on which analytical generalisations rely was simply not present, and the analysis remains primarily at the level of description.

Whilst the findings did not permit theory building per se, they did allow for narrative descriptions, which were necessary to answer the research question: Can similar organisations have distinctive identities? Before I address this question however, I first need to consider the question of descriptive organisational identity narratives, a point which I take up in the next section.

#### **8.4 Exploring the possibility of developing organisational identity narratives from the responses to the organisational identity survey**

The internet-based open-ended qualitative survey made it possible to provide a narrative description of the two heritage organisations' identities. The identity narratives represent the broad consensual constructions regarding the organisation, reaffirming the commonality and "centrality" associated with organisational identity (Gioia et al, 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002). Using broader identity narratives with identity statements within these, I was able to capture clusters of identity statements, much like the structural networks highlighted by Corley et al (2006). This cluster of identity statements served as members' working definitions of identity, as suggested by Corley et al (2006). The multiplicity reflected in these clusters allowed for various facets of organisational identity to be captured, much like the various selves in the personal identity of an individual. Identity accommodates the variety of roles a person is required to play: for example, a woman may be a wife, mother, daughter, academic, consultant – all of which require different (sometimes seemingly contradictory) actions (Albert et al, 2000; Craig, 1995; Gioia, 1998; Harré, 1991). The plurivocity associated with these descriptions did not necessarily imply fragmentation but rather that these organisations are characterised by "sets of

stories that have certain commonalities, such as key themes, core events and imposing personalities” (Brown, 2006:16).

In describing facets of their organisation, members drew on elements of the social actor and the professional framework within which it functions, in some cases using descriptive metaphors to capture particular meanings (Alakavuklar, 2009; Alvesson & Empson, 2008; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Kendall & Kendall, 1993; Nag et al, 2007; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006; Robichaud et al, 2004; Smith & Eisenberg, 1987). In so doing, they acted much like bricoleurs described by Levi-Strauss (1962), and which I used to describe my own role as researcher (Crotty, 1998). In making sense of their organisation, members have used the material at their disposal: the nature of the work and the way it is structured; clients; stakeholders; staff; management systems and leadership, to name but a few, interpreted these and constructed fragments conveying a sense of organisation identity. In my role as researcher, I have also engaged in the role of bricoleur, searching for common threads and thereby constructing a more coherent descriptive identity narrative for each organisation.

One key element of both narratives was the position held by both heritage organisations within the sphere of similar organisations. It was suggested of both that they held a prominent position and, although descriptions were phrased slightly differently, boiled down to the fact that both were leaders in their field. This supports the idea of some sort of identity-related roles performed by organisations, but further research regarding how these roles are negotiated and developed is still required (Albert & Whetten, 1985). It was not possible to determine within the current research design how this occurs, and this remains a question of interest in further organisational identity studies.

#### **8.4.1 The value of descriptions of this nature**

The description of organisation identity is critical as it provides the basis for so many actions in the organisations; for example, organisational change (Chreim, 2005; Nag et al, 2007), the relationships between organisations and their stakeholders (Brickson, 2005), and strategic decision-making (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991). Whilst organisational management and leadership may have a clear idea of the formal identity claims and statements, the clarity of these amongst organisational members may be doubtful, as well as the extent to which they identify with the formal identity claim. For this reason it is important to have a mechanism by which to access the organisation identity as viewed by other organisational members.

Understanding how organisational identity is viewed by members is useful in instances where organisational identity is being adjusted or changed. Both Chreim (2005) and Backer (2008) highlight how change is managed by adjusting or shifting meaning around identity labels associated with the organisation. Understanding the diversity of meaning associated with organisational identity labels as these are understood by organisational members, can facilitate the process of change as there is a clearer idea of how organisational identity is perceived. Shifts in identity can thus be managed in a more focused fashion.

Because organisation identity affects how members respond to newly introduced management practices, and the potential threats these may pose to identity, it is important that management understand organisational identity as viewed by members. Organisational identity gives rise to a range of behaviours that will subsequently be acceptable or unacceptable, and if change processes lead to behaviours or practices deemed unacceptable (as per the definition of organisational identity), these may lead to underestimation of the length and costs of the change process (Jacobs, Christe-Zeyse, Keegan, & Pólos; 2008).

### **8.5 Exploring the possibility a distinctive organisational identity**

Some authors have argued that because organisations in the same industry or business are subjected to the constraints and limitations of the setting, they will, by virtue of their identifications, be “forced” into similarity. This calls into question the likelihood of distinctiveness, originally highlighted by Albert and Whetten (1985), as a criterion of organisational identity. In the current study, I had the opportunity to study two organisations operating in the same industry, chosen as merger partners, precisely because of their compatibility arising from their similarity. This provided an ideal opportunity to examine the question of distinctiveness, which has not yet been addressed.

Each of the organisation’s identity narratives clustered around similar elements: each description included a narrative about its standing in the profession; another surrounding the professional reputation of the firm (which was linked in particular to clients and stakeholders as recipients of these services); and finally, one surrounding how people were viewed and relationships were conducted. Despite the similarities, however, the identity of both organisations was arguably distinct, and this could be traced to two factors. The first was an element of social actor, in this case the size of the organisation, which coupled with other factors influenced organisation identity in very specific ways. Second, distinctiveness arose from the construction of meaning around specific elements of the social

actor, for example professionalism. Alpha was constructed primarily as a business, resting on the provision of engineering services. Beta, on the other hand, was constructed around the provision of engineering services with profit as important but not necessarily the driving force. The third element that added to the distinctive feel of each organisation was the mix or combination of factors and the way they “worked together” to produce something distinctive.

So while organisations in the same profession do operate within very similar boundaries, with many similarities, the differences associated with the people who give them life, create a space for difference as well. Thus, much like personal identity, organisational identity is associated with similarity and difference (Buckingham 2008). Identity is similar because the categories from which identity is drawn are socially located and thus shared (Craig, 1995; Buckingham, 2008). At the same time identity is distinctive, as people seek to “rescue” something which is unique to them, thus distinguishing themselves from others (Craig, 1995; Buckingham, 2008).

It must be noted however that the nature of the research design allowed access to individual and collective meaning making in matters of organisational identity, allowing for the possibility of distinctiveness, thus contributing to this finding. It is conceivable that an alternative design, focussed only on formal claims relating to the social actor may have provided a very different outcome.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

The contribution of this study is both methodological and substantive. The study has provided further substantiation for the view that the choice of research design is not a neutral one but plays an integral role in the nature of the knowledge generated, and should be taken seriously as part of the research process. Furthermore, it has demonstrated the use of an internet-based qualitative survey in accessing organisational identity, and suggests that this form of data gathering in the organisation can be successful, provided that participants are computer literate and have access to the Internet. The data generated from the internet-based survey made possible the development of two descriptive narratives of each of the heritage organisation’s surveyed. These descriptive narratives, in turn, helped shed light on the question of distinctiveness in organisational identity, and showed that despite similarity in many characteristics, it is possible for organisational identity to include distinctive elements.

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## **APPENDIX A: CONSTRUCTION OF ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY NARRATIVES**

### **A1. Introduction**

The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the thinking and logic underlying the construction of the three identity narratives of each heritage firm. Appendix A serves to explain in more detail the content of the data analysis process discussed in Chapter 4, and the organisational identity statements and narratives discussed in Chapter 5.

In Section A, I trace the assumptions underlying the construction of the Alpha narrative, and in Section B, the underlying logic of the Beta narrative.

### **A2. Section A: Alpha**

For Alpha, there were three identity narratives, “We are a market leader” “We are client focussed professionals” and “We are a people orientated company”. Each of these will be discussed in greater detail below.

#### **A2.1 Identity narrative 1: We are a Market Leader**

This identity narrative is a combination of the identity statements relating to the business dimension of Alpha, and its status in the market where it is positioned by participants (supported by company documentation) as being a leading company, one that is fairly well known, being one of the largest (consulting) firms as well as one of the best. There is an emphasis on a business orientation, and the accompanying tendency to be bureaucratic. Finally there is a focus on continually changing in order to move forward. Included in this narratives are six identity statements:

- We are a leading company
- We are a highly regarded engineering company
- We are the biggest and the best but tend to be bureaucratic
- We are a multi-disciplinary firm with a global reach
- We are business-focused
- We are always moving forward

The construction of each of these identity statements, will be discussed in greater detail below, and includes a list of first order codes and associated quotes (where applicable).

### A2.1.1 We are a leading company

There were many references to the company being a leader in the field, some specifying specifically in South Africa or Africa, whereas others were non-specific, just referring to some form of leadership. In this identity statement, I also included references that denoted market leadership without specifically using this term, for example being in the “Top 500 in SA” or “A force to be reckoned with”. Listed below are some of the quotes associated with the identity statement “We are a leading company”

**Table A1: Quotes associated with “We are a leading company”**

<p><i>Alpha leader in the marketplace:</i> “Alpha was much more dynamic and driven to be a leader in the market place, with people to match” (P 65)</p> <p><i>Leader in Africa:</i> “Alpha, the biggest civil engineering consulting group in South Africa and a leader in Africa” (P 65)</p> <p><i>Leaders in quality</i> (P 48) / <i>to be the leader</i> (P 62) / <i>A leader</i> (P 71)</p> <p><i>Leaders in the field:</i> “Broad skills base, across most built environment sectors, numerous specialists, leaders in the field” (P 72)</p> <p><i>Leading (mentioned 10 times)</i></p> <p><i>Leading consulting company:</i> “I am working for the biggest consultant firm in South Africa. We are also the leading consultant company in SA” (P 14)</p> <p><i>Leading edge service:</i> “Alpha offers leading edge service as evidenced by the quality of our deliverables” (P 58)</p> <p><i>Leading organisation:</i> “a leading organization” (P 24)</p> <p><i>Leading player:</i> “leading player in the profession” (P16)</p> <p><i>Leading to the top:</i> “the company which is leading to the top” (P 47)</p> <p><i>Market leader:</i> “a well established organization being a market leader” (P 57) / “Definitely market leaders in South Africa and Africa. A proud and transforming company” (P 34)</p> <p><i>Main role player:</i> “Right up there as one of the main role players (but not in every field – such as dam building for example)” (P16)</p> <p><i>Industry leader:</i> It started as a small leader and developed as a market leader (P 9) / “Always better than the rest. Number 1 in the industry. Responsible and accountable” (P 9) / “Without having any other work experience to use a comparison, it has been great working for a company with the values of Alpha. Despite it's size and market position as the leader in the field in the country, Alpha is structured in such a way that it still pays attention to detail on a client level, employee level and project level. It is a flourishing company which reflects the manner in which it tackles work with excellence” (P10)</p> <p><i>Top 500 in SA:</i> “That we are the largest consultancy in South Africa. That we are a top 500 company in SA. That Alpha has embraced change in South Africa and offers equal opportunities to all it's employees regardless of race and gender – this was not forced upon us as this was our policy well prior to 1994” (P 42 / P 45)</p> <p><i>Force to be reckoned with:</i> “Good and competitive – a force to be reckoned with” (P 41)</p> <p><i>Status:</i> “accomplishments, status, multidisciplinary, ability to come along side and help” (P 74)</p> <p><i>Forefront of industry development (leadership):</i> “visionary and always in the forefront in terms of developments in industry” (P 8)</p> <p><i>Trend setters:</i> “We were like trendsetters in the market” (P 23)</p>
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### A2.1.2 We are a highly regarded engineering company

In this category I have included all references to Alpha's reputation as either being well known and highly regarded in the industry with an emphasis on the distinctive work it is involved in. I have included engineering as part of the descriptor, even though the quotes below do not suggest this specifically. I have done this because in the data more generally, there was mention of an engineering or civil engineering firm (see particularly quotes for "We are the biggest").

**Table A.2: Quotes associated with "We are a highly regarded engineering company"**

<p><i>Well known (x 5) / Well known brand (P 12)</i>  <i>Very old:</i> "Biggest consulting engineering firm, very old, and distinguished" (P 13)  <i>Alpha is reputable:</i> "Alpha is reputable in the market for implementing infrastructure projects in a professional manner, taking into cognizance the needs of beneficiaries, that is the client and community" (P 27)  <i>Competition:</i> "Any tender that we submitted, you hear fellow friends discussing that we are amongst their threats... so I guess out there we were competitive" (P 46).  <i>Good name in the market:</i> "good, based on trust and years of experience, and good name in the market" (P 13)  <i>Respected (19 times):</i> Used twelve times with regard to reputation. Also mentioned with regard to stakeholder views, company motto, and cocktail party / plane question. "Company that provides high quality work, had completed numerous prestige projects, both locally and abroad, and is well respected in the building industry" (P 55).  <i>Highly regarded:</i> "Being very highly regarded and Alpha's opinions would carry a lot of weight in any conversation" (P 42 / 45)  <i>Distinctive projects:</i> "Company with a proud history over an extended period of time with a lot of distinctive projects as proof" (P 51)  <i>Numerous prestige projects:</i> "Company that provides high quality work, has completed numerous prestige projects, both locally and abroad, and is well respected in the building industry" (P 55)  <i>Recommendation of services / trustworthy:</i> "Definitely a company to be used for a project" (P15) / "As I am involved with Alpha for two years as employee, I wish to mention that while I was with Makhado Municipality we appointed Alpha on various projects and my experience with Alpha was based on the fact that Alpha was trustworthy, and was always totally committed and had a lot of expertise" (P 51)</p> <p><i>Successful staff</i>  <i>Take care of their image through their employees:</i> "They take good care of their image through their employees, yet those who're still new in the industry tend to take some time to reach such stages of 'carrying the image in the best way possible'" (P 44)</p> <p><i>Dissonant voices</i>  <i>Negative attitudes for no reason:</i> "good although there were several instances of very negative attitudes for no apparent reason" (P 64)  <i>Limited general public awareness:</i> "Awareness amongst the general public seemed to be limited – this as probably more pronounced in Cape Town than in Pretoria where the company had a bigger footprint and attracted more of the projects in the public eye" (P 10)</p>
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*Not as reactive as possible* (reputation): “representing excellence but not always as reactive as we could be” (P 24)

### **A2.1.3 We are the biggest and the best but tend to be bureaucratic**

This identity statement linked the three initial second-order categories “We are the biggest” with “We are the best” and “We tend to be bureaucratic”. The first of these two categories were joined, as several participants, used these two terms together when describing the company. The category “We tend to be bureaucratic was added as it was linked to the size of the organisation by participants.

In the category, “We are the best”, I have included all the references to Alpha as having pre-eminence in its field or industry, as well as references to the recognition of the latter. Whilst this is similar to being a leading company as well as being highly regarded, it is taken a step further to indicate a position in the ranks of the highly regarded, in this case – the best. While there were several references to Alpha being “the biggest”, there was some variance with regard to the context in which it was considered as such. Some references indicated it was the largest in South Africa, with others indicating it was the biggest in Africa. The category “We tend to be bureaucratic” emerged primarily in response to management systems but as per the criterion set for inclusion as a dimension of identity, it was mentioned spontaneously in response to other questions as well, including culture, differences and cocktail party / plane.

#### **Table A.3: Quotes associated with “We are the biggest and the best but tend to be bureaucratic**

*We are the best*  
*Award-winning*: “healthy and meaningful as is proven by the many awards in which stakeholders rate us” (P 8)  
*Best in the field*: “the best in the field” (P 25)  
*Best in the industry*: “the best in the industry without a doubt” (P 50)  
*Best consultants on the continent*: best consultants on the continent and as with all consultants the communication stinks” (P 63)  
*Best service to attain best results*: “of a high quality.... best service to attain best results” (P 44)  
*Compete with the rest of the world*: “able to compete with the rest of the world” (P 46)  
*Desire to be the best*: “desire to be the best” (P 17)  
*Desire to be biggest and best*: “desire to be the biggest and, perhaps, to be successful and recognized as such amongst the profession” (P 16)  
*Doing our best*: “performing to the best of our abilities” (P 49)  
*Doing your best*: “doing the best that you could, up to standard and on time” (P 38)  
*Better than the competition*: “better than the competition” P 61)  
*One of the best*: “one of the best” (P 43)  
*Top in its class / Top notch*: “Still the top in its class and we just getting stronger and stronger by the day – look out for us” (P 54) / “excellent, top notch” (P 70)

*Outperforming*: “to be outperforming in terms of delivery of products and design aspects” (P 46)  
*Reaching the sky*: “in the next few years, it will be reaching the sky as the service, productivity, relationship will be escalating” (P 47)  
*The best*: “the best consulting company, by completing their work on time with the best quality” (P 3)  
*The best organisation*: “the best organisation” (P 47)  
*Strive to be the best*: “Always strive to be the best among competitors” (P 27)  
*Driving*: “Driving for excellence” (P 65) / *striving for excellence* (x2)  
*Striving for better*: “A competent company based on sound values and striving for better all the time” (P 17) / “familiar company to the sector with motivations to be better” (P 49)  
*Striving to be better* (distinctive): “striving to be better” (P 25)  
*Strive for perfection*: “striving for perfection” (P 40)

#### *Successful staff*

*Driving towards success*: “dynamic, clear-thinking people with constant  
*Drives towards success* (P 17)  
*Striving to be better*: “hard-working, motivated and striving to be better (P 49)

#### *Dissonant voice:*

*Development required*: “I would certainly give some background of Alpha and would recommend the company for any consulting services to be rendered as I am proud to be part of the company, however I believe we are in a rebuilding phase and not all employees are up to standard as yet, so I would certainly refer him to the right person to get joy out of Alpha. I honestly believe some individuals are not on the level as needed be regarding their position” (P 51)

AND

#### *We are the biggest*

*Alpha biggest consultancy*: “Alpha was the biggest consultancy in South Africa, and that Alpha has no merged with Beta... that Alpha was a multi-disciplinary consultancy” (P 16)  
*Biggest civil engineering company*: “The best – we are the biggest and most well known civil engineering company in South Africa” (P 6) / “Alpha, the biggest civil engineering consulting group in South Africa and leader in Africa” (P 65)  
*Biggest consulting engineering firm*: “Biggest consulting engineering firm, very old, distinguished” (P 13) / “I am working for the biggest consultant firm in South Africa. We are also the leading consultant company in SA” (P 14)  
*Biggest firm in Africa*: “We were the biggest firm in Africa and I was proud to be associated with the firm. I belonged to the firm” (P 19) / “We are the biggest and best consulting firm in Africa” (P 50)  
*Being the biggest and best*: “focussed on being the biggest and best, and the reputation for this in the fraternity” (P 16)  
*Large consulting company*: “Alpha is a large consulting company and diverse in various fields ranging from transport to electrical to project management. We are active in lots of African countries as well as the Middle East” (P 35)  
*Largest consultant in SA*: “It’s a professional organisation. People who know what they’re doing. We’re the largest consultants in SA. I would probably mention some of the projects we’re working on” (P 41)  
*Largest consulting firm*: “Being one of the largest consulting firms in South Africa (P 37)  
*The largest consultancy*: “The largest consultancy and within the top of the country (P 35)  
*Pride*: “It has a lot of history and I am proud to be part of it” (P38) / “a company who deliver quality and who is proud about its projects” (P 14) / “I was very proud to belong to a winning team” (P 23) / “...I have found that the ex-Beta has basically the same values as the ex-Alpha in the sense that pride, quality, mutual respect and dynamics are the core values of being part of one

of the best companies (Beta & Alpha) to work for” (P 2) / “The company I work for is very important and especially its values and what it stands for and I have always been proud to work for Alpha” / “It was an honour, and proud to have been associated with the VWL and Alpha brands and it would be sad as was the case with the VWL logo – not to see the Alpha logo on contract name boards anymore” (P 42/45)

*Large*: “Large, thorough, old school, expensive” (P 28)

*Size*: size was used eight times to describe Alpha, and particularly in the question on differences to highlight the distinctions between Alpha and Beta.

AND

*We tend to be bureacractic*

*Comprehensive*: “In certain areas as very comprehensive, in others not so professional. The A site manual is excellent, however there are few design check lists that encompass the combined knowledge of the technical expertise” (P 58) / “detailed, comprehensive: onerous being too strong a word, perhaps” (P 16) / “Comprehensive although at times it seemed too detailed but with a large organsiation it is necessary” (P 64).

*Enables continuity*: “A brilliant guide to do the work. If I had to leave, someone else can just continue from where I stopped” (P 33)

*Well structured*: “well structured. The financial system is world class with all pains that go with it. We are formalising the project side and has lots of procedures written down” (P 35) / “very structured in principle, but allowing common sense to prevail” (P73)

*Consistent*: “Very well developed and well tested. Integrates the business model with the projects model well. Implemented generally with attention to detail and consistency. Well structured to ensure a well managed and yet not bog down employees in systems and red tape. Flexible enough to allow continual improvement when suggested” (P 10)

*Enable maintenance of procedures*: “Good decision making management – Well placed management for the good management system in the company – Make sure that procedures for performing work are maintained – Action to prevent confusion” (P 3)

*Ensures smooth working process*: “structured and adequate to ensure smooth working processes” (P 26)

*Useful*: “Useful and probably ever changing to accommodate present and future changes in the company” (P 52)

*Relevant*: “Helpful and relevent” (P 61)

*User friendly*: “refined, orderly and user friendly” (P48)

*Easy to work with*: “I have only been working with the intranet systems and found it to be very easy to work with and is kept up to date” (P 5)

*Well organised management system*: “We have a very well organised management system in place. Everything works smooth and we do get enough support should we require support” (P14)

*Focussed on desired outcome*: “Practical, not too demanding, and focussed on the desired outcome” (P 17)

*Well thought out*: “very well thought out with regard to BST etc. Once the PSO is functioning as planned the PM tasks and controls will be even better” (P 25)

*Sometimes too much*: “very good but sometimes too much” (P 15)

*A lot of red tape*: “Big company with lot of red tape which is required at all” (P 71)

*Impossible to follow*: “nearly impossible to follow due to the shear magnitude of systems. No priority is given to any of the systems, making the decision of what to use and what not to very difficult” (P 8).

*Admin system a killer*: People management good but administrative system becoming a killer” (P 67)

*Necessary evil*: “A necessary evil as they interfered with my tasks” (P 58)

*Admin kills innovation*: “administration kills innovation” (P 29)

*Interferes with health, family and life*: “ISO is taxing the managers and staff to death – “legal



compliance” to the nth degree (and never expanding) means that work has to be relegated to personal times. Satisfying extremely heavy work demands plus the ever-growing system is in my view in many cases an impossibility which grinds managers and staff to/over the edge regarding health, family and life” (P 74)

*Alpha constrained by processes and procedures:* “Beta seems to have had a more relaxed way of doing things (which is no reflection on the ability to do big projects), perhaps not as rigidly constrained by processes and procedures. Alpha seems to have a preoccupation with such matters (presumably as a tool to be more efficient, and to work towards the ISO requirements” (P 16)

*Complicated:* “They were so complicated for ISO 900 processes” (P 23)

*Cumbersome:* “Quite comprehensive and sometimes cumbersome” (P 22) / “Functional yet sometimes VERY cumbersome and possibly not very streamlined. There could have been more improvement in this aspect” (P 68).

*Deficient in accessing prior knowledge:* “Excellent in some aspects (financial & formal management processes) but surprisingly deficient in accessing prior knowledge and experience” (P 24)

*Tedious:* “Modern, well structured and well managed but tedious at times as a result of the size of the organisation” (P 42 / 45)

#### **A2.1.4 We are a multi-disciplinary firm with a global reach**

Here I have combined two second order categories, one regarding the multi-disciplinary nature of the firm and the other regarding its geographical dispersion throughout South Africa, Africa and the Middle East, something referred to by some participants as the “global reach of the firm”. The multi-disciplinary nature of the firm relates to the diversity of technical services and the multiple areas of specialisation. These were combined in one identity statement, as several participants made reference to the multi-disciplinary nature at the same time as referring to geographical coverage of the firm. Also included here are references to the opportunities provided by the global reach and multi-disciplinary nature, as these provided significant prospects for employees and were thus a significant source of identification.

#### **Table A.4: Quotes associated with “We are a multi-disciplinary firm with a global reach”**

*We are a multi-disciplinary firm*

*Technical diversity:* “Alpha (is a) large consulting company and diverse in various fields ranging from transport to electrical to project management. We are active in lots of African countries as well as Middle East” (P 35)

*Broad based consulting engineering firm:* “well established, broad based consulting engineering firm with broad geographic coverage and offering a wide variety of services” (P 28)

*Alpha multi-disciplinary consultancy:* “Alpha was the biggest consultancy in South Africa, and that Alpha has no merged with Beta... that Alpha was a multi-disciplinary consultancy” (P 16)

*Technical diversity (seven times):* “Glad to have been part of a well organised and professional business where I had the opportunity to work and perform in an environment where a diverse group of skills was on hand whenever needed” (P 20) / “well founded, been in the market long, has offices in a large portion of the country, has a broad knowledge base with specialists in many

fields” (P 22)

*Combining talents*: “a bringing together of many talents and a start of a broader more diverse company” (P 40)

*Multi-disciplinary*: “being one of the largest consulting firms in South Africa, being multi-disciplinary (P 37) / “Professional, multi-disciplinary service and commitment to clients” (P 74)

*Numerous specialists*: “Broad skills base, across most built environment sectors, numerous specialists, leaders in the field” (P 55)

*Broad based service*: “comprehensive, quality and broad based service” (P 28)

*Depth of resources*: “Alpha was a dynamic firm with a depth of resources ready to tackle any client need” (P 64)

*Good team of specialists*: “we were fortunate to be part of a very good team of specialists who had honest and generally open and caring relationships” (P 73)

*knowledgable*: “knowledgable, experienced, professional and dependable” (P 73)

*Learned a great deal*: “I met a lot of interesting people and learned a great deal about engineering and management” (P 75)

*Exposure to multiple diverse projects*: “Alpha is the one and only organisation I have ever worked for. Alpha made me the engineer I am today through exposure to a multitude of diverse projects. Loyalty best sums up the relationship” (P 8)

*Excel in high profile projects*: “Alpha is very diverse and involved in many diverse projects. We excel in high profile and difficult projects. We like being challenged” (P 8)

*Freedom to pursue career path*: “I credit Alpha with where I am today. Alpha allowed me the freedom to pursue my career path with support and encouragement. It’s the only company I have ever worked for. I have almost without fail enjoyed the projects I have worked on. I have built up many strong relationships in the workplace and through working. I have seldom been unhappy (and never seriously so) at work” (P 10)

*Great company to work for*: “Alpha was a great company to work for, with limitless opportunities” (P 66)

*Creating opportunities for employees* (P 29)

*A company I have created*: “And this has really happened to me on the way to Angola – I mentioned that I work for Alpha and the attention is all there. I tell them about our projects, all the different clients and it just seems like I am talking about a company that I have created” (P 6)

AND

*We are a global organisation*

*A global organization*: It is a global organization which serves its clients satisfactorily and it is expanding timeously as a big company” (P 47)

*Global opportunities*: “all the global opportunities out there despite the economical problems in the world” (P 29)

*Globally recognized professional service provider*: “To be a preferred and globally recognized professional service provider offering sustainable infrastructure solutions” (P 4)

*Geographically dispersed*: “Well founded, been in the market long, has offices in a large portion of the country, has a broad knowledge base with specialists in many fields” (P 22) / “Alpha is a large consulting company and diverse in various fields ranging from transport to electrical to project management. We are active in lots of African countries as well as Middle East” (P 35)

*Situated all over SA and Africa*: “well known established engineering firm with 1600 personnel situated all over the RSA and Africa” (P 71)

*Global*: “global” (P 47)

### A2.1.5 We are business-focused

This identity statement is a combination of the second order categories “We are business- focused” and “We tend to be bureaucratic”. In “We are business-focused” I included all the data extracts that made reference to the emphasis on business and the importance placed on efficiency and effectiveness in producing products and services. It also included references to the kinds of activities involved in supporting a business orientation, including those of staff members who best served this purpose.

**Table A.5: Quotes associated with “We are business-focused”**

<p><i>Business-focused:</i> “Alpha was more business-minded with a clear focus on leadership development, growth and development into new fields. I think Alpha had a much stronger emphasis on thinking broadly and doing work with efficiency. Alpha was more geared towards a big company” (P 10)</p> <p><i>Alpha focus on work produced:</i> “Beta appears more formal than Alpha and Beta had more emphasis on entertaining clients than Alpha that concentrated on work produced” (P 24)</p> <p><i>Alpha revenue driven:</i> “Alpha more revenue – ‘finance driven’” (P 54)</p> <p><i>Alpha productivity high:</i> “The Alpha productivity is high and has a lot of experience and it has more skilled people” (P 47)</p> <p><i>Alpha moved from smaller projects:</i> “Alpha, mostly moved away from small projects” (P 69) (The context for this is that small projects do not generate sufficient income and were thus not viable from a business perspective. Alpha had taken a specific decision in this regard, and for this reason, this code is included here).</p> <p><i>Alpha more aggressive in market:</i> “Alpha in my opinion was more aggressive in the market e.g. continually seeking new markets, being innovative, trying to achieve more, etc” (P 68)</p> <p><i>Controlled costs:</i> “Do the best work possible using acceptable standards. Maintain client relationships. Control costs. Streamline decision making” (P 22)</p> <p><i>Hard on finance side:</i> “in the unit as take it or leave it. Alpha management as very hard on the finance side but tolerable on the group management side” (P 71)</p> <p><i>Financially orientated:</i> “being mostly financially orientated but becoming more people orientated in recent years” (P 55)</p> <p><i>Goal-oriented:</i> “enthusiastic and goal orientated” (P 57)</p> <p><i>Knowledge and people driven culture:</i> “Financial perspectives, client perspectives, internal operations are the main strategies to build the organisation and to be knowledge and people driven” (P 60)</p> <p><i>Long term prosperity</i> (P 17)</p> <p><i>Ensured market related salary:</i> “Make sure everybody had work, earned a market related salary and was happy” (P 19)</p> <p><i>Maximise profitability:</i> “Maximise profitability, maintain client relationship, execute the work in the most professional way and provide work balance to retain staff” (P 34)</p> <p><i>Performance bonuses:</i> “Is the best organisation to learn and have good experience. Good relationship in an organisation – performance bonuses to encourage staff to work hard – courses offered encourages the staff to learn more” (P 3)</p> <p><i>Successful staff:</i></p> <p><i>Controlled costs:</i> “Those that worked hard. Those that controlled costs the best” (P 22)</p> <p><i>Rain-makers</i> (P 54)</p> <p><i>Able to grow business:</i> “People who are able to grow the business” (P 65)</p> <p><i>Secure future work:</i> Those who could consistently produce projects that were successful to both the company and the client and secure future work based on the company’s performance and client satisfaction” (P 26)</p>
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*Bring in work:* “Those in managerial (associate / technical director or above) positions and those that did their jobs well and brought in much work for the company (P 28) / “Climbed a ladder, bring in projects and be clientele orientated. Widely known and respected (P33) / “ Those bringing in work.... (income to the company). Also those who were on time delivering work for deadlines” (P 41)

*Consistently produce good results:* “people who could consistently produce good results and have a well motivated team working with them” (P 68)

*Work carefully for the greater good:* “Money pays the bills for all, and it must be well spent, managed and made by all” (P 44)

*Exploiting opportunities:* “Exploit opportunities to do ethical work to the benefit of the company, it’s employees and the community” (P 17)

*Identifying opportunities:* “one who saw an opportunity to fill a need” (P 37)

*Hard working* (14 times): “People who can work together as a team, share ideas that everyone can benefit from. People who work hard and enjoy what they do” (P 19) / “persons that work hard, deliver high quality work with good relationships with clients as well as fellow staff members” (P 58) / “hard working, family orientated (as in forming a sense of family at work), dilligent with their responsibilities, taking initiative and honoring Alpha as their source of income” (P 58)

*Dissonant voices*

*Alpha expensive:* “....Alpha had a reputation for being expensive and being too big for clients – too remote, whether deserved or not” (P 66)

*Quality sacrificed for the bottom line:* “Exemplary in some instances but less so in others (quality sacrificed for bottom line)” (P 74)

### **A2.1.6 We are always moving forward**

This identity statement was formed to capture the characteristics associated with the second order categories, we are dynamic, and those formed in response to the question on change, change is natural, change is necessary, change as growth, change as an opportunity and change as a challenge. The meaning of dynamic, as defined by the Free Online Dictionary is: “Characterized by continuous change, activity, or progress” for example a dynamic market. For this reason, it was categorized with aspects relating to change, as it implies an openness to change, much like many of the responses to change mentioned in the survey. Because the idea of dynamism and movement, I have included the responses to the question on change as this formed a theme throughout the data, and not only as in response to the question on change.

Several responses highlighting the dynamism of Alpha were given and these were combined with other similar aspects relating to being vibrant, full of life and energetic. However, in contrast to being viewed as dynamic and forward moving, there were five references to Alpha being conservative. Conservative is defined as “disposed to preserve existing conditions, institutions, etc., or to restore traditional ones, and to limit change” (Answers.Yahoo.com). This conservatism was linked specifically to the nature of

technical solutions, and creating an environment that was predictable and in which employees knew what to expect. The constancy associated with conservatism provides a contrast to the dynamism associated with change, and was included as it represents somewhat of a contradiction, though this tension can be accounted for.

**Table A.6: Quotes associated with “We are always moving forward”**

<p><i>We are dynamic</i>  <i>Dynamic</i>: “dynamic and aware of need to change” (P 64) / “dynamic, clear thinking people with constant drives towards success” (P 17)  <i>Alpha dynamic</i>: “I feel Beta was rigid and old school. Alpha was more dynamic and young” (P 61)  <i>Alpha more dynamic</i>: “It would seem that Alpha was more dynamic in the way they provided solutions where Beta was very set in their ways” (P 18)  <i>Vibrant (x10)</i>: “Excellent company to work for. Modern ideas and ways to do business. Vibrant, good team spirit” (P 18)  <i>Energetic</i>: “positive and energetic” (P 23)  <i>Alpha full of life</i>: “Alpha was full of life, both internally and externally.... Beta seemed to be quiet, yet good at what they did” (P 44)  <i>Always moving forward</i>: “Always moving forward but still keeping our past in mind” (P 50)  <i>Moving forward</i>: “Professional, positive, moving forward” (P 41)  <i>Forward thinking</i>: “forward thinking and open to suggestion” (P 22) / “I would say that I worked for an organisation that was able to take on any type of work and produce positive results. The company was a pleasure to work for because it placed the happiness of the employees high on the company agenda together with those of the client. I would also say that the company was forward thinking in that while we based our work on tried and tested methods and technologies we did not limit ourselves - the company always looked at being innovative and where applicable risked new ideas and approaches to both project work and company structure” (P 26)  <i>Forefront of new technology</i>: “They have completed many large projects, are on the forefront of new technology and even though it is a large company, still cares for the individual – whether employee or client” (P 39)  <i>Responsive service provider</i>: “Adaptable and responsive service provider” (P 64)  <i>Transformation (value)</i></p> <p><i>Successful staff</i>:  <i>Go-getters</i>: “Go getters, With it, Dynamic” (P 62)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">AND</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Change in Alpha</i></p> <p><i>Change is natural</i>  The idea captured in this category is that change is part of the natural order of things and is for this reason to be expected.  <i>Business as usual</i>: “business as usual” (P 38)  <i>Change as a constant feature</i>: “Change was constant, the need to adapt was without end (perhaps not a daily imperative, but nevertheless a constant feature) (P 16) / “A continuous thing. Due to the type of work done change was a constant factor” (P 30)  <i>Change as ongoing</i> (P 64)  <i>Change as inevitable (x5)</i>: “something that is inevitable in a changing environment” (P 68) / “generally change was accepted as inevitable and on going. In my particular experience change has always been a big part of the company” (P 72) / “something that is inevitable and to be</p>
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embraced and managed” (P 55)

*Change as normal* : “normal” (P 67)

*Change as reality*: “a reality and an opportunity” (P 17)

*Change is necessary*

In addition to being viewed as natural, change was furthermore viewed as essential and necessary for organisational life, though included in this category is the view that change should be embarked only where necessary and not merely for the sake of it.

*Change as essential*: “essential” (P 65) / “an on-going action that is essential for the firm to remain relevant, vibrant and on the cutting edge” (P 70)

*Change is necessary*: “necessary and welcome although we understood that is always a challenge” (P 58)

*Change keeps people focused*: “..Change is always good. It keeps people focused and gives people an overall experience” (P 6) (linked to Change gives experience)

*Change as moving forward*: “Going forward to remain a leader in our field” (P 35) / “a positive way forward to benefit all” (P 36) / “Going forward and adapting to changing environment and not stagnating” (P42/45)

*Aware of need to change*: Dynamic and aware of need to change as circumstances evolve” (P64)

*Change only if necessary*: “good when really necessary. Our manager loved saying: ‘if it’s not broken, don’t fix it’. Mostly we were expected to do our jobs as good and fast as possible; not to re-invent the wheel” (P 41)

*Change to be embraced*: “something to be embraced” (P 75)

*Change as growth*

Similar to change being natural and necessary, though here the emphasis is on change as growth which is a natural and necessary process.

*Change as growth* (7): “An inevitable and desirable process of growth” (P 24) /

“progressive and necessary in order to advance, move forward and grow” (P10)

*Change as learning new things*: “A means to grow and learn new things” (P 18)

*Change as a new perspective*: “A challenge to learn something new and see things from a different perspective” (P 39)

*Change gives experience*: “...Change is always good. It keeps people focused and gives people an overall experience” (P 6)

*Change as ongoing development*: “part of our ongoing development” (P 64)

*Change as an opportunity*

Change has many positive consequences and this category captures the possibilities associated with change. These opportunities may be broad and abstract, focussed on improvement on business or very concrete like staff benefits.

*Change as opening new horizons*: “Exploring new horizons with the knowledge that much thought has gone into it” (P 31)

*Change as opportunity* (x8): “an opportunity to explore new areas, processes and ideas that could potentially improve the company and work opportunities” (P 26) / “great opportunity to achieve new goals” (P 50) / “Opportunity to better ourselves” (P 5)

*Change as progress* (P 48 / P 69)

*Good to improve performance*: “a good thing when done to improve performance and efficiency” (P 66)

*Building a more diverse company*: “a bringing together of many talents and a start of a broader more diverse company” (P 40)

*Improves staff benefits*: “Maternity leave now pays 100%, days offered for study leave – years of retirement” (P 3)

*Possibility to change for the best* (P 71)

*Change as a fresh start* “A wonderful move that would bring about a fresh start for all

employees” (P 44)

*Change as exciting*: “exciting but also scared of adapting” (P 49)

*Change as making a difference*: “making a difference” (P 46)

*Change as transformation*: “revision of what transpired before and it is therefore brought to transformation that will make a great difference of living and leading company globally” (P 47)

*Change as a challenge*

Change as a challenge captures those elements that present some challenges or difficulty associated with change

*Change involves sacrifice*: “essential to growth with sacrifices mostly on the part of employees” (P 8)

*Change as a challenge*: “A challenge to learn something new and to see things from a different perspective” (P 39)

*Challenging*: “a new challenge, adaptability” (P 11)

*Change as difficult to accept*: “Difficult to accept due to that the unit was old school and struggled to accept changes and new developments” (P 33)

*Change not always easy*: “not always that easy” (P 51)

*Dissonant voice*

*Conservative*: (5) “we are known for our solid and technically sound solutions – but we were a bit conservative at times, and our fees were relatively high” (P 21) / “sometimes conservative, fairly strict, but thus creating an environment where you knew what to expect” (P 39)

## **A2.2 Identity narrative 2: We are client-focused professionals**

In this narrative I brought together the key ideas of professionalism, the recurring theme of client focus, the importance of relevant stakeholders and nature and standard of the services offered by professionals to their clients. Central in the link is the idea that was expressed several times, that without clients, the organisation’s reason for existence would be futile, and more importantly impossible, as clients served as their source of income. For this reason, client care and focus were critical to their identity. Much is said about clients and this can arguably be attributed to two questions that related to the service provided by the organisation as well as the nature of client relations. However mention of clients was not limited to these questions only, and remained a consistent theme across the answers to all the questions, thus meeting the criterion for inclusion.

Related to the above-mentioned is the nature of the work produced, which was believed to be of high quality and solution driven. The final aspect included here is the identity statement relating to external stakeholders, which include “All people who have the right to an opinion and who can make valuable inputs” (P 39), as they are in a sense, a client of sorts. The identity narrative “We are client-focused professionals included four identity statements:

- We are professional in our approach

- We client-focused
- We are driven to deliver quality service to clients
- We are committed to working with relevant stakeholders

### A2.2.1 We are professional in our approach

The idea of being professional was one that permeated the data and as will be demonstrated below, was used in some way to answer all the different types of questions, with the exception of those related to change, emotional connection and key differences.

This suggests a central characteristic with a fair degree of depth.

The code “Professional” was assigned 52 times and was used to describe *values*: “professional”, *culture*: “Being professional in every aspect of service rendering” (P 51) and “professional with good moral principles to staff and clients”, *successful staff*: “Professionals building client relations on trust and excellence” (P 24), *staff relations*: “sometimes anonymous, but mostly open and professional” (P 48), *client relations*: “friendly and professional” (P 73), *relationships with external stakeholders*: “Keep it professional and take their interest at heart” (P 30), *reputation*: “highly professional and an organisation that can deliver” (P 8), *service*: “Professional, high quality and solution driven” (P 73), *management style*: “open, honest, fair, and very professional” (P 45), *leadership*: “open, honest, fair, professional and approachable” (P 42), *relationship between management and employees*: “professional” (P 69), *management systems*: “professional and strategic” (P 60), *distinctive*: “The organization was dependable, conducted its business in a professional manner and had good staff relationships” (P 73); “a very professional company which offered a quality product” (P 50) and “Maximise profitability, maintain client relationship, execute the work in the most professional way and provide work balance to retain staff” (P 22), *cocktail party / plane*: “..it’s a professional organisation. People who know what they are doing. We’re the largest consultants in SA. I would probably mention some of the projects we’re working on” (P 41) and “A professional place where I learnt a lot” (P 53).

#### Table A.7: Quotes associated with “We are professional in our approach”

<p><i>Professional</i> (x 52): “highly professional and an organisation that can deliver” (P 8) / “The organisation was dependable, conducted its business in a professional manner and had good staff relationships” (P 73)</p> <p><i>Professional client service</i>: “given the highest priority, but kept professional at all times” (P 8) and</p>
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“providing a professional and efficient service to its clients in accordance with fair competitive commercial practice” (P 42 / P 45)

*Professional in a personal way*: “Professional in a personal way” (P 52)

*Professional global organization*: “Professional global organization ready to take over the world” (P 33) (overlap with the market leader narrative)

*Professional service delivery*: “Well suited to supply various services professionally” (P 4) / “A competitive structure delivering satisfying professional service while sticking to strict rules and regulations” (P 33)

*Professionalism*: (12 times) Professionalism as a value was mentioned several times; distinctive: “Acting with professionalism & integrity” (P 5), culture: “professionalism above all” (P 6) and “high degree of professionalism and technical excellence” (P 59), reputation “one of high professionalism and integrity” (P 26)

*Example of professionalism*: “Alpha has been good to me stretching me to fulfil my potential. It has taught me excellence in my work and enabled me to ‘building’ other staff members reporting to me towards their own goals. Alpha will live on as an example of professionalism in engineering” (P 58)

*Professionals in development*: “Professionals in development” (P 23)

*Highest professional standards*: “adhering to the highest professional standards with a prime focus on the customer” (P 70)

*Best brains in the business*: “top professional with the best brains in the business” (P 70)

*First time right*: “First time right. Professional approach. Job satisfaction” (P 11)

*Safety net*: “Developed to be a safety net and to guide you towards a successful end product” (P 9) / The safety net to protect the trapeze artist (Staff) from fatal mishaps” (P 31) / “The perfect environment to exchange ideas and to be able to do your work with the knowledge that there will always be a safety net below to prevent you from falling (risk management)” (P 32)

### **A2.2.2 We are client -focused**

As indicated in the introduction to this identity narrative, this particular identity statement originates primarily in two questions, those related to the organisation’s service and client relations. However, responses regarding the importance of clients were not restricted to these two questions, and permeated many of the responses to the questions on values, culture, cocktail party or plane and company motto. For this reason, it was presumed to be a shared element of identity. The title of the identity statement is based on a data extract from participant 10, who described the culture of the organisation as “To provide a top quality service with a focus on clients and how best to meet their needs” (P 10). This suggests a link between the current identity statement “We are client-focused” and the one following: “We are driven to deliver quality service to clients”

There were many responses pertaining to clients, and the identity statement “ We are client–focused” can be divided conceptually into two broad areas, I have termed loosely “the Client is king”, which highlights the importance of client relations, not least of all to ensure that work is done according to the needs and demands of clients and “the Client as our bread and butter” which emphasises the economic value of clients and the necessity for good relations to ensure continued success. In addition to these,

are the descriptions of successful staff members and their role in bearing out this particular dimension of organisational identity.

**Table A.8: Quotes associated with “We are client-focused”**

<p><i>Client is king</i></p> <p><i>Client always right:</i> “Always right. Always treated with respect, he must get the product he pays for” (P 39)</p> <p><i>Client first:</i> “well preserved. Client first: (P 21) / “respectful and comes first with high dignity” (P 47)</p> <p><i>Client focused:</i> “The company was client focused and looked after and cared for personnel” (P 60)</p> <p><i>Value to client:</i> “excellent value to clients” (P 31) / “To work within a budget and time frame and to deliver outstanding value to the clients” (P 32)</p> <p><i>Delivery of product in time and budget:</i> “The company would at all times try to make a delivery of a product within time and budget at the same time make the client satisfied” (P 46)</p> <p><i>Satisfy needs and responsibilities:</i> “strangers we needed to establish relationships with to become friends so that we could at least satisfy their needs in the work and responsibilities they entrusted us with” (P 26)</p> <p><i>Aiming to satisfy clients:</i> “aiming to satisfy what ever our clients required” (P 64)</p> <p><i>Client interest at heart:</i> (x3) “We stand for doing our work well and to the best of the client’s interests” (P 58)</p> <p><i>Client relations as bonds:</i> “bonds between the organisation and the client” (P 46)</p> <p><i>Client satisfaction:</i> “The company that cares for its people and quality of work and client satisfaction is most important factors” (P 60)</p> <p><i>Committed to client satisfaction:</i> “committed to client satisfaction” (P 21)</p> <p><i>Keep client happy:</i> “keeping the client happy at all times” (44)</p> <p><i>No compromise with client’s happiness:</i> “of a high standard. No compromising when it comes to client’s happiness” (P 44)</p> <p><i>Extra mile:</i> “We went the extra mile to serve our clients well” (motto) (P 74)</p> <p><i>Ensure client trust:</i> “Very important. Building good relations with the client in order to ensure that you are trusted by them in what you do” (P 30)</p> <p><i>Good interaction:</i> “generally ok, with good interaction and contact between us and clients” (P 66)</p> <p><i>Years of experience:</i> “good, based on trust and years of experience and good name in the market” (P 13)</p> <p><i>Trust:</i> “Based on trust” (P 24)</p> <p><i>Respect for client</i> (P 42 / P 45)</p> <p><i>Effort to improve client relations:</i> “an effort was always made to improve” (P 36)</p> <p><i>Client relations proactive:</i> “excellent, proactive” (P 48)</p> <p><i>Kept client goals in mind:</i> “good as we always kept their goals in mind” (P 40)</p> <p><i>Well managed:</i> “well managed” (P 29)</p> <p><i>Client relations exclusive:</i> “Very important to the point where certain people maintained the only link to the client and no others were allowed to approach the same client” (P 22)</p> <p><i>Client is our bread and butter</i></p> <p><i>Client as backbone of the company:</i> “the backbone of the company and excellent relations was therefore a top priority” (P 42 / P 45)</p> <p><i>Client relations as valuable:</i> “highly valued. Lot of effort went into keeping clients happy” (P 41)</p> <p><i>Client relations important</i> (x19) “Clients were treated with respect and a big effort was put into meeting their needs, answering their requests and performing a good service. There was frequent emphasis on the fact that the best form of marketing is to ‘do the current jobs well’. There was quite a focus on the relative importance of clients dependent on the value of business they could</p>
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bring to the company” (P 10) / “one of the most important things. No clients, no work” (P 19) / “important, as with most we wanted a long relationship” (P 35)

*Client relations necessary*: “important and necessary” (P 49)

*Crucial to success*: “is one of the key elements to ensure successful business” (P 57)

*Core of our business*: “the core of our business” (P 61)

*Important part of day-day business*: “A very important part of day-day business” (P 75)

*Worth protecting*: “valuable and worth protecting” (P 32)

*Highly valued*: “Very important and highly valued” (P 31)

*Value client relations*: “We are a company that values client relations and do things the open and honest way” (P 30)

*Value every client*: “to value and respect every client no matter how small – they are our best form of advertisement” (P 42/ P 45)

*Essential*: “Essential and a good example to other clients” (P 48)

*Client relations required cultivation*: “important to have, and to nurture and to cultivate, but at the same time something which was more the focus of established management” (P 16)

*Client relations good for business*: “good for business” (P 43)

*Successful staff*

*Staff client focused*: “important and the people were client focused” (P 60)

*Client orientated*: “Climbed a ladder, bring in projects and be clientele orientated. Widely know and respected” (P 33)

*Client relations as priority*: (x4) “People that were committed to what they were doing. Putting client relations as a high priority but doing it with integrity” (P 30)

*Old school ties*: “.... Also those with old school ties have proved successful in terms of market penetration” (P 34)

*Skilled people*: “skilled people that did their task with pleasure, and were able to deliver products as agreed” (P 35)

*Dissonant voices*

*Lack of proper communication*: “Good from the one side but I feel that there is a lack of proper communication between the client and us” (P 33)

*Cases of insufficient attention*: “a very important aspect although there were cases of insufficient attention to some clients because of the time available” (P 64)

*Improve client relations*: “Good but can be improved” (P 15) / “not as good as it could” (P 20)

*Limited to project life span*: “Directly linked to projects and were rarely taken on after projects finished” (P 58)

*Poor performance required remedial action*: “generally good but there were cases of poor performance that required remedial action” (P 64)

*Used as stepping stone*: “Good, in some instances too good as there was a feeling that some personnel would use Alpha as a stepping stone to create a future for themselves away from Alpha” (P 51)

### **A2.2.3 We are driven to deliver quality service to clients**

This identity statement is similar to the previous one in that it relates to the customer but the emphasis here is the nature of service that is provided to the latter. The differentiating factor however is the emphasis on the nature of the service, which was described as being of a high quality or standard as

well as being solution driven. Also included here are the descriptions of successful staff members who support this particular aspect of identity.

**Table A.9: Quotes associated with “We are driven to deliver quality service to clients”**

<p><i>The best service</i>: “Alpha was a very strong company and always committed in giving the best service and looking after the employees” (P 6)</p> <p><i>Good service</i>: “providing a good service and basis of trust to the client” (P 67)</p> <p><i>Providing a value service</i>: Providing a value service, based on technical skill, for a client” (P 36)</p> <p><i>Great service with great attitude</i>: “providing a great service with a great attitude” (P 56)</p> <p><i>Growth indicative of quality service</i>: “The growth we have experienced is indicative of our quality service” (P57)</p> <p><i>High quality service</i>: “Of high quality whilst taking factors such as social environment, sustainability etc into account. We were not in it for the quick buck” (P 68)</p> <p><i>High class service</i>: “high class, probably as good as could be, but still with the odd imperfection” (P 17)</p> <p><i>Commitment to deliver</i>: “A company who is proud about its projects, and who show commitment to deliver” (P 14)</p> <p><i>Service excellence</i>: “Service excellence” (P 56)</p> <p><i>Service is valued</i>: “highly valued” (P 9)</p> <p><i>Quality deliverables</i>: “Quality deliverables” (P11)</p> <p><i>Work of high quality</i>: “To deliver work of high quality, with integrity and honesty” (P 55)</p> <p><i>High standards</i>: high standards (P17)</p> <p><i>High standards of work</i>: “produce a high standard of work” (P 19)</p> <p><i>Projects of high standard</i>: “projects of a high standard (P 14)</p> <p><i>Quality</i>: (x17): “Doing things with integrity and to the required quality” (P 68)</p> <p><i>Quality service</i>: (P 14)</p> <p><i>Quality of service</i>: “Quality of service” (P 67)</p> <p><i>Quality client service</i>: (x4) “to provide a top quality service with a focus on clients and how best to meet their needs” (P 10)</p> <p><i>Quality of work</i>: “Doing everything with care and without pressure to compromise on quality of work for the sake production” (P 48)</p> <p><i>Reliable service</i>: “Reliable and deliver on time, re-act quick on requests from client” (P 19)</p> <p><i>Reputation for quality of work</i>: “Good reputation for the quality of work we delivered and the way we operated” (P 19)</p> <p><i>Superb service</i>: “it has superb service” (P 47)</p> <p><i>On time</i>: “on time” (P 20)</p> <p><i>Value engineering</i>: “value engineering” (P 11) / <i>Value</i> (x4) as a value</p> <p><i>Pleasing</i>: (service) “pleasing and satisfactory” (P 46)</p> <p><i>Client service</i>: “work to give a good product to our client” (P 35)</p> <p><i>Service delivery</i>: “Service delivery to satisfy client’s needs” (P 11)</p> <p><i>Serve clients needs</i>: “...” (P 60) (core value) / <i>Service</i>: (x3 as core value)</p> <p>One aspect of this is being solution driven</p> <p><i>One stop shop</i>: “It’s a one stop shop where you get all your engineering solutions” (P 23)</p> <p><i>Able to find solutions</i>: “open-minded and able to find solutions for any challenge” (P 59)</p> <p><i>Provide suitable solutions</i>: “Provide suitable solutions” (P 71)</p> <p><i>Provide cost effective solutions</i>: “ Provide cost effective solutions according to client and site conditions” (P 39)</p> <p><i>Provide unique solutions</i>: “Known to provide good service, able to take on challenges and come up with unique solutions” (P 30)</p>
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*Providing engineering solutions:* “providing engineering solutions to clients satisfaction” (P 36)  
*Problems found solutions:* “The place where strangers become friends and where solutions were found to problems. It was easy to work and to feel that systems were in place to minimize risk (P 31)  
*Solution driven:* “professional, high quality and solution driven” (P 73)  
*Solution orientated:* “I would only have good things to say: ‘The people I work with are down to earth and solution orientated. No place for pretences or arrogance” (P 21)  
*Sound engineering judgments:* “Good service, not compromising on values, sound engineering judgments” (P 39)  
*Distinctive solutions:* “distinctive solutions” (P 21)  
*Innovative solution provider:* “innovative solution provider” (P 18)  
*Technically sound solutions:* “We are known for our solid and technically sound solutions – but we were a bit conservative at times, and our fees are relatively high” (P 21)  
*We can achieve anything:* “With our combined talent, we can achieve anything”

#### Successful staff

*Set the standard:* “people who set the standard and motivate others to perform to their best” (P 40)  
*work of high quality:* “persons that work hard, deliver high quality work with good relationships with clients as well as staff members” (P 15)  
*Committed to deadlines:* “Pleasant to work with, committed to deadlines, good communicators, technically proficient” (P 21)  
*Goal orientated:* “enthusiastic and goal orientated” (P 57)  
*Skilled people:* “skilled people that did their task with pleasure, and were able to deliver products as agreed” (P 35)  
*Technical excellence:* “technical excellence” (x 3)  
*Technical expertise:* “Those who have the technical expertise and those who have the freedom to express themselves through their technical expertise. Also those with the old school ties have provide successful in terms of market penetration (P 34)  
*Technical skill:* “members with the correct technical skills, managerial skill and happy doing what they were” (P 36)  
*Technical ability:* “technical ability” (P 36)  
*Technically adept:* “technically and politically adept” (P 74)  
*Technically strong:* “technically strong” (P 15)  
*Technically proficient:* “pleasant to work with, committed to deadlines, good communicators, technically proficient” (P 21)  
*Expertise:* “I enjoy working for an organisation with such a lot of expertise” (P 25)  
*Satisfied clients:* “Those with good expertise who did good work and satisfied clients” (P 72)  
*Timeous delivery:* “People who deliver on time and who has relationships with others” (P 14)

#### *Dissonant voice*

*Deteriorating:* Adequate, but of a lesser quality in recent years when compared with the past. This is most certainly a result of us taking on all work available without being able to keep up with staffing demands” (P 9)

### **A2.2.4 We are committed to working with relevant stakeholders**

In the provision of client-focused professional service, there is an important third party, the stakeholder for whom these services are delivered. In the provision of many engineering services, the client (who

foots the bills) is different from those receive or use the final product. Stakeholders are those groups who have a vested interested in the product or services, and who need to be engaged and consulted as part of service delivery. For this reason, their engagement and commitment is critical as they can affect the completion of projects within time and budget, and ultimately judge their effectiveness and value.

This identity statement is based primarily on responses to the question regarding relationships with external stakeholders, and according to the criterion set, this is insufficient to warrant its inclusion as a facet of identity. It was in situations such as these that the company documentation proved particularly useful. Promotional material presents Alpha as a company closely aligned with the Government's vision to provide services especially to communities who are historically disadvantaged, as a result of the Apartheid system. This is achieved primarily through municipalities and includes the provision of flushing toilets, building houses and roads (to mention just a few). Funding in some of these projects is by external agencies for example USAID. For this reason it was included as part of the construction of identity, though arguably not as critical as some of the others. In the Literature chapter, in the discussion of centrality of identity, I referred to *centrality as depth*, as described by Corley et al (2006). The key idea here was that various identity dimensions have varying "levels of centrality", some deeply rooted as part of identity with others situated at a more superficial level. Commitment to stakeholders is arguably an identity characteristic that lies at a more superficial level. The degree of centrality is determined by the number of situations in which the identity becomes salient, thus the organisational identity of an engineering firm is more likely to have engineering and professionalism as more central characteristics than for example stakeholders, as these would be salient in more situations. It is nevertheless a facet of identity, albeit a less central one.

The name of the identity statement is one that I have constructed, and aims to summarise the sentiments expressed about external stakeholders. Whilst some employees responded that due to their job profile or level, this was not relevant, others referred to broadly two types of stakeholders. The first are those representing community interests and they form the bulk of the responses. The second group referred to as external stakeholders, were professional organisations and institutions, though there were far fewer references to these.

**Table A.10: Quotes associated with “We are committed to working with relevant stakeholders”**

<i>Described as: right to an opinion:</i> “All people who have the right to an opinion and who can make valuable inputs” (P 39)
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*Award winning*: “healthy and meaningful as is proven by the many awards in which stakeholders rate us” (P 8)

*Balance of own and community interest*: “responsible and based on a sound balance of own and community interests” (P 17)

*ES interest at heart*: “Keep it professional and take their interests at heart” (P 30)

*Interaction determined by projects*: “Professional – we interacted where required by our projects” (P 35)

*ES on board at all times*: “External stakeholders were on board at all times through consultations and frequent meetings for updates. Project Steering Committees were established to ensure all stakeholders were involved in decision making processes” (P 27)

*ES necessary*: “necessary” (P 25)

*ES relationships encouraged*: “very good. We encourage it” (P 56)

*ES relationships warm*: “We were warm and friendly towards our stakeholders” (P 23)

*Full of priceless experiences*: “Wonderful and full of priceless experiences” (P 44)

*ES relationships important* (7): “Important and needed to be maintained” (P 22)

*ES valued* (P31 / P 32)

*Looked after stakeholders*: “The company looked after relevant stakeholders in projects. The company also took the views of stakeholders seriously. The company capitalised on its strengths by sowing back into academic institutions through support, bursary programmes and lecturing in courses. There could have been more emphasis on company involvement in professional organisations (eg I am not aware of staff being involved in SAICE professional registration examiners)” (P 10)

*Better life for people*: “assisting and making better life for people” (P 3)

*Community focused*: “How caring is our organization assist the community where assistant needed” (P 3)

*Critical area of public relations*: “a critical area of public relations that needed to be dealt with as one would with a client” (P 26)

*High on the agenda*: “High on the agenda” (P 38)

ES relationships described as “Partnerships” (P 61) and “Priority” (P 29)

*Easy association with ES*: “a good relationship as we associated ourselves with them easily” (P 40)

*Effort to consider all ES*: “Good. Effort was made to consider all stakeholders” (P 41)

*Encourage relations with professional bodies*: “Regarding professional bodies, organisations in particular, relations and involvement were strongly encouraged” (P 64)

*Involved with stakeholders*: “Good, we have always been very involved” (P 6)

*Working relationships*: “These were more working relationships – not so close as with colleagues nor possibly even our clients as well” (P 68)

*Compliance*: “One of full co-operation and to comply with the codes of ethics of the relevant professional associations” (P 42)

*Mutually respectful*: “generally mutually respectful with Alpha held in high esteem” (P 24)

### **Dissonant voices**

*Non existent*: “non-existent at my level” (P63 - technical director)

*Only directors involved*: “Non existent as only directors are involved” (P 33)

*Improve involvement in professional orgs*: “There could have been more emphasis on company involvement in professional organisations (e.g. I’m not aware of staff being involved in SAICE professional registration examiners)” (P 10)

*“Old regime” used against us*: “handled positively, although the “Old Regime” ticket was sometimes used politically against us” (P 74)

*Negativity due to jealousy*: “good, with some negativity engendered by jealousy and/or misunderstanding of our role” (P 66)

*Not too much focus on ES relationships*: “Good but not too much focus was placed on these relationships” (P 70)

Lacking: “Lacking” (P65)

*ES constraints*: adequate but perhaps because of time constraints and associated costs should have been improved” (P 64)

### **A2.3 Identity narrative 3: We are a people-orientated company**

There were many statements in the data that referred to the nature of the work, the client focus and concern for staff, as characteristics of the organisation. The two previous narratives addressed the aspects of work and technical expertise as well as the focus on clients. It is to the employees that I turn in the third narrative. There are three broad foci that form the focus of this narratives– the first being the care and concern for employees, secondly, the obvious enjoyment expressed people in their working relationships and thirdly, the values by which the organisation was governed (as stated, anyway).

Naming this grouping was challenging as there are two key ideas contained within it, one related to the people centredness and the second to the value orientation. I settled on a name that encompassed the people orientation, for two reasons, firstly, the organisation’s identity was located by participants as caring for people, staff in particular, and secondly, most of the values have as their focus, people as well. The name of this narrative is drawn from a description of the organisation’s culture by one of the participant’s which he referred to simply as “People orientated, caring” (P 61). Whilst not a detailed description, it provides an apt summary of an orientation present in the organisation towards people and the way they should be managed and led. Like most identity dimensions, it is not without dissent, and these voices are included to provide an alternative perspective. There are three identity statements within this narrative:

- We are a company that cares for its people
- We are happy working together
- We are a value-driven company

#### **A2.3.1 We are a company that cares for its people**

The focus of this identity statement is an aspect of organisational identity that people are important, they should be looked after and treated as people. The title is based loosely on an extract of data from participant 60 who described the company motto as: “The company was client focused and looked after and cared for the personnel” (P 60). One aspect of this orientation was the focus on development, and



this emphasis is included here as the investment associated with developing people, demonstrated a belief in their value (even if this is to the ultimate benefit of the organisation). Another dimension, I have linked to this is the opportunities people see in the firm, and their desire to build a future with the company, as a result of this particular orientation.

**Table A.11: Quotes associated with “We are a company that cares for its people”**

<p><i>Staff/ People / people orientated</i> (x6)</p> <p><i>Treating employees as human beings</i>: “treating their most valuable asset, their employees, as human beings and not as an ant community to serve the “queen” anonymously” (P 48)</p> <p><i>Caring</i> (x7): “Progressive and caring. Strongly business minded and focused. Approachable, interested and inclusive of opinions, even when divergent” (P 10) (leadership) / “caring but never coming too close” (P 68)</p> <p><i>Approachable</i>: (x6) “good and approachable. They always had time to listen to you and help you” (P19) / “Structured and forward thinking but approachable and consultative” (P 26)</p> <p><i>Caring for staff</i>: “concerned about their staff” (P 28)</p> <p><i>Making employees feel at home</i>: “I think I've said it all in the above, but to my friends I'd point out how the company managed to make every employee feel at home and a part of the company's achievements, rather than being a number in the army” (P 48)</p> <p><i>Walked a long way</i>: “Walked a long way and still respect each other” (P 67)</p> <p><i>Company that cares for it's people</i>: “The company that cares for its people and quality of work and client satisfaction is most important factors” (cocktail party)(P 60)</p> <p><i>Company that believes in it's people</i>: “A company that believe in their people” (P 54)</p> <p><i>Loyalty</i>: “I had a feeling of loyalty towards Alpha, especially the people I worked with everyday” (P 39) / “I was very loyal to Alpha (possible too loyal) but that is how I felt and I won't regret it. Alpha was a company one could be proud of (both on account of it's achievements as well as it's way in which it looked after it's people” (P 68) / “Loyalty, both ways” (P 72)</p> <p><i>Empathetic</i>: “open and empathetic” (P 32) (man-employee rel)</p> <p><i>Treated with dignity</i>: “open and friendly and treated with dignity” (P 73)</p> <p><i>Empowerment</i>: “Alpha is a company that prides itself on integrity, accountability, people empowerment and excellence” (P 5)</p> <p><i>Equal opportunities</i> (x5): “one of respect for employees rights, fair treatment and equal opportunities for all” (P 42 / P 45)</p> <p><i>Looks after employees</i> (x5): “Alpha was a very strong company and always committed in giving the best service and looking after the employees” (P 6) / “I am happy at Alpha as they look after their staff – especially the engineers” (P 7) / “We looked after our employees not only in work but on most areas of life” (P 35)</p> <p><i>Becoming more open</i>: “becoming more open with employees feeling more appreciated than in the past” (P 55)</p> <p><i>Plan your future with</i>: “An organization that you can plan your future with” (P 4) (cocktail party or plane) / “A place to reach your dreams” (P 9)(distinctive / motto)</p> <p><i>Respect</i>: “one where you not only did what was necessary or went the extra mile when it was expected but when it was also not expected. Everybody was treated with respect and no matter what level you were on, as someone who had a contribution to make to the success of a project” (culture) (P 26)</p> <p><i>One for all</i>: “One company for all” (P 3) (motto)</p> <p><i>Precious</i>: “Precious” (P 32) (staff relations)</p> <p><i>Development</i> (Mentioned 10 times by four people): “Mostly a positive culture (as opposed to toxic). Employees took part in some of the decision-making. There was freedom to better</p>
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yourself. I used to be part of the administrative staff, before competing my engineering studies. Sometimes the perception was that technical staff were the ‘real’ employees, and the supporting staff were ‘second class’ – in admin this was rather de-motivating” (P 41).

*Develop well-rounded approaches:* “collaborative and inclusive. Information was disseminated well to all levels of management. Higher levels of management were always open to be approached by lower level employees. Directors usually had time to train up and develop younger staff members. Employees were encouraged by management to develop well-rounded approaches to the business environment beyond pure technical skills” (P 10) / “As the only organisation I have worked for I feel that I have learned a lot (put in positions where I had to take responsibility from an early age) and grown a lot as a human being” (P 20) / “is the best organisation to learn and have good experience – Good relationship in organization – performance bonuses to encourage staff to work hard – Courses offered encourages staff to learn more” (P 3)

*Keen on teaching new staff:* “inspiring. Very keen on teaching new staff” (P 52)

*Learning channel:* “a learning channel for new employees” (P 49)

*Learning through growth:* “Learning through growth” (P 53) (company motto)

*Education* (P 52) / *Developing* (P 40)

#### **Dissonant voices**

*Lacking transparency:* “striving to lead through example and becoming more people orientated, but lacking sufficient transparency at times” (P 55)

*Juniors distanced:* “Old fashioned. It has "the boss is always right" attitude. There is transparency between seniors and I feel juniors are distanced way apart (P 46)

### **A2.3.2 We are happy working together**

There were many quotes referring to the work environment of Alpha, and the fact that this was comfortable, friendly, energizing, personal, respectful and compassionate. A few even used the metaphor of a family to describe how they felt about staff relations. In this identity statement I have grouped all the references that described the working environment and how staff related to each other. Many of these were in response to the question on staff relationships but it was a theme that permeated responses to all questions and is thus included as a dimension of identity. Naturally, not everyone experienced the environment in the same way, and there are dissonant voices as well. However very few of these contradict the identity statement totally, and many actually support it, but offer exceptions and suggest improvements.

**Table A.12: Quotes associated with “We are happy working together”**

*Cordial* (x4) / *Friendly* (x15): linked to professional, informal, open, compassionate, motivated, meaningful, treated with dignity/ welcoming

*Compassionate:* “open, respectful, friendly and compassionate” (P 42 / P 45)

*Tolerance:* “a predominantly Afrikaner culture with good strong work ethic and inclusion or acceptance of other cultural influences” (P 8)

*Comfortable:* “I was comfortable with all my fellow employees. I love my work” (P 52)

*Create favourable working environment:* “young, vibrant and creating a favourable work environment” (P 33)

*Energizing:* “a conducive environment. One could be helped, lifted and energized by fellow

workers when you needed help” (P 46)

*Family* (x4): “Close and even like a big family” (P 5) / *A big happy family*: “it was a big happy family” (P 38) / *Like family to me*: “like family to me” (P 44)

*Friendships*: (x6) / *Friends*: “Good working relationships, also friends” (P 39)

*Friends with same vision and ethics*: “Friends with same vision and ethics” (P 59)

*Feeling secure*: “feeling secure” (P 37)

*Good staff relationships*: “We work well as a unit together and have good working relationships” (P 15) / “The organisation was dependable, conducted its business in a professional manner and had good staff relationships” (P 4)

*Constrained by engineering mind set*: “Good, within the constraints of the engineering mind set of task orientation” (P 58)

*Good interaction*: “the good interaction between all the different offices and individuals regardless of their position and/or seniority” (P 75) / “Good, especially in own units – not so between ‘foreign’ managers” (P 63)

*Integral part of our business*: “an integral part of our business” (P 75)

*Personal*: “generally good and happy working environment. While we knew we were part of a large organisation, the size of our team and local office allowed us to interact on a personal level and relate as friends with our colleagues” (P 10)

*Pleasant working environment*: “Pleasant working environment” (P 11)

*Relational*: “Good relationship in an organisation” (P 3)

*Sociable networking*: “sociable networking with readily available support” (P 27)

*Second home* (emotional connection): “A second home” (P 4)

*Uncomplicated*: “generally uncomplicated” (P 37)

*Down to earth*: “I would only have good things to say: “The people I work with are down to earth and solution orientated. No place for pretences or arrogance” (P 21)

*Warm* (4): “warm and excellent because most people have been working together for 10-20 years” (P 34)

*Crucial for success*: “crucial for success” (staff relationships) (P 61)

*Positive contribution to my career*: “friendships and as a positive contribution to my career” (P 18)

*Staff relations important*: “Staff that works well together can achieve so much more” (P 55) / “important and to have good collaboration. Staff relationship was good” (P 60)

#### *Successful staff*

*Relationships with others*: “people who deliver on time and who has relationships with others” (P 14)

*Motivated*: “people who are motivated and progressing in growth in terms of knowledge, inspiration etc” (P 46)

*Happy helpful manner*: “Know what they want and to get it in a happy helpful way” (P 53)

*Happy*: “people who are hard working and happy” (P 66)

*Interpersonal skill*: “excellent good behavior and has interpersonal skill” (P 47)

*Interact well*: “an intelligent person who can interact well” (P 67)(successful staff)

#### **Dissonant voices**

*Staff relationships vary*: “Varying between units and work groups or sections from fairly tight / good relationships to non existing and a-social intellectual beings” (P 13)

*Improve communication*: “Staff relations are good but can improve especially communication” (P 12)

*Greater capitalisation of relationships*: “Unfortunately the company did provide as many opportunities to capitalise on this as it could have - there was certainly room to increase” and facilitate social interaction between staff with a view to team building and increasing employee satisfaction” (P 10)

*Artificial between units*: “honest in units, often artificial between units” (P 63)

*Tension between offices:* “Internally reasonably good but some tension existed between offices” (P 22)

*Edgy between admin and technical:* “Positive. Sometimes a bit edgy between admin and technical” (P 41)

*Very difficult:* “Very difficult. You have to be very careful of what you say in the unit as very single rumour starts to spread. I sometimes feel as if I am in a nursery school” (P 33)

*Staff relations a background issue:* “Something which could be “had” through effort in engaging colleagues, attending functions etc, but not something which was “out there in the open”, ie more of a background issue, but nevertheless important in the sense of facilitating easier contact among professional teams” (P 16)

### **A2 .3.4 We are a value-driven company**

At the time of the merger, there were five stated values, integrity, excellence, teamwork, embracing diversity and people empowerment. Of these five, three of the values came through strongly enough to be categorised as identity statements. As indicated in the Chapter 4, the question with regard to values was kept open and participants could have mentioned anything in response. The fact that three of stated values come through so strongly, suggests that these are in fact fairly well entrenched in the minds of employees.

Included in this identity statement are the three values, teamwork, excellence and integrity, each formulated as an identity statement. Two of the values, diversity and people empowerment were mentioned only briefly. The development of people, which I believe is one element of people empowerment was discussed as part of the identity statement: “We are a company that cares for people”.

#### **Table A.13: Quotes associated with “We are a value-driven company”**

*We are a cohesive team*

*Teamwork:* (x15) “Employees working as a team and assisting each other” (P 3) “part of my team” (P 7) / “Working together as a team to achieve the goals of the company” (P 44) / “being of high importance. Staff that works well together can achieve so much more” (P 55) / (P 74) / “That the people are warm and comfortable to be around. We also have an excellent team who works as one” (P 52) / “We were fortunate to be part of a very good team of specialists who had honest and generally open and caring relationships” (P 73)(cocktail party or plane)

*Well-motivated team:* “We are a talented company. Our working environment is excellent as we always have company to keep us going. We all socialise and everyone is familiar with each other. We strive for perfection and we are a well motivated team” (P 40)

*Social:* (x5) “Team working group – social function organized – Supportive during sickness and other bad situation” (P3) / “People who could consistently produce good results and have a well motivated team working with them” (P 68)

*Excellent to work for:* “Excellent company to work for. Modern ideas and way to do business. Vibrant, good team spirit” (P 18)

*Importance of team dynamics:* “Staff relations were good. Our team dynamics played a huge role in this” (P 30)

*Walked a long way*: “Walked a long way and still respect each other” (P 67)

*Some sensitivities*: “Good teamwork, but some sensitivities due to unit / division bottom lines & interactions” (P 74)

#### *Successful staff*

*Positive contribution*: “people that made a positive contribution to the team” (P 18)

*Share ideas*: “People who can work together as a team, share ideas that everyone can benefit from. People who work hard and enjoy what they do” (P 39)

*Embracing teamwork*: “People who embraced team work and expanded their own horizons but reaching out to the multitude of available disciplines. In other words: someone who networks successfully within the organisation” (P 8)

*Enjoyed work*: “People who can work together as a team, share ideas that everyone can benefit from. People who work hard and enjoy what they do” (P 39)

*Worth celebrating*: “Something to celebrate and be proud to have as part of the team” (P 32)

*Team-players*: “People who can work together as a team, share ideas that everyone can benefit from. People who work hard and enjoy what they do” (P 39)

#### *We are a business with integrity*

*Integrity* (x19): “professional at all times with the utmost integrity” (P 75) / “to conduct business honestly and with integrity” (P 45) / “People that were committed to what they were doing. Putting client relations as a high priority but doing it with integrity” (P 30)

*Set an example*: “To accept personal responsibility for your actions and to set an example of loyalty, diligence and efficiency” (P 42 / P 45)

*Honest* (x10) / *Honesty*: (x18)

*Ethical* (x11) / *Ethics* (x1): “High degree of ethics” (P8) / “High ethical values” (P 9) / “High ethical standards” (P 31 / P32) / “professional company, great values (ethical)” (P 56)

*Good moral principles*: “Professionals with good moral principles to staff and clients” (P 73)

*Transparency*: culture described as “Doing things for the good of the company as a whole. Conduct yourself with integrity and act in transparency” (P 21) / “Being transparent and doing things honestly with due regard for local and international norms of conduct” (P 45)

#### *We are dedicated to excellence*

*Excellence* (x19): 15 times as core value, “One of excellence and to which other companies could aspire to” (P 68) (reputation), “Alpha is a company that prides itself on Integrity, Accountability, People empowerment and Excellence” (P 5) (cocktail party) / “Leading Excellence Empowerment” (P 20) (distinctive) / “striving for excellence” (P 25) (culture)

*Excellent client service* (x7): Offered excellent service to the client and made follow-up” (P 3) / “Far reaching and excellent by way of the level and diversity of the types of work it undertook” (P 26)

*Excellent products* (P 72) / *Excellent services* (P 72)

*Engineering excellence*: “Engineering excellence” (P 22)(core value) / “Engineering excellence” (P 66) (distinctive / motto)

*Striving for excellence*: “Quality, integrity and striving to excellence” (P 39) / “We strive for excellence in our service” (P 57) /

*Performance excellence*: “responsible, work ethics, performance excellence” (P 13)(culture)

*Dedicated to excellence*: “Alpha was an organization dedicated to excellence in which employees were given room to exercise their initiative” (P 24)

#### *Successful staff*

*Work with excellence*: “Those who did their work with excellence and attention to detail and who went the extra mile to see a task through to completion” (P 10)

**Dissonant voice**

*Representing excellence*: “representing excellence but not always as reactive as we could be” (P 24)

**A3. Section B: Beta**

In the previous section, I traced the process of second order coding in the construction of the Alpha identity narrative. In this chapter, I follow a similar process for the second merger partner, Beta. The process I discussed under the heading “Constructing the categories” was replicated here, and the assumptions regarding successful staff and dissonant voices, also apply.

**A3.1 We are the “grand old lady” of South African consulting engineers**

The name of this identity narrative is drawn directly from one of the responses to the question regarding reputation: “highly professional and well respected, some times termed ‘the grand old lady’ of South African consulting engineers” (P 136). Although this was the only reference to this description, it captured quite aptly how I had come to understand Beta and its identity in the market, both through the responses in the data as well as the company documentation and the Beta Head book. The use of the female gender was interesting as the firm, particularly with regard to professional staff, was predominantly male. It did however capture the image of something stately, elegant and old, almost timeless, aspects which came to the fore. This identity narrative contained four identity statements:

- We are a well-known engineering firm
- We are numbered amongst the best in our field
- We are a leader in the field of water engineering
- We are reputable purveyors of engineering expertise

Each of these express a similar idea - being reputable in the field. Whilst the sentiment is similar, different phrases and metaphors are used by participants to capture facets of Beta’s reputation.

**A3.1.1 We are a well-known engineering firm**

Included in this identity statement are two broad categories of responses, firstly those referring to the acclaim and recognition accorded (in the minds of participants at least) the company Beta in the market, and secondly, responses referring to the history and legacy associated with the company, which together capture the idea of being “the grand old lady” highlighted in the identity narrative described above. In referring to the recognition given to the company, some participants made reference to the

nature of the firm, for example an engineering company, an environmental consulting team, or simply just a company. I have chosen to stick with engineering company, as there are more references to some form of engineering.

**Table A.14: Quotes associated with “We are a well-known engineering firm”**

*Well-known engineering company:* “Beta was a well known engineering company all over South Africa that offered very professional and experienced advice and service. Beta was over 75 years old. They merged with two other engineering companies Alpha and Gamma, which is known across the globe for their engineering services and is now known as the new company Delta. I believe these two companies together will reach new heights. It was a pleasure working for Beta, but I am looking forward to being an employee of Delta for many years to come” (P 82)

*Well known:* (x9) “Excellent, very well know organisation recognized nationwide” (P 116) / “A well known firm that was very well respected” (P 103)

*Name recognized immediately:* Beta had (and still has) a good reputation in the marketplace and has a good image. The name is recognized immediately” (P 82)

*Hear people talking about the company:* “very good and you always hear people talking about our company where you never thought” (P 83)

*Highly regarded* (x3) “Highly regarded as a reliable professional company. Preferred service provider” (P 140)

*Very highly regarded:* (x2)

*Highly respected in fields of operation:* “Highly respected in our fields of operation” (P 106)

*Highly acclaimed in the profession:* “Respected in the water field. I consider that Beta were highly acclaimed in the profession and government trusted our credentials” (P 121)

*Well-established civil engineering company:* “The company I am working for is a well-established Civil Engineering company. We do work in both the private and public sector and specialise in many areas such as structures, buildings, roads, transportation and even more. We are a good team and work well together” (P87)

*Developed from a small group of excellent ethical engineers:* “It is an organisation I am proud of; it developed from a small group of excellent, ethical engineers who had respect for their colleagues. Much of this was retained in the bigger organization. We were conservative in many respects” (P 135)

*An icon:* “An icon, dependable” (P 113)

*Link to engineering icon ‘Founder’:* “the emphasis will be on the opportunity we had to be involved with very interesting and ‘one of a kind’ type projects in the water field and our bond with Engineering Icon of the century, Founder. For a technically orientated engineering mind highly rewarding!” (P 131)

*Appointments on Beta name:* “Technical standard of work was first priority, above profit on projects. Many markets were very well established and we received many appointments just on the Beta name. My career development was looked after very well (Pr Eng and further growth). In our Cape Town Water Department through planning on staff resources and strategic issues was done. Excellent team building also. I felt a great sense of belonging. It was by far the best company I have worked for” (P 98).

*Pride in history, achievements, ethos:* “All the above, with a sense of pride at its history, achievements and ethos, and my own role in its success on various large projects over the years in different regions” (P 125)

*Consultants know the name:* “Beta had such a strong heritage of technical excellence in especially the water field. Everywhere in SA people which have worked with consultants would know the name” (P 98)

*Building on a legacy of excellence:* “building on a legacy of excellence” (P 140)

*Heritage (value):* “Heritage which resulted in excellent reputation” (P 98)

*Leave a legacy of quality projects:* “Leave a legacy of good quality projects that result in clients rewarding us with future work” (P 111)

*Valued its heritage:* “It was part of the very make-up of who I am. I believed strongly in the organisation, valued its heritage, and strove to build on that. Most importantly, I was and am deeply committed to serving the people with whom I work everyday, and to growing together with them” (P 126)

*Oldest and reputable companies:* “It is one of the oldest and most reputable companies in South Africa and one from which you will always receive professional, top quality service and products” (P 104).

*Oldest environmental consulting team:* “The oldest environmental consulting team in the country delivering professional service and cutting edge products at all times” (P104)

*Inspired by our heritage:* “Being inspired by our people, our diversity and our powerful heritage” (P87)(motto)

#### ***Dissonant voices***

*Less well known than we thought:* “Well known and respected. However, I sometimes think we thought we were better known than we were” (P 93)

### **A3.1.2 We are numbered amongst the best in our field**

Much like Alpha, several participants made reference to the company being “the best”. Whilst some used these terms specifically, other made use of similar terms, with the same meaning. The title itself is taken directly from one of the participants who stated: “...We love our work and by Providence, have been numbered amongst the best in our field” (P 126). Once again there is some difference as to the reference against which “the best” is determined, some indicating the “best in the water field”, another more broadly referring to best in the business”, another using civil consulting engineers as the mode of comparison. I deliberately kept with the more generic “best in our field” as this is consistent with the original quote from which the title is drawn, and it allows for some of the ambiguity often associated with identity (Gioia, 1998)(see also the contrast with the more specific focus in the next identity statement). Whilst some participants simply stated the company was the best, others provided a more detailed description of why this way so.

#### **Table A.15: Quotes associated with “We are numbered amongst the best in our field”**

*As good as any:* “as good as any” (P 109)

*One of the best:* “One of the best” (P 111)

*Company aimed to be the best:* “The company aimed to be best in its field – technical excellence was very high in a number of the older guys” (P 93)

*Best consulting engineers in the water field:* “Due to our depth of civil engineering knowledge, especially in the water field, we can provide the best consulting engineering service in South Africa. I would definitely inform the other person of the instrumental role which we played in the Lesotho Highlands Projects” (P 77)

*Best in its business:* “best in the business” (P 104)

*Best of civil consulting engineers in SA:* “among the best of civil consulting engineers in SA” (P125)



*It was the best:* “It was the best” (P 134)

*Numbered amongst the best:* “I work amongst a company of people who I find inspiring in every way, and who have helped me become a better person. We love our work and by Providence, have been numbered amongst the best in our field. The future is always uncertain, but it is good to be facing it with a team like this, that has so much more potential to build into, to take on opportunities that will arise” (P 126).

*Beta best albeit expensive:* “My experience in government tender committees bears out the reputation of Beta as the best company, albeit the most expensive. Where top quality work was needed, in particular where a legal challenge may occur, then Beta would be the company of choice because the products would be technically and legally defensible and this was widely known in government” (P 94)

*Of the highest order:* “Of the highest order. Our reputation was everything” (P 112)

*One of the best:* “One of the best: (P 129)

*Technically excellent civil consulting engineers:* “technically among the highest of civil consulting engineers in SA, with lower reputation on transformation” (P 125)

*Strive to be the best:* “Always strive to be the best among competitors” (P 108) (culture)

*Doing it to the best of your ability:* “Doing it to the best of your ability” (P 119)(culture)

### **A3.1.3 We are a leader in the field of water engineering**

As with Alpha, reference was made to Beta being a leader in the field more generally, though particularly in the field of water engineering, and it is with this particular focus as I have chosen to stay. I have done this because there is sufficient support for this idea, and because leadership in a field is more realistic if it tends to be specific. It also provides a contrast to the other identity statements, which were deliberately left open to capture the ambiguity associated with identity. In this decision, I was also informed by the general data corpus (survey data and company documentation) where there were many references to water engineering in other contexts as well.

#### **Table A.16: Quotes associated with “We are a leader in the field of water engineering”**

*Leading consulting water engineers in SA:* “One of the leading consulting engineering firms in SA, especially with its knowledge in Water and Municipal engineering” (P 139)

*Leader in its field (x2):* “a leader in its field as depicted by the several awards for professionalism by client bodies” (P 132)

*Leading through excellence (motto):* “leading through excellence” (P 101)

*Beta world leader in water engineering:* “Beta has been recognized as a world leader in water engineering with its founder named “Engineering icon of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”. It has a proud heritage of serving its clients over the full life cycle of its projects” (P 132)

*Leading water consultancy in SA:* The leading water consultancy in South Africa that pushed the barriers of innovation, technology and planning processes. Society would have been much poorer without it” (P 140)

*Market leader in water resources management:* “very good overall and market leader in water resources management” (P 97)

*Class leader:* “Class leader, dependable” (P 113)

*Outstanding in the field of engineering:* “I have heard our reputation described as outstanding in the field of engineering, and regarded as leaders in the profession” (P 81)

*Privilege to work with leaders in the field:* “A privilege to have been able to work for and with such leaders in the field of engineering while always maintaining an unwavering level of honesty and integrity and understanding of staff needs” (P 136)(cp/pl)

*Retain status as leading environmental team:* “Always striving to deliver top quality service and products to ensure the retention of our status as the leading environmental team in the country” (P 104).

*Internationally acknowledged masters:* “Within the water division, leadership was world class with insightful managers who are internationally acknowledged masters within their domain” (P 94)(leadership)

*Strive to remain at the leading edge:* “We strive to remain at the leading edge of the sector in rendering the best quality products, at all times and in all applications” (P 94)

*Acknowledged for excellence in our field:* “exceptionally strong and acknowledged for excellence and leadership in our field” (P 124)

### **A3.1.4 We are reputable purveyors of engineering expertise**

There were many references to the standard of products and services provided by Beta and the expertise and skills that made these possible. I have chosen to capture these as an identity statement that was taken directly from one of the participants responding to the question on reputation, describing Beta as a “Reputable purveyor of engineering expertise” (P 13). The identity statement includes a wide range of references regarding both the nature of the expertise as well as the standards associated with this provision. Whilst the other identity statements in this narrative focus on the positional status of the firm in the industry, this identity statement focuses on the skills and expertise that underpin this position. Due to the large number of quotes, I have selected the most descriptive, ensuring that the various concepts associated with the statement are included.

#### **Table A.17: Quotes associated with “We are reputable purveyors of engineering expertise**

*Provider of quality engineering services:* “being a provider of quality engineering services” (P 135)

*Providing integrated high quality solutions:* “focus on providing integrated solutions of high quality” (P 95)

*Products that stand the test of time:* “Providing our clients with the most appropriate solution and to deliver a product that stood the test of time” (P 132)

*Cost effective integrated civil engineering solutions:* “Building on empowered staff, the organization provides cost-effective integrated civil engineering solutions that ensure long-term client satisfaction” (P 125)(dist/motto)

*Providing the most appropriate solution:* “Providing our clients with the most appropriate solution and to deliver a product that will stand the test of time” (P 132)

*Pioneering excellence:* “Pioneering excellence” (P 122)

*Engineering excellence:* (core value x2) / (motto x1)

*Excellence in engineering:* “Excellence in engineering” (P 144)(value)

*Cost-effective practical design:* “Cost-effective and practical design” (P 115)

*Thorough cost effective consulting service:* “Provide a thorough and cost effective consulting service to your client” (P 77)

*Providing best solutions to clients:* “I’ve always found Beta a very supportive company to work

in where the focus is on providing the best solutions to clients and where cutting corners was not accepted. There is a very positive team spirit where people are prepared to go the extra mile to help colleagues that have deadlines to meet” (P 95)

*Producing innovative solutions:* “We are a great group of technical people that produce innovative solutions that are multi-disciplinary and integrated” (P 122)

*Engineering skills:* “The Engineering skills, drawing skills and management skills” (P 114)

*High level of competence and experience:* “Having a high level of competence and experience” (P 130)

*High standards of engineering:* “Delivering high quality products produced by competent staff utilising high standards of engineering design and implementation” (P 103)

*High standard of work:* “High standard of work, high productivity, offered something to the team” (P 113) (SS)

*Quality* (various): as a value (x3) and culture (x1) and leadership (x1)

*Quality work:* “A people-orientated company that went about things in an inclusive way, producing quality work that was always appreciated by our clients” (P 112)

*High quality work:* “High quality work and well equipped staff” (P 79)

*Quality advice, design, solutions:* provide quality advice, designs and solutions to clients” (P 142)

*Quality project management:* “provide quality project management” (P 111)

*Highest quality:* “Highest quality” (P 95) (value)

*Highest quality product delivery:* “the pursuit of high quality product delivery” (P 103)

*Deliver a quality product:* “Delivered a quality product while taking the person into account” (P 101)

*Deliver on time* (value): “To deliver on time” (P 87)

*Delivering a high quality product:* “Our clients regarded us as delivering a very high quality product (that was why they came to Beta)” (P 98)

*High value on technical excellence:* “Conservative and placing high value of the technical excellence of the service delivered while maintaining commercial sense” (P 131)

*Excellence in engineering:* “excellence in engineering” (P 144)(value)

*Technical and service excellence* (value)(P120):

*Technical competence:* (x3)(value)

*Technical excellence* (Value x4) and x1 motto)

#### *Successful staff*

*Conscientious:* “ “Focussed, dedicated and conscientious” (P 96)

*Deliver high quality products:* “Staff pride themselves on technical excellence and thus delivered a high quality product” (P 99)

*Technically strong:* “Technically strong people, willing to change and make decisions” (P 98)

*Innovative:* “Innovative, driven by excellence, high producers” (P 83)

*Resolve issues logically and analytically:* “Dynamic and able to resolve issues logically and analytically” (P 104)

*Productive in assigned duties:* “productive in assigned duties” (P 127)

*Excelled in technical work:* “Those who excelled in technical work, worked well in a team environment, and shared their knowledge and experiences easily” (P 95)

*Individuals who best utilize available resources:* “Individuals who know how to best utilize the resources available in making successful projects” (P 140)

*Technically competent:* “Those who were technically competent, committed to the firm and important colleagues who deserved their success” (P 138)

*Pride in high quality work output:* “Conservative, deliberate approach to work with concomitant pride in high quality work output” (P 124)

*Quietly competent:* “quietly competent and hard working” (P 107)

*Well equipped staff:* “High quality of work and well equipped staff” (P 79)

*Deliver product of excellence:* “Working together to deliver a product of excellence” (P 99)

*Delivered goods on time and in budget:* “Those that were committed to their work and clients and

delivered the goods on time and within budget” (P 106)

*Dedicated* (x5): “Well qualified, dedicated, hardworking. A desire to become one of the best. Good relationships and always prepared to do more than expected” (P 115)

*Led big projects*: “Those who worked very hard (often long hours) and who lead big projects. There were also those who took time to mentor and help others who were still learning” (P 93)

### **A3.2 We are the consulting engineering company with a heart**

This identity narrative originates in one of the participant’s responses to the question regarding the distinctiveness of the organisation, with an emphasis on a possible motto. The response was “The Consulting Engineering company with a heart” (P 93). I have chosen this quote as it captures an important distinctive nuance of Beta and that is the importance of people in all they do. Whilst I deal with this aspect more particularly in the next identity narrative, “We are a family working to engineer a better future for all” it is clear from the response included here that people were perceived to be critical in the way business was approached. This is captured in the following quotes from the Shandbrief, (April/ May 2007:9) which quotes the Chairman, Hannes Kritzinger’s 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary speech: “We are less commercial but more democratic than most, we talk longer before we decide but then we generally reach consensus. We care for each other and for our own, and we have heart”. A similar sentiment is captured by Kritzinger in the Chairman’s report of 06/07 “Beta will never chase profits above everything else, but it is nevertheless important for use to remain, sufficiently profitable, because only then will we be able to pay market related salaries, spend enough on bursaries and training and contribute to society in the way we would like to” (2007:3).

This approach manifests in attitudes towards staff but also more broadly in a civic-mindedness that views the business of engineering (and particularly water engineering) as a civic duty to improve the lives of fellow South Africans. For this reason, there is an emphasis on the excellence of the work or product produced irrespective of whether this is sufficiently profitable or not. Included in this identity narrative are the identity statements:

- We are firstly engineers
- We are professionals
- We are a company that puts the client first
- We are civic minded

Each of these is aimed at addressing various elements of the broader narrative.

### A3.2.1 We are firstly engineers

The emphasis of this identity statement is on the importance of doing excellent work, even where business interest may take a knock because the provision of services is crucial and almost a civic duty.

**Table A.18: Quotes associated with “We are firstly engineers”**

*Service excellence a priority:* “large family environment to provide excellent service to valued clients. Staff were valued as the important means to serve the client. Systems were viewed as the requirement to facilitate higher achievement and efforts were made to prevent it to burden the service delivery. Service excellence was highest priority. We were possibly in our conduct firstly engineers and business was a close second” (P121)

*Balance between profit and pleasant working environment:* “The organization was a home for those who loved what they do. Excellence was valued. Above all people were acknowledged and respected. I believe that we achieved running a viable business where most people enjoyed what they were doing. There was a balance between being a profitable business and creating a pleasant work environment” (P 135).

*Avoid chasing short term profit:* “Focussed on long term growth and protecting the reputation of the firm rather than chasing short term profit” (P 95)

*Income generation by product of quality work:* “Regarding income generation as a by-product of top quality work, but not the reason for work” (P 94)

*At cost of project profit:* successful staff described as “working together to deliver a product of excellence (sometimes at the cost of project profit)” (P 99)

*Bottom line was not the ISSUE:* “ Although the bottom line still mattered in Beta, it was not the ISSUE” (P 97)

*Job done at all costs:* “giving your client sound and cost effective advice and to see to it that the job got done at all costs; ie never walking away from the job” (P 77)

*Driven by product:* “Very very thorough. Often did more than we needed to and didn’t make money. Product driven and not profit driven” (P 93)

*High quality service:* “Comprehensive, with the high service levels provided not always providing adequate profit” (P 103)

*Going the extra mile:* “Going beyond the call of duty. We would rather make a loss than provide an inferior product” (P 97)

*Beta driven by technical excellence:* “Beta’s ethos was more technical excellence driven than profitability driven...” (P 120).

*Technical excellence affected profit:* “Speaking with regard to the water division in Beta, Beta was a specialist company where technical excellence sometimes affected profitability” (P 102)

*Income generation by product of quality work:* “Collectively striving for the best service to be rendered in a very complex and multi-dimensional field – namely water resources management. Sharing responsibility for on-going performance and market dominance in terms of reputation and professional status of the company in all projects and dealings with peers, research organisations, government sector and commercial applications. (P 94)

*Beta wanted better lives:* “I would say Beta was not only in it for the money but to really better lives. Beta was a company that became a family in a very short time which motivated us to always give our best” (P 84)

#### *Successful staff*

*Provide required output in budget:* “persons that could provide the output required within budget and programme and work in a team” (P 121)

*Good marketers / Technical ability combined with business acumen:* “Mainly good marketers, but in several instances technical ability combined with business acumen also” (P 120)

### A3.2.2 We are professionals

The term “professional” was assigned 38 times and as a response to (almost) all the categories of questions. Thus professional was used to describe values, culture, external stakeholder relationships, client relationships, leadership, reputation, successful staff, management systems, external stakeholder relationships, staff relationships, management style, leadership and emotional connection. It was also used in the context of a distinctive characteristics or motto for the organization, was well the question regarding what would be told at a cocktail party or plane. The code professionalism was assigned 19 times,

**Table A.19: Quotes associated with “We are professionals”**

*Professional:* (x38) “Our service in the market place is definitely professional and we provide the best service / product that we can” (P 82) / “Relationships with external stakeholders are very professional and a good relationship has been formed with all clients” (P 82) / “Professional, courteous never condescending with few exceptions honest and above bribery and reproach” (P 93) / “Professional and service-driven” (P 96)

*Professionalism:* (x19)

*Professional expertise:* “professional expertise” (P 141)

*Professional in all we did:* “Professional in all we did” (P 138)

*Professional in providing excellent service:* “Professional in providing excellent service” P 90)

*Professional service delivery:* “Professional service delivery” (P100)

*Professional with unshakeable ethics:* “Professional with unshakeable ethics” (P 134)

*Providing excellent professional service:* “being committed in providing excellent professional services to our clients and are inspired by our people” (P 87)

*Professionalism and integrity a way of life* (see also family for full range): “an organization in which staff were an important asset with whom open communications were important, professionalism and integrity were a way of life and team building was promoted. There was a sense of family and recognition of all staff” (P 138)

*Serve general public with professional service:* “serve the general public well by providing a professional service” (P 130)

*Unbiased professional advice in engineering practices:* “unbiased professional service in engineering practice” (P 130)

*Quality professional services:* “Quality professional services that you can trust” (P 127)

*Acted with integrity and professionalism:* “a great organization to which I was very loyal which acted with integrity and professionalism” (P 138)

*Strong emphasis on professionalism:* Client orientated but with a strong emphasis on professionalism” (P 139)

*Offered professional experienced service:* “Beta was a well known engineering company all over South Africa that offered very professional and experienced advice and service...” (P 82)

*Executing projects in a professional manner:* “Executing projects in a professional manner with due regard for the client’s requirements while operating honesty and integrity” (P 127)

*Highly regarded as reliable professional company:* “highly regarded as a reliable professional company. Preferred service provider” (P 140)

*Respected as solid professionals giving independent advice:* “Very well respected as solid professionals who could be trusted to give independent advice. Not as well known for all its range of expertise as would have been desirable” (P 138)

*Successful staff*

*Acted in professional manner:* “Those that acted in a professional manner, interacted well with clients and were respected by their peers” (P 141)

*Dedicated to clients:* “very professional and dedicated to their clients” (P 87)

*Best of ability:* “All work should be done with pride and to the best of your ability. The workplace is also a place to grow in experience and create new relationships (both social and professional). Professionalism is non-negotiable” (P 82)

*Good professional standing:* “People who were prepared to work hard, invest in themselves, had a balanced outlook, had a good professional standing” (P 102)

*Example for others to emulate:* “...the life blood of the firm and an example for others to emulate” (P 136)

*Exceeded in chosen profession:* “Those who excelled in their chosen professional discipline and who had fun doing it” (P 123)

*Supportive team of quality professionals:* “Beta has been involved in major infrastructural planning and development in South Africa and Southern Africa over many years with significant contributions in the water, transportation, municipal and environmental fields. The Lesotho Highlands Project was a hallmark project in working cross-border and in major international consortia. Beta have a supportive team of quality professionals and it has been a special organisation to work for” (P 123).

*Supportive team of quality professionals:* “Beta has been involved in major infrastructural planning and development in South Africa and Southern Africa over many years with significant contributions in the water, transportation, municipal and environmental fields. The Lesotho Highlands Project was a hallmark project in working cross-border and in major international consortia. Beta have a supportive team of quality professionals and it has been a special organisation to work for” (P 123).

#### **Dissonant Voice**

*At times dictatorial:* “Professional but at times tending to be dictatorial” (P 136)

### **A3.2.3 We are a company that puts the client first**

Quotes that comprise this identity statement are drawn primarily in response to the questions on client service and client relations. However references to clients were made in response to other questions are well and for this reason it is considered to be a viable identity statement. The title is an adaption to a response to the motto questions, to which the participant responded: “Service excellence, together we put the client first” (P 121).

There were many quotes in this particular category, and I have pruned these considerably, focusing those that describe in more detail the nature of the service and how it “works” in relation to identity. Several of those pruned referred to values and included “Service to client” (P 141), “Client focussed” (P 95/P 110), “Our client came first” (P 87) and “Client satisfaction” (P 111).

The category is divided into four key areas, clients are the foundation stone of success, deliver the best value service to clients, clients rely on our service and expertise, and successful staff and clients. There were several dissonant voices as well.

**Table A.20: Quotes associated with “We are a company that puts clients first”**

*Clients are the foundation stone of success*

*Foundation stone of success:* “Consistently outstanding and one of the foundation stones of the success of Beta” (P 112)

*Client relations guarded and cherished:* “To be guarded and cherished. My greatest satisfaction was building the relationship to the point where the client trusted us, would do all they could to have us as their consultants, and continuously came to us for advice” (P 126).

*Built on trust:* “Of critical importance, long established client relations based upon trust have been built with the major employer within the sector ie the Dept of Water and Environmental Affairs. Also several provincial and local government Departments rely on us for on going assistance in the execution of their line functions and without which the collapse in service delivery would be far more advanced than we know” (P 94)

*Client relations as valuable:* “Our clients were regarded as valuable” (P 83)

*Long established client relations (x3):* “Exceptionally good in the case of our major clients. The long established relationships with senior client staff over many years have been very fruitful, resulting in a large number of appointments” (P 141)

*Client relations nurtured:* “highly regarded and nurtured to create long term relationships” (P 101)

*Clients felt safe:* “A personal people-orientated company where staff were content and produced very good work for clients who appreciated the working relationships and felt “safe” with the firm” (P 112)

*Component for firm’s success:* “A major component in the success of the firm. Previously, many projects had been given to the firm due in large part to the excellent relationships enjoyed between Beta and our clients” (P 112)

*Key to success:* “Key to success and always placed as a high priority” (P 125)

*Underpinning marketing efforts:* “Highly valued, underpinning our marketing efforts at all levels within the organization” (P 110)

*Important to promote firm’s good standing:* “Very important to promote the firm’s good standing in the community” (P 132)

*Long association:* “Extremely good based on long association and personal relationships” (P 124)

*Clients rely on our service and expertise*

*Excellent service relied on by clients:* “excellent service that was relied on by clients” (P 140)

*Amongst top firms wrt delivery:* “of superior technical quality and know that clients view Beta as being amongst the top firms in terms of service delivery” (P 121)

*Client relations important (x9):* “extremely important to maintain at a level where the client accepted you as an extension to his own team where he could rely on top quality professional work being delivered on time and at fair value” (P 136)

*Clients appreciated us:* “I worked for a good firm who looked after their people and did excellent work. Clients appreciated us and we always had excellent relationships with them. We had a very good reputation” (P 112)

*Clients felt safe:* “A personal people-orientated company where staff were content and produced very good work for clients who appreciated the working relationships and felt “safe” with the firm” (P 112)

*Clients glad when proposals accepted:* “Well respected by the opposition and clients were generally glad if we were successful with our proposals” (P 121)

*High level of trust displayed:* “Generally good with a high level of trust displayed” (P 123)

*High levels of accountability transferred:* “Excellent with high levels of accountability transferred to us” (P 140)

*Mutual trust and respect:* “Based on mutual respect and trust” (P 121)



*Deliver the best value service to clients*

*Beta: clients knew we loved business:* "...At Beta, so far as I could ascertain, clients knew we were in this business because we love it, and we had the great opportunity of making a good living and a profit from that which we so enjoy..." (P 126)

*Fair value for client:* "Giving the client fair value for money. Providing clients with sufficient information to allow them to know progress and cost implications. Providing opportunities for individuals to develop" (P 142)

*Provide best advice to clients:* "Provide quality service to all clients large and small. Maintain good relationship with clients. Use experience in organization to provide the best advice to clients. Reward staff who perform well" (P 111)

*Service excellence:* Service excellence, together we put the client first" (P 121)(motto)

*Excellent service to client:* "Excellent service to clients" (P 85)

*Quality client service:* "The provision of a quality service to clients" (P 142)

*Delivering best value service:* "Highly professional, ethical and delivering the best value service to clients while retaining "the family business culture" (P 136

*Going the extra mile:* mentioned 9 times in response to service, client relations, distinctive / motto / successful staff: "being very good and were always ready to find solutions where required and going the extra mile" (P 87)/ "Go the extra mile to exceed client expectations" (P 95) / "People orientated, supportive, and going the extra mile to delight clients" (P 95)

*World class service to clients:* "Providing a world class service to our clients" (P 106)

*Ensure quality and accountability:* "Giving the best service possible and meeting client requirements. Ensuring quality and accountability" (P 116)

*Do it properly and on time:* "Do it properly, on time and give the client what he wants" (P 96) (culture)

*Successful staff:*

*Skilled in marketing and selling:* "Those who contributed to the growth of the firm; usually those who were skillful in marketing and selling" (P 77)

*Ability to work with clients and staff:* "technically sound with a good ability to work with clients as well as fellow staff members" (P 132)

*Interfacing well with clients:* "In the technical domain, relatively sound (given their level) in (i) getting quality work done (ii) meeting deadlines within budgets (iii) interfacing well with clients, (iv) being a constructive and helpful presence in their work environment or in the wider firm, where appropriate" (P 143)

*Meet client expectations while making a profit:* "People who could meet client expectations while making a profit and enjoyed what they did" (P 135)

*Maintain sound viable business practice:* "Meeting the needs of our clients whilst maintaining a sound viable business practice" (P 130)

### **Dissonant voices**

*Service mostly met programme and budget requirements:* "Technically sound, offering a full range of civil engineering services, but not offering the wider range of services that could have been beneficial. Service did sometimes meet the programme and budget requirements of the clients" (P 138)

*Could have done more to keep relationship going:* "In general good, but maybe we have not done enough to keep relationships going after completion of projects" (P 131)

*Client relations could improve:* (x2)

*Difficult with non-technical and small sector clients:* "generally good to excellent when dealing with technically competent clients, but sometimes difficult with non-technical and small public sector clients" (P 103)

*Undermined by perception of insufficient black managers:* "generally healthy, except that during recent years some of the relationships were somewhat undermined by the perception that our lack of Black Managers implied a lack of support for the "New South Africa" (P 143)

*Lacking adequate business management:* “Professional but sometimes lacking adequate business management. Clients generally regarded Beta staff as professional colleagues who were there to support and assist them” (P 138)

### **A3.2.4 We are civic-minded**

In this identity statement I have included responses that emphasise the civic and community orientation of Beta. The idea underlying this statement is that through their business, particularly in the realm of water services, Beta has contributed to the building of the country. Water being a basic human need as well as one of the key areas of business means that in “doing” business, they are in fact doing so much more, and are contributing to building the country.

**Table A.21: Quotes associated with “We are civic minded ”**

*Together we can make a difference:* “Working together we can make a difference in meeting the needs of our society” (P 123) (motto)

*Part in building the country:* “I would speak with pride of Beta and the valuable part they play in building the country” (P 81)

*Providing leading edge in quality:* “Providing the leading edge of quality, evidence of which is where Beta reports would be used to set the standards of work for other consultants. Providing voluntary value to the water sector, recognizing that water is a basic human need and an essential requirement for the sustainable future of mankind” (P 94)

*Assisting improve the environment:* “Beta has always been involved in community upliftment and assisting organisations to improve their environment, as well as affording individuals the opportunity to achieve their potential” (P 81)

*Positive difference to communities:* “We make a positive difference to the communities we work within...” (P 100)(motto)

*Sustainable solutions:* Sustainable solutions through integrated professional services in development and management of infrastructure, make a positive social and environmental impact” (P 116)(motto)

*Uplift citizens quality of life:* “A service to uplift the quality of life of the citizens of our country to the benefit of all” (P 142)

*Contribution to society’s needs:* “Contribution to society’s needs” (P 94) (value)

*Contribution to larger society):* ext s/h relationships described as ... “very good due to the ethical way in which business is conducted and the contribution made to the larger society through our projects” (P 99)

*Society poorer without Beta:* “The leading water consultancy in South Africa that pushed the barriers of innovation, technology and planning processes. Society would have been much poorer without it” (P 140)

*Beta duty driven:* “...Ninham Shan had profit targets but would take projects on that were not profit but actually our duty” (P 84)

*Furthering aims of professional associations:* “Good and participatory. The organisation supported and fostered development in community groups and were particularly proactive in initiatives to promote engineering and mathematics initiatives within community groups. The organization was always deeply involved with furthering the aims of the professional associations although were not as supportive (at a corporate level) of environmental groups as they could have been” (P 103)

*Beta involved in Water Research Commission:* “Excellent – Beta was regarded as a source of expertise, always ready and willing to serve for example on Steering Committees for Water

Research Commission research projects and thus play a leading role in determining the direction and usefulness of research within water in the country. Beta staff also serve on ISO inspection teams, assist the Green Scorpions in identifying illegal activities even providing expert testimony to the State Attorneys office on a voluntary basis. Beta serve as examiners for professional engineer registration and have enjoyed a reputation as a quality institution always willing to contribute knowledge, experience and skills to the sector and society as a whole” (P 94)

*Experience and training to provide professional input:* “Use one’s engineering experience and training to provide professional input to some common need” (P 130)

### **A3.3 We are family working to engineer a better future for all**

One of the clearest narratives emerging from this study was the family orientation that characterised Beta. The title of this particular narrative’s wording is an adaption of a organisational motto suggested by one of the participants: “A family working to engineer a better future for all” (P 144). I have chosen this quote because it captures the concept of the family that is a critical element of this identity narrative. Furthermore, it plays on the nature of the business, engineering, as a means to create a better future for all.

- We are a family
- We are a company that values our people
- We are focused on the development of our staff

#### **A3.3.1 We are a Family**

The metaphor of the Beta family was perhaps the clearest identity statement in the data. I have pruned the number of quotes slightly but what remains will nevertheless give an indication of the strength of this particular identity orientation. The identity statement itself is a summary of these elements and is not drawn from one of these specifically. An element I have included with the family metaphor, is the value orientation, as one of the participants referred to the organisation as “my second home” in which “...most areas the values of an ethical respectable family was still prevalent” (P 135).

#### **Table A.22: Quotes associated with “We are a family”**

*Family:* (x24) “I feel like being part of a family” (P 88) / “Like a family. It was really nice to work for Beta being there for more than 10 years shows that the company was excellent. I never thought of leaving the company” (P 83) / “...We were like family in Beta always feeling at home and very comfortable in whatever way....” (P 83) / “Always striving for perfection... and achieving it. Loyalty amongst the staff and a sense of “family” was one of the key factors that made Beta an employer of choice” (P 81) / “...We worked hard but also had time to relax and enjoy each others company and we have been like a big family in our branch” (P 87) / “I feel like being part of a family” (P 88) / “A family who supported each other at all times” (P 142)

*Enjoy family culture:* “I enjoy the working environment, strive for technical excellence, the

family culture and their core values are aligned with my own values” (P 99)

*A family organisation:* “A family organisation with excellent service delivery, not standing back for ANY bigger organisation” (P80)

*Almost family:* “Almost family” (P 92)

*Happy family:* “You should come and work for a proper company, one where you have direct ownership interests that can’t be taken away from you. We really enjoy what we do and are consequently also good at what we do. We are a happy family and you should consider ‘joining us!’” (P 110)

*A family touch:* “A feeling of being part of the organization, a family touch” (P 105)

*Belong in the firm:* “Caring and homely. One was made to feel to belong in the firm such that you perform not to impress the boss but because you are doing it for the company (which is part of your family in a sense” (P 105)

*Always feeling at home:* “I used to work for a company, always feeling at home. If there was a second chance, I wouldn’t hesitate going back. The management, staff and generally all the colleagues were like family” (P 83)

*Accepted as a family member:* “Ninham Organisation Shand culture was alive. Doesn’t matter who you are. From day one you was accepted as a family member. True honesty and dedication was given” (P 117) (culture)

*Family and my life:* “Family and my life, > 30 years service” (P 134)

*Family culture:* “a family culture where the individual and their needs matter” (P 99)

*Family orientated:* “very ‘family’ orientated and old fashioned” (P 91)

*Family spirit:* “Sharing and optimizing resources. Lateral thinking. Family spirit” (P 140)

*Family type environment:* “Family type environment” (P 111)

*Family who cares about clients:* “A family who cares about its clients and recipients of its deliverables” (P 100)

*Relaxed family environment (culture):* “Relaxed and family environment while doing your best for the good of the company” (P 97)

*Close knit family:* (3x) “It was like a close knit family, everyone was contributing and sharing knowledge. Good listening and communication was also important” (P 116) / “A close knit family under one roof and management respects rights of employees” (P 116)

*Belong to Beta family:* “Beta was a technically excellent consulting Firm where employees at all levels generally felt cared for, because they belonged to the ‘Beta Family’” (P 143)

*Made me feel at home:* “Beta has been very good to me since I started as an employee. They have been very supportive and positive in me being a part of the organization and that has made me feel at home and made it easy to adjust to the new environment” (P 82)

*Home away from home:* “We felt like people cared and did not only come to work to work but because it as fun. Beta was... theirs no better way to describe it home away from home” (P 79) / “During working hours it was acceptable to have a chat and crack a joke or two with a colleague, alot of laughter took place. It was home away from home - help was readily available. Everyone had time to assist you in fulfilling a task. Work was taken seriously but so was interacting with one another. It was easy to speak to directors or associates - one even played pool with them. Socials were fantastic – we loved it – young and old - all departments interacted with one another. I knew almost all and we consisted of approximately 250 staff” (P 79)(culture)

*Retaining “family business” culture:* “Highly professional, ethical and delivering the best value service to clients while retaining “the family business’ culture” (P 136)

*Extension to the family:* “An extension to the family, becomes part of your purpose in life” (P 136)

*Strong sense of family:* “Very fair to all with a strong sense of family” (P 109)

*Strong sense of family connection:* “Strong sense of ‘family’ connection with colleagues and the firm over many years” (P 123)

*Fortunate to be part of the Beta family:* “I consider myself most fortunate to have been part of the Beta family, and while I recognise the need for the company to grow, I am profoundly sad to see it disappear into the past” (P 81)

*Let people feel at home:* “Let our people feel at home and express themselves with their work” (P 97)(motto)

*Sense of family:* “An organization in which staff were an important asset with whom open communication were important, professionalism and integrity were a way of life and team building was promoted. There was a sense of family and recognition of all staff” (P 138).

*Operated as a family:* “We operated more as a family” (P 142)

*Organization felt like home:* “An organization that felt like home” (P 92)

*Promote culture of Beta family:* “Excellent, and caring for each other. Tried to promote a culture of “The Beta family” (P 139)

*Promoting family culture:* “A wonderful experience, open, honest, based on trust and integrity, respects for each other technical knowledge and ability, promoting a family culture (this is for our department, not applicable to high level management)” (P 99)

*Proud family atmosphere:* “The company had a proud family atmosphere” (P107)

*Clients part of the family:* “The company took responsibility for its projects. In some cases clients could be regarded as extensions of ‘the family’” (P 135)

*Important to understand:* “Important to understand and necessary to cultivate to keep the team (‘family’) motivated” (P 136) (staff relations)

*Striving to maintain family ethos:* “ Committed to a democratic South Africa; strong in responding to the Firm’s strategic challenges; generally striving to maintain a “Family” ethos amongst employees – although of course, there were lapses occasionally or in specific locations, where local leadership were not consistently engaged in facilitating a “lekker” working environment for staff” (P 143)(leadership)

*Second home:* “...In most areas the values of an ethical respectable family was still prevalent in the organisation. It was my second home” (P 135)

#### *Ethical respectable family*

*Business ethics:* (as value)(P 131)

*Excellent work:* “Simply those who lived the afore-mentioned values. The excellence of their work and the dignity with which they treated others was to be the proof” (P 126)

*Uncompromising ethics:* “A firm with uncompromising ethics offering the highest quality, while appropriate, engineering services at fair value to the client” (P 136)

*High ethical standards:* “One of high ethical standards, a company that is recognized for its technical excellence” (P 99)

*Acts with integrity:* “A company that values their employees, that acts with integrity with trust being the foundation on which relationships are built between employees” (P 99)

*Acted with integrity and professionalism:* “A great organisation to which I was very loyal which acted with integrity and professionalism” (P 138)

*Acting in an ethical manner:* “Striving to provide an excellent professional service acting always in an ethical manner” (P 129)(culture)

*Ethical and honesty:* “ethical and honesty” as value (P 124)

“*Ethical practices*” (P 100) and “*Ethics*” (P 122) as value

*Honest* (x12) coded twelve times as a value

*Honesty* (x9) coded nine times as a value

*Integrity* coded 36 times primarily as a value but also in response to cocktail party / plane, reputation and successful staff “Integrity, Long standing reputation and name. Not just business focused, people are important too” (P 92)

*Integrity towards clients and staff:* “Highest level of integrity towards clients and staff” (P 103)

*Integrity was inspiring:* “There were many men and women whose lives displayed an integrity that was inspiring. There were obvious exceptions, but generally, the leaders lived lives that were worth following” (P 126)

*Maintaining unwavering honesty and integrity:* A privilege to have been able to work for and with such leaders in the field of engineering while always maintaining an unwavering level of

honesty and integrity and understanding of staff needs” (P 136)(cp/plane)  
*Operated with integrity*: “They were professional and operated with integrity” (P 142)  
*Transparency* as a value mentioned once.  
*Striving for actualization of core values*: “Continually striving for greater actualization of the core values specified above, ie “Respect for Others”; “Honest Accountable Professional Services”; “Integrity and Transparency”, across all the Firm’s Operating and Administrative Sections and throughout all employment levels” (P 143)

### A3.3.2 We are a company that values our people

There were many possible titles for this identity statement as there are various elements that come to the fore in this category. These include the element of care of employees, respect for all, the importance of people, that people are treated equally (dissonant voices aside). Bearing in mind these various elements which all speak of a concern for people, I have chosen to name this “We are a company that values our people” as these other elements care, respect, equitable treatment are all likely consequences of placing value on people.

#### Table A.23: Quotes associated with “We are a company that values our people”

*Family protectiveness*: “Value of staff as the most important resource – a family protectiveness” (P 124)  
*People orientated* used five times to describe the values, culture and motto. “A personal people-orientated company where staff were content and produced very good work for clients who appreciated the working relationships and felt ‘safe’ with the firm” (P 112) / “A people-orientated business with a strong “family” culture committed to providing technically excellent services” (P 120) / “A people-orientated company that went about things in an inclusive way, producing quality work that was always appreciated by our clients” (P 112)  
*People (x4)* and *People based organization* as values  
*People came first*: “People definitely came first; both the Co towards its employees and very much employees towards each other” (P 93)  
*People driven practice*: “People driven practice” (P139)  
*People first*: “People first” (P 84)  
*People are important*: “long standing reputation and name. Not just business focused, people are important too” (P 92)  
*Felt part of something bigger*: “I would definitely tell them it is an awesome co to work for. Not only do they pay well with good benefits but the work itself made me feel as if I am part of something bigger. They care about their staff. Do expect high efficiency, but if you work hard, the company works hard for you” (P 84).  
*People make the organization*: “I will use words like: well respected, proud, loyal, fond, realising that is it the people that make the organisation” (P 121)  
*Consideration for the being of people*: “Consideration for the being of people. Sometimes it could be viewed as too tolerant on mediocrity and slow to implement change” (P 135) (leadership)

*Respect as an aspect people orientation*:  
 Successful staff described as “Respected and valued” (P 112)  
*Respect (x4)*  
*Respect as a value: for employees and clients* (P 135), *for others* (P 143), *for staff* (P138)

*Respectful*: staff relations described as respectful

*Respect for all*: “Hard work, good working conditions and respect for all as human beings with problems, fears, aspirations etc” (P 109)

*Treated with respect*: “Everyone treated each other with respect and communication was very good between everyone. Concerns were easily expressed and dealt with as soon as possible” (P 82)

*We prized, trusted and empowered people*: “We prized, trusted and empowered our people” (P 126)

*We love this stuff and prize each other*: “We love this stuff, and prize each other” (P 126)

*Benefit of placing people above systems*: “Placing people above systems and raw business will produce its own results in allegiance, productivity and profitability, recognizing that our staff is our most important asset, with due recognition and rewards to those who perform to their best. The recognition of spouse and family as key motivators thread through the company’s DNA” (P 125)

*Inspired by staff*: “Probably the most enjoyable aspect of my work. I was inspired by those around me intellectually, in work, in personal growth, in the way they valued and treated their families, and in the general way they lived their lives” (P 126)(staff rel)

*Cherish the good start*: “I will cherish the good start I got in the consulting world, where I was treated specially as an individual and not just as a cog in the machine” (P 140)

*Treated as adults*: “to be treated as adults and not prisoners” (P 79)

*Great place to work*: “A great place to work where staff are relaxed, easy to talk to, willing to openly communicate and where we are all part of a great team and are treated as equals” (P 119)(Motto)

*Everyone treated equally*: “No person is more important than another. Therefore everyone will be treated equally and with the same level of professionalism and interest” (P 82)(motto)

*Loyal and committed to Beta*: “I felt loyal and committed to Beta, because Beta accommodated me and recognised my needs and made allowances for my circumstances as a result I was prepared to go beyond the 8hr work day and contribute my skills, knowledge, imagination and full mental and psychological resources to the benefit of the company” (P 94)

*Tolerance of diversity*: “Conservative and professional. Team work. On Wednesdays at 10h00 – team times for all staff members at the same arena, the Forum – management team getaway, all offices (selected individuals) team building, Friday Beta Shack. There was open debates and tolerance of diversity at senior level (where I was more exposed). Respect of others, irrespective of position” (P105)

*Non racial and gender equal*: “Totally non racial and gender equal as far as treatment and work interactions are concerned” (P 93)

*Appreciate that people came first*: “I appreciated the way people came first, That made me feel valued” (P 112)(emotional connection)

*Valued as part of Beta*: “I always felt valued as part of Beta not only the unit. I felt our directors were approachable. We always worked hard as a team no matter what level you are at you felt valued” (P 84)

*Cares for its people*: “A dedicated organization that cares for its people” (P 78)

*Caring* mentioned 14 times by eight participants and in response to values, staff relations, management style and management-employee relations, cocktail party / plane, motto, leadership and successful staff “Generally there was an atmosphere of team work and co-operation amongst all staff on a work level, as well as a sense of caring on a personal level” (P 81) / “Healthy team work and competition whilst being caring as well” (P 121)

*Caring for each other*: “Excellent, and caring for each other. Tried to promote a culture of “The Beta Family” (P 139) / “A great engineering firm, with excellent engineers. Traditional, conservative but dynamic in its approach to work. Open and caring and people centred” (P 105).

*Caring for staff*: “The strive for technical excellence with a strong focus on business ethics, caring for staff and building internal relationships based on trust and integrity with all working together to the benefit of the department” (P 86)

*Caring organization:* “A caring organization where the Beta ethos was very prominent. When dealing with other Beta offices, it was evident that this permeated throughout the organization. Work ethic was a high priority but did not preclude staff from interacting on a social basis in the work place. When exit interviews were carried out on staff who had resigned, the one common thread was the pleasant working environment that existed in the Beta offices” (P 141)

*Not only looking after own interests:* “Efficient, outgoing and willing to be part of the team and not only looking after their own interests” (P 84) (SS)

*Company to be proud of:* “Company to be proud of. Company that takes care of their workers, yet professional” (P 89)

#### **Dissonant voices**

*Discrimination:* “Very warm in most cases, with some exceptions of people who were really cold towards the other non-white groups and/or undermining their intelligence” (P 97) / *Non-white groups felt out of place:* “Good although some people from non-white groups sometimes feel out of place. Access to management was surprisingly easy” (P 97)

### **A3.3.3 We are focused on the development of our staff**

One particular manifestation of the value of people was the emphasis placed on their development. Given that the organisation aimed at providing professional services, and that professions are usually characterised by a distinct path of training, professional registration and socialisation, this would appear to be a necessary feature of identity.

#### **Table A.24: Quotes associated with “We are development orientated”**

*Technical experts mentoring others:* “My heritage organization, although comparatively large, always had a family feel and ethos. One felt part of the organization and, if you were loyal to it, it would be loyal to you. It was ahead of its time in terms of “equal opportunity” in that, even prior to 1994, all employees were treated equally within the framework of the country’s laws of the time. The organization had experts in almost all fields of its endeavours who were willing to impart their knowledge to those who were less experienced. Where at all possible, the organisation always went out of its way to try and accommodate an employees particular wishes such as office transfers, engineering discipline department changes etc.” (P 103)(Cp/pl)

*Above average technical library:* in discussion of management systems mention is made of an “above average technical library” (P 103)

*Continual professional development:* “continued professional development” (P 102)(value)

*Develop full potential:* “Staff are important, how can we help them to develop to their full potential to benefit both the company and themselves. The company would be nothing without them” (P 142)

*Development of each individual:* “Development of each individual to attain their best performance, maintain high levels of motivation and consequently loyalty to the company” (P 94)

*Development of staff as a value:* “Development of staff” (P 94)

*Development of the individual as a value:* “Development of the individual” (P 142)

*Developmental as a value:* “developmental” (P 100)

*Excellent opportunities for development:* “Beta was a very supportive employer providing a stable, pleasant and challenging working environment with excellent opportunities of development. This inspires loyalty and pride that I would like to take forward into the merged entity” (P 120)(emotional connection)

*Beta empowers to serve you:* “Beta empowers and serves its employees to better serve you” (P



110)

*Become a good engineering geologist:* “Wonderful place, gave me all opportunities to travel, to grow and become a good engineering geologist. Many excellent memories” (P 93).

*Beta ideal for a young graduate:* “It was a great company to work for. Especially for a young graduate who found it easy to approach people in the company and ask for advice and guidance in career matters as well we technical matters. I learnt a lot from my time there and would never have considered leaving the company prior to the merger” (P 144).

*Company gave responsibility:* “The company gave you responsibility and encouraged commitment to doing the job well, enhancing the image of the company, and treating one another fairly and with respect. You are not ‘watched’ and monitored continually, but had a line manager or superior to whom you could go to ask form guidance etc.” (P 93)

#### *Successful staff*

*Empower employees:* Those who work to their optimum at their delegated roles and empower colleagues to do the same, in a collaborative effort to promote and achieve the values and objectives of the company, recognizing that special reward does not come without some sacrifice” (P 125)

*Determining own development:* “Motivated, loyal, fulfilled, self-determining their own development and facilitated in every way by fellow staff as well as the company” (P 94)

*Willing to give advice:* “Members of staff who are willing to give advice when needed concerning work as well as people who are a pleasure to work with in the office” (P 82)

*Developed their potential:* “Those that developed to their full potential and provided guidance and support to more junior staff” (P 142)

*Helped to develop:* “One who works under a good boss who recognizes weaknesses and strengths of a staff member and also who will now be able to give direction or overcome the staff members weaknesses” (P 116).

#### **Dissonant voices**

*Limited room for growth:* “There was only limited room for growth” (P 118)

*Sabotage candidate technicians:* “Its always out to sabotage young candidate technicians” (P 118)

**APPENDIX B: ORGANISATION IDENTITY: SURVEY**

The aim of the questionnaire is to understand the identity of the heritage organisations, Alpha and Beta, of which the merged entity, Delta, is composed. Please answer from the perspective of your experience with your heritage organisation. In the questionnaire below, you will find a number of incomplete sentences which you will be required to complete. Think about words or phrases that are most often used to describe your heritage organisation, either Alpha or Beta, and use these to complete the sentences. Please be as honest as possible as this survey is completed anonymously. You will first be required to complete some biographical information.

**Biographical information**

*Please complete the following biographical information. Put a cross in the appropriate box or fill in the required information.*

Heritage organisation to which you belonged:

Alpha

Beta

Gender

Male

Female

Age:

Home language:

Highest educational qualification:

Staff component:

Technical director

Associate

Young engineer

Civil technician

Administrative

Unit:

Job title:

Years service at Alpha / Beta

**Questions**

1. For me, the three core values of my heritage organisation are:

2. The culture of my heritage organisation could best be described as (culture is viewed as the generally acceptable way of doing things in an organisation):
3. In my heritage organisation, change is viewed as:
4. I would describe successful staff in my heritage organisation as:
5. I would characterise staff relations in my heritage organisation as:
6. I would characterise client relations in my heritage organisation as:
7. Relationships with external stakeholders could be described as:
8. I would describe my heritage organisation's reputation in the marketplace as
9. I would describe my heritage organisation's service in the marketplace as:
10. The management style in my heritage organisation could be described as:
11. The leadership in my heritage organisation could be described as:
12. At my heritage organisation, the relationship between management and employees could be described as:
13. I would describe the management systems in my heritage organisation as (in this case management systems refer to :
14. If you had to, in one short phrase, summarise what was distinctive about your heritage organisation, what would that be? (Think of it as devising the company motto):
15. In what key ways would you say Alpha and Beta differ?
16. Describe your emotional connection to the organisation:
17. Imagine you meet someone at a cocktail party or on a plane. What would you say about your heritage organisation?

Language

Ethnicity

Nationality