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Living and Breathing E.ON

Analysing Commitment in a Low-Commitment Organization

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Abstract

Title:	Living and Breathing E.ON: Analysing Commitment in a Low-Commitment Organization
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Key words:	Identity, Identity Work, Resistance, Disidentification, Commitment
Research question:	In which different ways do four E.ON employees, through identity work, identify with and commit to E.ON?
Methodology:	This study has a subjective reality view and is based on critical theory, hermeneutics, and the postmodern approach. Qualitative interviews were used to collect the empirical data.
Theoretical perspectives:	The theoretical framework is based on literature concerning identity, identity-work, image and resistance.
Empirical foundations:	The study's empirical foundation consists of semi-structured interviews with four E.ON employees. Additional secondary data relevant for the study has also been taken into consideration.
Conclusions:	Findings in this study all point in the same direction showing the four E.ON employees using different identity work processes resulting in the same outcome, a strong identification with and commitment to E.ON.

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1 Introduction

"All the time you have to think 'how do I act now when I take the cab, as I am an E.ON-employee'. My behaviour can affect the cab-driver's image of E.ON." Mark explaining how he is affected by work even when he is not at work.

"Many of my friends do hardly know that I am working here." Lisa explaining how she is a different person outside work.

"If I walk out of here[1] and into Volvo instead [...] then I am a nobody there. And it takes some time to be 'someone'." Maria, considering why she is loyal to E.ON.

"*Now there is a party, let's leave that[2]; I will not ask you about your job."* Carl talking about how he sometimes likes to 'leave' work out of the discussion.

These quotes represent four typical expressions we have met during this study. All four tell something about commitment and identity in their own way. E.ON, as an organization, is known to be a good place to work at and an organization working hard to increase employee satisfaction. E.ON employees see their employer as "*a high-quality employer*" (E.ON Sverige, Annual report, 2007, p. 29) and compared to other employers E.ON was ranked above average. Another remarkable thing with E.ON is how low, according to E.ON's HR-department, both the sickness absenteeism on 2.0 % and the turnover rate on 4.6% are (E.ON Sverige, Annual report, 2008: HR-Department, E.ON Sverige).

1.1 Background

Who am I? How do I act? On the surface, identity is single dimensioned, where the object of study is a stable and coherent self. This seemingly linear topic has several multifaceted levels. Who we are and what we do affect the way we act (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Is it possible to have two different identities, one at work and one at home? If you really like your job, will you think about how you act to protect the reputation of the organization even if you are not working? How do we as individuals affect our own identity and can external factors have such an impact on us that we change our identity?

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[1] E.ON, researcher note
[2] Work, researcher note

The content of an identity is living and in constant motion, where defining and redefining of the self is ongoing (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Individuals are, more or less, consciously engaged in formation and reformation of their identities. In the identity process people may experience insecurity and even though we might say that we have always been the same, a development of our character has taken place and we are not the one we were ten years ago, last year or even yesterday (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

In many ways, identity determines who we are and it affects much of what we do and how we feel. Identity creates stability for an individual as it categorizes and fixes people into groups. This also creates a sense of belonging to different groups. Belonging is important as it gives the individual status and a feeling of distinction. During all interaction identity will be subject to forces of change. This will develop the sense of what to identify with. Groups perceived as giving most status will change and membership will transfer to those seen as most appealing (Walsh & Gordon, 2008). What organization a person works for is one building block in shaping the identity through status, belongingness and corporate discourse (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Identity in relation to the organization is complex. There are many advantages of employees identifying with and creating a sense of belonging to the organization as it can lead to motivation and commitment as well as facilitate the understanding of the organization and guide employees towards desirable actions (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Burke, 2004: Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeld, 2005). Some companies have an image that is appealing which facilitate influencing the identification process of their employees, since employees find it easier to identify with attractive corporate images (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994: Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The image communicated by the organization has to be seen as authentic, because otherwise the identity work between organizations and employees will be met with skepticism. Employees may be reluctant to follow the organizational way and find other areas of interest which they identify more with, for example their family or their membership in a society (Fleming & Spicer, 2008: Elsbach & Bhattacharya 2001).

Working with identity can be a way for an organization to exercise control in a more subtle way than rules and regulations. Identity regulation can create a common organizational identity. A homogeneous organizational identity might facilitate control of the employees since it is easier to control groups than individuals. Another factor closely related to organizational control is

commitment. If the employees feel that they are part of the company they will find it easier to commit to it and with commitment loyalty will increase (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Using identity regulation is a better way to execute control than using rules and regulations, as these can be experienced as blunt and be met with resistance (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Resistance is a way for employees to cope with work even though it is not in line with their personal values. This kind of resistance can be expressed by strikes, walk-outs etcetera (Fleming & Spicer 2008). Resistance is more than tangible actions and it can be expressed by for example cynicism and skepticism. Using cynicism to resist is a way to distance the mind from the ideology of management and it is also a way for the individual to mentally separate herself/himself from the organization (Fleming & Spicer 2003).

1.2 Problematization

It is no longer only the machines that are the most important resources to companies. In today's society also people possessing knowledge are being valued. Since employees are considered as an asset to many companies, it is of great importance to retain the workers within the organization (Alvesson, 2004). One way to control the employees and their knowledge is by making them identify with the organization. This is important since identity is said to create greater commitment and loyalty (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Ashforth & Mael, 1989: Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994).

There is said to be a strong link between organizational identity and the employees´ commitment towards the organization (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Scott & Lane, 2000: Walsh & Gordon, 2008). The employees can be seen as entrepreneurs for the company and it is important to make sure they act along with the organizational values even outside the work place. Especially when the employees meet customers, potential customers and other outsiders it is essential that they act in a desired way and communicate the organizational values. One way to implement this behaviour is to encourage an overlap between the organizational identity and the individual identity of the employees (Fleming & Spicer, 2004: Walsh & Gordon, 2008).

1.2.1 Why E.ON Sverige?

One of the largest energy companies in the world, E.ON, is interesting regarding how employees identify with and commit to the organization. E.ON is not a company which usually is referred to

as a high-commitment firm, as for example consultancy firms are (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007: Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen, 2009). Instead companies operating in the energy industry, which E.ON does, should be understood as a low-commitment firm. In low-commitment firms it said to be more unlikely for employees to commit to and identify with the organization, than it is for employees in high commitment firms to do the same (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007: Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen, 2009). Low sickness absenteeism, low turnover rate and high job satisfaction among the employees at E.ON Sverige raises the question about what the company is doing right. According to Ashforth & Mael (1989) and Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994) identification is one factor strengthening both the willingness to work hard and the satisfaction at work. A survey conducted in 2007, answered by 86% of E.ON Sverige's employees, indicates that 80% of these employees would recommend E.ON as "*a high-quality employer*" (E.ON Sverige, Annual report, 2007, p. 29). Taking this survey into consideration E.ON employees can be seen as both committed to and identified with the organization. Another study indicated that E.ON, compared to other Swedish employers, was ranked above average (E.ON Sverige, Annual report, 2007). How does this organization manage to get their employees to commit to E.ON Sverige?

1.3 Research Question

In which different ways do four E.ON employees, through identity work, identify with and commit to E.ON?

1.4 Purpose

As mentioned before E.ON is supposed to be a low-commitment firm, but for example the survey conducted in 2007 contradicts this and indicates that E.ON employees is acting in a manner more similar to the one in high-commitment firms and to a larger extent commit to the organization (Alvehus, 2008: Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007: Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen, 2009). This behaviour of E.ON employees, acting as committing to and identifying with the organization even though they are not working within a company seen as a high-commitment firm, is a reason to why we became interesting in this area of research. We are interested in understanding how employees in a low-commitment firm, to such a large extent, can commit to and identify with an organization.

The purpose of this study is to show different ways identity work leads to identification and commitment towards E.ON within a group of four employees. To be able to answer the research question we will analyse the identity work of the four E.ON employees and try to find differences in how they work with their identification with and commitment to the organization.

1.5 Disposition

A setup and structure of how this thesis is constructed will be presented to make it easier for the reader to follow. The thesis will therefore be presented as follows:

In the *first part* a brief introduction to the research area was given and the research question was presented.

In the *second part* the methodology for this study will be described. This section aims to notify the reader about the choice of methodologies and methods used in this study. It is also aiming to create an overview of how this study was conducted.

In the *third part* the theoretical framework used in this study is discussed. In this section the main points of the theory will be touched upon and these will be further elaborated in the analysis.

The *fourth part* is where the analysis is presented. This is the section where the empirical material collected from the four interviews will be presented, interpreted, and analysed based on the theoretical framework introduced in part three.

In *the fifth and last part* the conclusion and findings drawn from this study will be presented as well as suggestions for future research.

2 Methodology

2.1 Ontology and Epistemology

Within the framework of this study we do not look upon reality as something objective, instead we see it as something constantly changing, due to the shifting nature of context and people. The subjective perspective, which this study is based on, view reality as something biased, continuously changing, and dependent on the person interpreting reality (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Kvale, 1997). In order to increase the possibility for us to answer our research question, a supporting approach and a methodology that helps to attain the chosen purpose are needed (Jacobsen, 2002: Bryman & Bell, 2007). Due to the chosen reality view, of the world being socially constructed, the outcome of this study will be affected by our pre-understanding. The subjective reality view is based on the meaning held by individuals (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). These meanings and pre-understandings will affect how new understandings and what kind of understanding emerging as an outcome of this study.

2.1.1 Critical Theory

This study relies to a large extent on how the interviews are being interpreted. Since interpretation is a key word in critical theory and it is aiming to find underlying meanings we will take on this critical approach as one way to understand the content of the interviews. There are in particular two levels of interpretation. Firstly you can interpret, try to find, the underlying source of an assumption etcetera. What is the assumption based on and how can this affect the communicated idea? Secondly, you can interpret an assumption by trying to understand the deeper content of the idea or action etcetera. Are there for example any hidden political views or personal values in the expressed idea or action? (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Another critical approach is to challenge what is there and open up towards what you are studying and not take things for granted (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Caza & Caza, 2008: James, 2008).

2.1.2 Hermeneutics

According to hermeneutics, knowledge is acquired by looking deeper into content. The foundation of objectivist hermeneutics is the hermeneutic circle of part and whole, which implies that any phenomenon can be understood as a whole, only in reference to its parts, and that the

parts can only be understood in relation to the whole (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Kvale, 1997: Thurén, 1991: Hartman, 2004). In this study we will start by interpreting the interviews as one long story and thereafter we will break them down into parts to look at specific quotes. After that these quotes will be referred and compared to the interview as a whole and so on and so forth. Since we will work back and forth between whole and part while analysing the interviews hermeneutic is a suitable approach to take and it will help getting a deeper interpretation of the interviews compared to if only the whole was considered. The hermeneutic approach does not only take whole and parts into consideration. Alethic hermeneutics is not emphasising subject and object relations in the same way as objective hermeneutics, but instead it disbands the polarity between them. The circle in alethic hermeneutics is based on understanding and pre-understanding, as the assumption is that we cannot function without understanding, and when interpreting we use our pre-understanding to gain new understanding (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Thurén, 1991). Pre-understanding is crucial to how understanding is created and even more so in a group of researchers. The different pre-understandings possessed play an important role worth acknowledging when constructing the understanding of this study, which is another reason why the hermeneutic approach was chosen.

The hermeneutic approach affected both the way we framed the research topic, the way we conducted the interviews and the analysis. The alternation between focusing on whole and parts resulted in a deeper understanding throughout the process of this study (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Kvale, 1997).

2.1.3 Postmodernism

Another approach used is the postmodern, in terms of the researchers interpreting the statements of the interviewees as shaped of the discourse they were part of. Context is a key word in postmodernism, which means that the meaning of the interviewees is dependent of the context they are in (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Alvesson, 2003). One reason for choosing the postmodern approach is the fact that it does not see the narratives as a unique person telling a story about her/his life, but instead it is the language that speaks through the person that is important (Kvale, 1997). This was important to acknowledge while interpreting the interviews to be able to reach through the façade of the employee and get to know the individual behind.

Hermeneutics and critical theory takes interpretation into consideration. Since hermeneutics is focusing on human behaviour while critical theory also takes ideas, values etcetera into consideration they can be seen as complementing each other concerning understanding and interpretation (Bryman & Bell 2007). In difference to hermeneutics and the critical approach, postmodernism concerns the context and seeks to gain a broader understanding of the social reality (Alvesson, 2003: Bryman & Bell, 2007). This is why these three approaches together will give a more comprehensive view than each of them will do separately. Important in this study are the aspects of interpretation, understanding, and context. This said because we are interested in understanding values, behaviour etcetera in the specific context of the case organization. Hermeneutics, critical theory and postmodernism will facilitate the research process and help create a comprehensive view of our research area.

2.1.4 Qualitative Approach

A subjective reality view was taken in this study, which led to the choice of a qualitative approach, since this is the only approach operative with subjectivity (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The aim of this research is finding a deeper understanding instead of a generalized truth. This said, since for example Bryman and Bell (2007) argue for how qualitative research cannot be used for generalization. This is because the individuals interviewed in such a study are not chosen because they are good representatives of a population. The qualitative approach was chosen for this in-depth study and one of the strengths was its ability to create a deeper understanding of how employees work with their identities. A qualitative approach can be seen as appropriate in order to create deeper understanding for an unclear research area (Jacobsen, 2002). This qualitative study used a deductive approach where existing theoretical material was collected and used as a base for interpreting empirical material (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Through a deductive approach experience of existing material of identity work was gained. This pre-understanding was used in the conduction and interpretation of the interviews.

The qualitative approach has both advantages and disadvantages. This was taken into consideration and we found that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages. On the one hand the qualitative approach is both time and resource consuming but on the other hand it gives the opportunity to get the depth needed in this study (Bryman & Bell, 2007: Jacobsen, 2002).

2.2   Defining Area of Research

One case company was chosen and at this company four interviewees were selected to be part of the study. This research is limited to understand in what different ways these *four* employees identify with and commit to the organization. We are not aiming for generalization which is why we have chosen to take on a similar approach as the one used by Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) and Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen (2009) and use an in-depth focus. Different from Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) and Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen (2009) is the fact that in this study four employees were chosen for the analysis, instead of one. The reason for this is because we want to see different ways of how employees can identify with and commit to an organization.

2.3   Limitations

There are two main limitations to be found in this study. The first one is the fact that only four employees have been interviewed. This small number of interviews might appear as a limitation but the fact that we are not aiming for generalization reduce the strength in using this as an argument for limitation. As Bryman & Bell (2007) argue, qualitative research cannot be used for generalization. In this study we are interested in understanding values, behaviour etcetera in the specific context of the case organization, which is why a qualitative approach is preferred (Bryman & Bell 2007). Furthermore this study is based on the interpretations made by the researchers, and a study based on interpretation of something specific is not suitable for generalization (Merriam, 1994). The aim is to show how identification and commitment, through identity work, can be created in different ways within the group of these four employees. Secondly, having someone at E.ON choosing interviewees for this study might make the outcome of the interviews more positive. To overcome or reduce this limitation a critical approach was taken, trying to find the underlying meaning of what was said while interpreting the empirical material.

2.4   Method

2.4.1   Company Selection

We chose to study only one company. The choice of conducting an in-depth study at this specific case company was an active decision, because an in-depth study would give us as researchers a more fundamental understanding of how a limited number of employees construct their identities in a specific context.

The access to the company was granted through a previously established contact between one of the researchers and an employee of the case organization. Starting November 2008 until the end of February 2009 a relationship was developed, thanks to a project coordinated by the School of Economics and Management at Lund University. During this period of time the idea was arising to conduct a master's thesis at this specific company. The very first contact was made by e-mail and a positive response was received.

2.4.2   Data Collection

In order to gain an insight in the area of research, we have chosen to use data collection methods appropriate for our purpose, which is important to be able to answer the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Our primary data collection consisted of qualitative interviews with four employees working at the case company. To gain richer empirical material we took the opportunity, inspired by Dingwall (1997) and his principle of "hanging around", to observe the environment before, during, and after the interviews. The secondary data where mainly collected from annual reports, scientific journals and academic literature. One has to consider secondary sources as something objective written by an objective individual. However, the way we interpret the literature can be subjective and it depends on the individual, the context etcetera, which is why it is in line with the subjective perspective chosen for this study.

2.4.3   Qualitative Interviews at E.ON

The first contact was initially made by e-mail and over the phone. We presented the research question and our thoughts about the conduction and collection of the empirical material. For example, we asked for around five employees to interview and suggested desired interview dates. We also requested employees who had worked more than two years within the organization as new recruits might have a nuanced and not as deep understanding of their employer. Our company contact selected the interviewees, based on our requests. We ended up with four employees. Three of them are managers in different units of the case organization. The fourth one is a project co-ordinator. Kvale (1997) describes good interviewees as: *"cooperative, well-motivated, well-spoken, and knowledgeable individuals"*[3] (Kvale, 1997, p.135). Our interviewees had elements of this and we were given consequent and sincere answers. Even though we did not have the final control of choosing interviewees, we were satisfied with the

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[3] Our translation

outcome. In the end we were the ones deciding how many of the four interviews to use in the final analysis, which is why we chose not to see the interview selection as a limitation.

The interviews were conducted at the case organization, both at the Swedish headquarter and at other offices, depending on where the interviewee had her/his office. All interviewees were informed that they were going to be anonymous and all the interviews were recorded. The interviews lasted on average one and a half hour. The four interviews were conducted in Swedish and all three researchers took turns in interviewing and to be the co-interviewer, with the responsibility to observe, listen and take notes. Since linguistic shades may affect our interpretations, this way of working was found most adequate for the purpose of this study. The recorder worked as support to our notes and made it possible to focus on the interviewee. The disadvantages may however be that some interviewees might see the recorder as a monitoring device, hindering in giving honest answers. After all, we decided to perceive the recorder as a positive tool in the interpretation of the empirical material.

2.4.3.1 Interview Guide

For all four interviews a semi-structured interview questionnaire was used, which encouraged the researchers to ask spontaneous questions. Kvale (1997) stresses that: *"The more spontaneous questions, the bigger likelihood to gain spontaneous and unexpected answer"[4]* (Kvale, 1997, p.121). The interview guide[5] was originally in Swedish, but in appendix an English version will be enclosed. Due to the Swedish nationality of our interviewees, it was a deliberate choice of ours to conduct the interviews in Swedish. This hopefully resulted in more honest and in-depth answers. The underlying motive for conducting semi-structured interviews was to give the interviewees the opportunity to talk about their identity work and how they commit to the organization. To be sure that some central themes were discussed, irrespective the interviewing researcher, we used an interview guide. This gave the support needed and made the researchers more comfortable listening to the interviewee's unique stories.

2.4.4 Research Interview

A research interview is more than just a polite conversation because it has a specific purpose. What is perceived as true changes with context, time, people etcetera taking part of, for example

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[4] Our translation
[5] Appendix [1]

an interview, and this is why a subjective perspective is to prefer. A subjective perspective allows truth to change and to be different from time to time (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Kvale, 1997). In interview situations there is always a risk that the researcher influences the interviewee, especially if the researcher knows what outcome she/he is working towards. If this is the case the way the interview will be interpreted might be biased of the researchers own idea of what is being researched. The researchers only have limited time to achieve a connection with the interviewee and if the researcher fails, the research interview can be a waste of both parties' time and energy. The researcher therefore needs to create an atmosphere where the interviewee feels secure enough to speak honestly about her/his thoughts, career dreams and personal fears. The researcher also needs to obtain a balance between the knowledge search and the human interactions, emotions and ethical aspects (Kvale, 1997: Merriam, 1994: Silverman, 1993). A research interview is a situation where the interviewee is exposed, and the researcher needs to be gentle in terms of not taking advantage of this exposure in an unethical way. The researcher has the key to the interviewee's emphatic world and if the researcher gains access to this private world, it is important not to abuse this exchange of confidence. The interviewee does not only use words to describe her/his life, also body language, gestures, facial expressions, intonation etcetera is used to intermediate their world view (Jacobsen, 2002: Kvale, 1997). The use of these different kinds of language underpins the choice of a postmodern and a critical approach. Using these approaches can help finding the underlying meaning and what is to be found behind these different expressions made by the interviewees.

2.4.4.1 Role of the Researcher

How knowledge is gained can be illustrated using different metaphors. Mentioned by Kvale (1997) are the miner and the traveller. The miner is one who searches for an objective truth. In this research situation the miner metaphor is not applicable, since there are no claims for generalization in this study. In this case the researchers act more like Kvale's (1997) traveller, consciously searching for new knowledge in specific places. A traveller does not want to find objective truths and it is how places and stories heard on the journeys are interpreted that is important. New knowledge is gained through interpretation, but the reflexive process can also present new insight and understanding of oneself to the traveller. Kvale (1997) describes the traveller metaphor as a postmodern approach where conversation plays a prominent role. This

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was in line with the qualitative approach chosen for this study, in terms of the ambition to say something about the unique human being without generalization.

The key questions for the researcher in a research situation according to Kvale (1997) are: what, why and how. In this study what regards the process of gathering enough pre-understanding and why concerns the chosen theme of employees' identity work and finally how concerns the methods and techniques used to answer what and why. Through a conversation one gets to know one another and through that we learn something about that other persons experiences, emotions, hopes and dreams in the world she/he lives in. Taking on an objective view, the things we learn about each other will be the truth and never change. This is most of the time not the case when humans are involved. If an individual is aware of this and open to re-evaluate what she/he has learnt during this conversation this situation will be more true to life. This is why it would be more realistic to have a subjective perspective when human interactions are in focus. The research situation, especially in interviews, is power asymmetric. The researcher is the one deciding upon the topic and themes to discuss during the interview, which means that the researcher is the one in control, because when topics are discussed the researcher is the one critically following-up what the interviewee just said (Bryman & Bell 2007: Kvale, 1997: Merriam, 1994). The interviews in this case are primarily considered as an interaction and an exchange of viewpoints about the studied area. The reciprocal dependence is central, because without the interviewees' collaboration we would never obtain new knowledge about the case organization and according to alethic hermeneutics the researcher has to have a certain level of understanding and pre-understanding in order to be able to analyse the gathered material (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Kvale, 1997: Merriam, 1994).

In order to understand the interviewees' life-world, a researcher needs to be sensitive for how different approaches can affect the end result, for example different interview styles held by the researchers. The interview situation is an interaction where the researcher's sensitivity and humanity is of importance to inspire confidence and make the interviewees feel comfortable enough to open up and let the researcher into their world (Kvale, 1997: Merriam, 1994). Mostly in this study the interview situations were characterized by positive emotions, curiosity and mutual respect. Although, in one case the interviewee adopted a wait-and-see approach in the beginning and as the postmodern approach states, the context in which the interview takes place

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is important for how the interview turns out (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Alvesson, 2003). The sensitive interview style created in this case played an important role creating the right atmosphere and after a while, the person lowered the guard and opened up.

Some of the interviewees' stories were contradictory, which created some ambiguity in interpretation of the data. Contradictions can emerge from lack in communication between interviewee and researcher. We chose to understand these contradictions as an adequate way of illustrating the world based on different understandings and pre-understandings held by the interviewees. To understand the contradictions found it is important to take a critical approach and distance from the actual quotes to be able to find the underlying source to this statement. The researcher needs to be both competent within the research area as well as competent enough to explain the research area to the interviewees (Kvale, 1997: Merriam, 1994).

2.4.5   Processing Empirical Material

Before the interviews were conducted the interviewees were told they would be anonymous when the material was being processed. This is why the first step in processing the empirical material was to make the interviewees anonymous. The interviewees were given new names, sexes, number of children, and changed spare time activities.

To be able to organize the empirical material, common themes were created. As the hermeneutic approach suggests the interviews were interpreted both as whole stories and in smaller sections and depending on the outcome the material was structured into these different themes. The work of structuring the empirical material has been done both as a group of researchers and by each researcher on her/his own. Organizing the material in this way facilitated the analysis. When analysing these themes a critical approach was taken trying to get a deeper content out of the material. In the postmodern approach the language is crucial and for that reason the interviews were listened to many times, to be able to capture different nuances in the interviewees' language talking about the discourses and the contexts they are being part of.

While working with the empirical material different interpretations were made. As the alethic hermeneutic approach claims it is important to acknowledge that these interpretations are affected by the researchers own pre-understanding and might have been interpreted differently by an individual with a different pre-understanding (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000).

2.4.6 Validity

When conducting interviews, there are some aspects that have to be taken into consideration and viewed as risk factors (Silverman, 1993). Firstly, the interviewees were chosen by an employee at the case organization which might have affected the answers in the interviews. The interviewees chosen might have had a more positive opinion of the organization than other employees. Since our purpose is to find out in what different ways these four E.ON employees commit to the organization a choice of employees giving too positive answers might affect the outcome. Secondly, it is important to remember that the researchers might affect the way the interviewees are responding to the questions (Bryman & Bell, 2007: Jacobsen, 2002: Kvale, 1997: Merriam, 1994). To minimize these problems we have only given the interviewees our research question beforehand and not our interview guide. The research question they received was "*We like to study the interaction between the individual and the organization, and how this interaction affects an individual's identification with the organization*". This was a bit modified to make it easier for the interviewees to understand what we were doing. The research question has changed over time and is now slightly different from the one the interviewees were given[6]. The reason for not handing out the interview guide beforehand was to minimize the risk of the interviewees discussing the questions. To avoid influencing the answers of the employees interviewed we were trying to make the interview more like a conversation instead of a structured interview. By doing this we were hoping for the interviewees feeling comfortable and encouraged to speak more honestly about the topic discussed.

According to Jacobsen (2002) the context in which the interviews take place is important for how they turn out. The interviews done in this study were conducted at the offices of the interviewees. This interview context could be both positive and negative. The positive aspect of it was that the employees interviewed probably felt more comfortable in a well known environment which might have encouraged them to speak more honestly. Furthermore, the environment in which they are working could be observed. A negative aspect could be the fact that the interview took place at the interviewees' work place and the interviewees might have felt comfortable in their own environment but it might also have hindered them from saying what they actually thought and felt in the matters discussed (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006).

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[6] Appendix [2]

In the first contact with the case organization two of the researchers did not have any substantial pre-understanding of the organization. The third researcher had previously been in contact with the organization through a project introduced by the School of Economics and Management at Lund University, and had due to this some insight in the organization. It turned out that this mix of pre-understanding and insight in the organization combined with the unawareness has been positive. The different pre-understanding made us question the assumption we made during the study in a more reflexive way and the hermeneutic approach encouraged us to analyse the data more deeply, not only focusing on the whole but also the parts and how these two can be related to each other. These different experiences might have helped to create a more objective view compared to if the researchers had possessed the same pre-understanding of the organization or if the study was conducted by only one researcher.

In this study both primary and secondary sources were used. The positive and negative aspects of the primary sources are discussed in the interview section. The secondary sources used were mainly articles from journals. Many of the chosen articles were referenced in other articles which might indicate the relevance of the specific article. Furthermore, many of the authors of the articles used were also being referenced in other works read during the study. The amount of work the authors have published could also be seen as an indicator underpinning the trustworthiness. The webpage of the case organization had to be considered as valid since unreliable facts would have damaged the organization's stakeholder relations. The annual report had been controlled by external auditors which strengthen its validity.

Different people can interpret the same thing in different ways (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000: Kvale, 1997: Merriam, 1994). The data collected from interviews and secondary sources were interpreted from a subjective perspective by the researchers both at an individual- and group-level. Conducting group interpretation based on a subjected view encouraged discussion and confrontation of the different individual interpretations. This confrontation was something we thought would bring more validity into the discussion of the study and as Silverman (1993) suggested, underpinned the reliability of the outcome. We were also forced to rethink our own interpretation as well as consider different alternative approaches.

During the study four interviews were conducted and all of them were used in the analysis and discussion. We had the opportunity to choose how many of the interviews to use in the analysis

part. All four interviews contained elements that would bring value to the analysis, which resulted in the choice of using all four interviews. The in-depth study of four interviewees gave us a better understanding of how work at the case organization was carried out and an increased insight into identity work and commitment. This facilitated the interpretation of the data collected from the interviews used in the analysis. The interviews were conducted in a single organization which might appear as a limitation. This study on the other hand did not aim for generalization, but to carry out an in-depth study where the results helped answer the research question[7] regarding this specific organization. The fact that we were not aiming for generalization increases the validity of the result compared to if it was a generalizing study.

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[7] See page 9

3 Theory

3.1 Identity

Identity has a fluid nature, is complicated, multidimensional, instable, and is changeable which makes the concept of identity important to recognize (Alvesson, 2004: Balmer, 2008: Corley & Gioia, 2004). In general, identity can be referred to who individuals think they are and how to behave, as well as a process which creates a sense of self. Vital questions in the identity process are: "who am I", "what do I stand for" and "how should I act" (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008: Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999: Cerulo, 1997: Elsbach & Bhattacharya 2001: Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003). Identity exists on different levels and can refer to how a person perceives herself/himself as an individual, in a group, in an organization etcetera (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008: Balmer, 2008: Collinson, 2003: Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994: Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Individual identity can be understood as personal attributes that are not shared with other people and which might have the ability to influence organizational identity (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). All human beings are affected by their environment which is why individual identity also can be perceived as socially shaped (Haslam, Postmes & Ellemers, 2003). An individual might possesses multiple identities. Which identity is exposed depends on the environment in which the individual is acting (Collinson, 2003: Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Work is essential and a major part in a person's life. Individuals both identify with and are being identified by their work. Employees create a work identity which affects how individuals perform at work and can create a "*me at work*" (Collinson, 2003. p 537) (Alvesson, 2004: Gini, 1998: Walsh & Gordon, 2008). When creating these identities individuals in general try to define themselves in positive terms (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

Organizational identity can be built upon the communication of distinctive organizational characteristics (Balmer, 2008). It may also be seen as shared beliefs about the central and distinctive features of an organization (Scott & Lane, 2000). The organizational identity can help individuals in their identity work and influence personal behaviour (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008: Balmer, 2008). In order to guide the employees toward a desired behaviour it is

important to differentiate the organizational identity, by using specific goals, missions, beliefs etcetera (Haslam, Postmes & Ellemers, 2003: Scott & Lane, 2000). How strong an individual identifies with the organization she/he works for depends on how much her/his individual identity has in common with the organizational identity (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994: Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001: Scott & Lane, 2000). Individuals that strongly identify with the organization, use similar attributes to define themselves as the one they use to define the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994: Scott & Lane, 2000).

3.2 Identity Work

Individuals cannot avoid being engaged in identity work due to the many different discourses surrounding them. Identity work is a process where individuals seek direction in multiple discourses, trying to find a homogeneity corresponding to their own notion of self. Individuals do not have to take the same positions consistently, as one identity can be used at home, a second at work and a third at the country club. Identities are not only formed alone, they are also formed in interaction with other people. In these different situations identities are formed in interaction when people ascribe individuals' different attributes as well as individuals ascribing themselves attributes (Beech, 2008: Watson, 2008). Identity work in interaction with others is a way to locate oneself in a group and create a sense of belonging. During this identity work individuals will try to place themselves into different categories, for example age, gender, or team affiliation. The groups an individual choose to identify with will be seen as positively contributing to the individual's status (Walsh & Gordon, 2008: Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Due to different interactions diverse identities will be formed, as the individual is trying to adapt to contexts. The adaption process might be reflected in disidentification with certain groups as well as identification with groups with shared characteristics (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Watson, 2008). Groups confirm identities, and individuals are strengthened by the confirmation. In the case a group confirms an identity the individual does not want to be associated with, the individual will create an ideal picture of how she/he wants to be seen. The identity will then be created around this ideal picture, which will give a higher self-esteem (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006).

Problems in the identity work process might arise if several discourses compete with each other. Individuals strive for a single sense of self, but the different discourses present a possibility to

choose which one to take on. If the individual does not question or doubt her/his identity, identity work will not take place (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). An individual seldom wants to be forced into a certain position or identity. An organization provides space for repairing and redefining identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). To be able to influence identity work the right attributes for a desired identity have to be communicated. Identities can be influenced by symbols, work routines, rules, and norms at work etcetera, which will be granted a meaning and in that way act as an influencing force (Beech, 2008).

Individuals might create their identity both from the organization as well as different sections of it, for example their department, work group or workout group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). During identity work individuals try to identify with the organization by defining themselves by attributes similar to those used to define the organization. The more an individual ties her/his identity to the organization the stronger the commitment and loyalty will be. Also, when identifying with a group for example an organization this can lead to a perception of the success and failures of the organization as one's own (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). Identity is modified when the organization itself changes, as the discourses identity builds upon will be transformed in the process. Individuals work with their identity in constant interaction with discourses, which define and redefine identities as well as define group belonging and social status. Because of its many discourses the organization is a powerful tool for identity work (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Even though the organization might try to affect how individuals construct their identity, it is hard to predict the actual outcome of this work. The offered identity has to be appealing and in some way enhancing the status of the individual. Trying to define the characteristics of the organization as unique and also clearly draw a border to other groups may help identification with the organization. The outcome of the identity work can potentially turn out in an unfavourable way for the organization, as the individuals might find other sources for their identity than their organization (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Ashforth & Mael, 1989). If individuals find the created identity unfavourable, they can themselves construct a discourse that gives a higher identity status (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006). Finding an identity unfavourable can also be a reason for disidentification. Disidentification is an active decision by the individual against an organization where the individual chose to not define itself with the same

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characteristics as the organization (Elsbach, 1999: Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Other reasons for disidentification can be incongruence between an individual and an organization concerning values, goals or other characteristics. Actions taken by a disidentifying individual can for example be publicly speaking about disliked parts of the organization or keeping the place of employment a secret from others. Disidentification can create a sense of distance from the organization and make the individual feel unaffected by the demands coming from the organization (Fleming & Spicer, 2003: Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

3.3 Identity as an Organizational Control Factor

One way of manage to control employees working within an organization is by influencing their identity work (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). By regulating employees' identities management can affect for example their sense-making and their understanding of the organization, in order to guide the employees' behaviour toward a desired outcome (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Burke, 2004: Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeld, 2005).

By using identity regulation a more homogenous organizational identity might emerge which can facilitate the control of employees (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006). Identity regulation is a way for management to affect the identity work of the employees. Identity as a tool for organizational control is aiming to affect how employees' perceive themselves, their individual identity, and their environment to be able to regulate how they identify with the organization (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). A common base, for example shared values, a strong organizational culture, symbols, and shared beliefs can facilitate the control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Burke, 2004). There are also other factors closely tied to organizational control. For example Alvesson & Willmott (2002) see organizational commitment as an important factor if using identity regulation as a controlling mechanism.

A reason why management often tries to regulate and guide employees' identity work towards group- or organizational identification is because it is easier to control groups than individuals. If the employees' feel that they are a part of the organization they will find it easier to commit and with commitment loyalty increase (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). When employees commit and identifies with the organization they will perceive the organization in a more positive way which might make it easier to guide the employees toward an organizational desired behaviour (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Scott & Lane, 2000).

Organizational commitment can be created in several ways, which will encourage an increase in the overlap between the individual and the organizational identity. One way employees can create a strong relationship between individual and organizational identity is by bringing their "home" to work. Integrating home and work can be done by for example allowing employees decorating their own workspace and encouraging informal dressing. The more at home and comfortable employees' feel at work the bigger the overlap between their individual and organizational identity will be. The overlap is important when it comes to control, because a strong relationship between individual and organizational identity makes it easier to direct the employee in a desired direction (Fleming & Spicer, 2004). The organization can affect how the overlap between individual and organizational identity is developed. Organizations can encourage employees to think about work while not being at work. This can be done by organizing meetings at places not connected to work, arranging after work activities, and expecting their employees to prepare for work at home (Fleming & Spicer, 2004).

There are not only advantages but also disadvantages with using identity as a controlling device. One disadvantage is that it might be hard to regulate identity and the fact that often only parts of the identity are affected by management actions. Another disadvantage is that identity regulation is not a frictionless process and it is likely that resistance will emerge. The outcome of identity regulation can not be seen as something sustainable since identity work is an ongoing process (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

3.4 Sensemaking and Identity

Sensemaking is a way for people to interpret and understand what is going on in their environment by, for example, using signs, actions and, previous experiences (Brown, Stace & Nandhakumar, 2008: Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008).

Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeld (2005) argue that sensemaking is a cornerstone in the creation of human behaviour. Further on they claim that sensemaking is a tool in identity creation and that the way individuals make sense of their environment guides their actions. Sensemaking can be connected to identity because who we think we are, our identity, affect the way we think, act, interpret different situations etcetera, both at work and elsewhere. It is important to fit in and what other people think about us will therefore affect the way we make sense of our environment. Since outsiders can affect on our sensemaking process they will also have an

impact on how we create our identity (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994: Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeld, 2005).

3.5   Image and Identity

One of the foundations of employees' individual identification is consistency between characteristics of the organization and attributes used by employees defining themselves. As image could be seen as the subjective view or impression of the central characteristics of an organization, these must be experienced as attractive by the individual in order to facilitate organizational identification. The employees must also feel that the communicated organizational image affect her/his self-esteem in a positive way. If it does the organizational identification will be stronger (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994).

Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994) claim the employees' individual identification to be dependent of the identification with the images the company communicates through various media. Identification can be expected to be lower if the employees construct the organization's images as negative. As images can increase the perceived distinctiveness of an organization, and individuals often search for a distinct group to identify with, clear communication with images can help individuals to construct their identity around these communicated images (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

3.6   Resistance

Resistance can be viewed on both a group- and individual level (Thomas & Davies, 2005). On an individual level, resistance exists and is expressed in terms of meanings and identities, where the person constantly tries to adapt, change and affect the discourses, but at the same time they are influenced by other discourses. Individuals struggle to find a balance between their work and personal interests. Behind these struggles and efforts there might be a desire to retain or attain a sense of self. The difference between one's work interests and personal interests is where resistance may occur. Resistance is nothing sustainable but is re-evaluated over time and individuals constantly change the understandings of the discourses they are affected by (Thomas & Davies, 2005).

The struggle by individuals in the organization is done in order to be able to cope with work as it is sometimes seen only as a means to pay for other activities that are more in line with the

individual's personal aspirations. Resistors engage in various forms of resistance such as, for example, cynicism and skepticism towards the organization (Fleming & Spicer, 2008).

Cynical employees follow the company code and act as if they believe in the values of the company, even though they might not. Under the surface cynical employees resists the values and distrust them. This gives a feeling of liberation from being caught in the claws of the organization. Resistance, in the form of cynicism, is present at all levels in an organization, even in the higher levels of it. Cynicism can be a way for the individual to break away from the collective mind-set and create an illusion of distance to your colleagues (Fleming & Spicer, 2003: Fleming & Spicer, 2008).

Cynicism and skepticism are quite similar to each other, to make a clear distinction between them is hard and there are different opinions on what the difference between the concepts is (Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2005). One suggestion is made in Reichers, Wanous & Austin (1997), were cynics are a more pessimistic version of the skeptics. Another way to define it is that cynics are more pessimistic in general, and skepticism is more focused on management and how things are handled in the organization (Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2005).

4 Analysis

4.1 Introduction of Interviewees

Mark is in a relationship but he lives on his own. In his spare time he likes to work-out. At E.ON he works as a project co-ordinator.

Maria lives with her boyfriend. She enjoys art and every now and then joins the art club at E.ON. Her position in the company is as a manager.

Carl is married and has three daughters. When he is off work he likes to spend time outdoor. His position at E.ON is manager for one of the departments.

Lisa is married and has two sons. In her spare time Lisa likes to run. Her position at E.ON is manager for one of the departments.

4.2 Bringing Home to Work

Encouraging employees to bring their home to work can be a way for how an organization might try to increase their employees' commitment to the organization. If they feel comfortable and "at home" while at work it can emphasize an overlap between the organizational and individual identity and this overlap creates organizational commitment. An increased overlap creates commitment and this in turn can have a normative controlling effect (Fleming & Spicer, 2004: Walsh & Gordon, 2008). Lisa indicates that she is trying to find a good balance between work and family life. This can be a reason why she brings her "home" to work. The observations done at Lisa's office during the interview showed signs of this phenomenon. She had for example personal belongings and things with sentimental value such as drawings made by her children. Having all these things reminding her of home at her office can be an evident action of bringing home to work, which also can flourish the relationship between Lisa and E.ON. This can also increase the overlap between Lisa's individual self and the organization, which creates deeper organizational commitment (Fleming & Spicer, 2004). When Lisa feels this stronger commitment to the company she identifies more with E.ON and her loyalty will increase. Lisa's loyalty towards E.ON might affect her satisfaction at work, which is said to increase employees' willingness to work hard (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). Another

sign of Lisa's effort of bringing home to work is the fact that she lets her children come to her office once in a while. This identity work, done by bringing home to work, can be a way for Lisa to establish her identity both as a working woman and a mother. If she manages to establish an overlap between these two identities it can lead to an increased commitment towards E.ON.

The private life of the employees is of interest for a company when trying to control the work performance (Fleming & Spicer, 2004). Carl tells that his superior, when he first started to work at E.ON, insisted on meeting his family. The superior claimed that if he did not know Carl's wife and daughters their collaboration would not be as good as it could be. This can be an indicator of E.ON's wish to take part in the employees' private life, in order to increase for example the work performance. During the interview Carl tells us how it has always been important for him to separate work and family. This is why it must have been awkward for him integrating his family with work, since it breaks down his previously strong boundaries between these two. All this may play an important role considering the overlap between the individual and the organizational identity in terms of guiding the individual behaviour towards an accepted organizational behaviour (Fleming & Spicer, 2004). The concept of bringing home to work stressed by Fleming & Spicer (2004) gives the impression that most identity work based on this concept is done by the employee under the illusion of it being their own choice. Even so this might be influenced by the normative control affecting the actions of employees (Fleming & Spicer, 2004). In the case with Carl we question if he would have agreed to this interaction if he was not encouraged by his superior. The fact that he is willing to grant this request might be a sign of his commitment to E.ON, since committed employees who identify with the company often are more positive towards how the company act (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Scott & Lane, 2000). Further on, as Alvesson & Willmott (2002) claim, loyalty towards the organization increases if the employee is committed to the company and this can be a reason to why Carl agrees to bring his family. It can be his loyalty towards the organization and superior that makes him stretch his previous boundaries of not interacting family with work. Carl still seems to feel reluctant about this interaction, but he appears to justify it to himself by letting us know that his daughters appreciate meeting his colleagues. Justifying this might be a way for Carl to keep his positive picture of E.ON even though the superior made him cross his personal boundaries.

4.3 E.ON Gatherings

Maria talks about the social activities offered by E.ON as positive and she takes part in some of them when possible. She thinks there is a great choice of social activities at E.ON, and mentions that you can take part in sport, join the art club etcetera.

> *When one enjoys working at a company and the people there then you get a lot of friends at work and then it is a bit hard to draw the line between what is an E.ON arranged after work and what is after work with E.ON-friends. (Maria)*

This quote can exemplify Maria having blurred boundaries between home and work. This said because she is having a hard time deciding when she is doing something with her co-workers at work or when she is doing something with her friends from work. Social activities can, according to Fleming & Spicer (2004), be a way for an organization to break down the existing boundaries between an employee's home and her/his organization. The quote above indicates that Maria thinks it is hard to tell when her colleagues should be called friends or co-workers. Setting boundaries between colleagues and private life are a way to separate home and work life (Fleming & Spicer, 2004). Maria having a hard time telling the difference can be an indicator of these boundaries being blurred for her, this blurriness can in turn be a sign of an overlap between Maria's individual and organizational identity. Since Maria is having a hard time keeping apart when she is with co-workers or friends we think that she must feel comfortable in whatever situation she is interacting with her co-workers, and for her it does not matter if it is at work or outside work. This "at home" feeling that we would like to ascribe to Maria's behaviour can emphasize the overlap between her organizational and individual identity that Fleming & Spicer (2004) and Walsh & Gordon (2008) discuss. This overlap can also result in Maria being more committed to the organization than other employees not having this overlap. Another sign of Maria's commitment to E.ON can be her positivity towards the things E.ON offers. According to Alvesson & Willmott (2002) and Scott & Lane (2000) committed employees who identify with the company are more positive to what the organization is doing. E.ON in a way makes use of the social activities outside work in order to blur the boundaries between the company and the private life. Maria embraces it, and seems to be open towards the activities. A reason to this can

be Maria's commitment towards the company and her colleagues, making her perceive the things E.ON does in a more positive way.

Lisa and Carl tell us that they are not taking part in after work activities because they already spend much time at work. When they are off work they want to spend time with their families. The only time they actually do take part in activities outside work is when they are encouraged to do so by superiors. Some researchers, as for example Fleming & Spicer (2004), claim that taking part in social activities is necessary to break down the boundaries between work and home and to emphasize commitment between the employee and the organization. If this is the case Carl and Lisa should be less committed to the organization than Maria. Both Lisa and Carl have children and highlight the importance of spending time with their families which can be a reason to why they prioritise in different ways. Even though Lisa and Carl do not participate in these activities they do not seem to be less committed to E.ON than Maria. The difference is the way commitment is expressed. Lisa and Carl for example show commitment by integrating home and work to some extent, instead of participating in social activities.

4.4   E.ON's Values

> *On my part it is pretty obvious what E.ON stands for […] and fortunately*
> *that is quite similar to what I stand for. (Maria)*

Maria seems to have much in common with E.ON. How strong an individual identifies with the organization depends on how much her/his individual identity has in common with the organizational identity (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994: Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001: Scott & Lane, 2000). Individuals, who strongly identify with the organization, use similar attributes to define themselves as the ones used to define the organization (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994: Scott & Lane, 2000). Maria neither seems to doubt nor question what E.ON stands for. She does not only know what E.ON stands for, she also accepts it which can be a sign of her identifying with E.ON. This said since Dutton Dukerich, & Harquail (1994) stress similarities between the individual and the organization facilitates identification.

Organizations want their employees to identify with the organizational values to facilitate the creation of an organizational identity, which in turn can help individuals in their identity work and influence personal behaviour (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008: Balmer, 2008: Broms &

Gahmberg, 1983). During the interview when Lisa talks about E.ON's values she mentions them as behaviours and something she has to accept in order for her to work for the company, otherwise she would be better off working for another organization. This statement can be a sign of her commitment towards E.ON in terms of her identifying with the company since she is willing to let the company values influence her personal values and behaviour. Even if the company acts against Lisa's own personal values, her belief in E.ON seems to be strong enough for her to accept it.

Identities are formed in interaction with other people. For example with other individuals or the department one works for. Identifying with a group leads to success and failures of the group being perceived as ones own (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Lisa talks about her colleagues and managers as important factors for her well-being at work. She also repeatedly talks her department as "us". She talks about other departments blaming her department for faults and mistakes, sometimes groundless, but nowadays she is proud of her department being a model of how other departments should work. Lisa using "us" talking about her department can be a sign of her identifying stronger with her department than with the organization as a whole. Ashforth & Mael (1989) talk about in-groups and out-groups, where the in-group is the group one identifies with, and the out-groups are the ones one compare with in order to strengthen the in-group identification. The fact that Lisa has a picture of what is her in-group, in this case her department, and what is her out-groups is a sign of her identification with the department she works for, since the clear definition of in- and out-groups is a way to strengthen the identification with the in-group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Talking about his family Carl describes his daughters' reaction when he began to work at E.ON as a disappointment because it meant he would leave his former attractive employer in the telecom sector. His daughters also questioned the energy sources E.ON was working with, since it is both coal and nuclear power. The sensemaking process has an impact on how individuals create their own identity and to be able to identify one has to understand why he or she is doing a specific thing (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994: Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeld, 2005). As we perceived it, Carl tackled his daughters' reaction of him starting to work at E.ON, by making sense of the things he really cared about at work. Carl talks about how he had faith in the company and trusted his feelings that the company had the right values according to him. A

reason why Carl might have been able to identify with the company was the fact that he believes in value-based companies instead of rule-based ones, since it is important for employees to understand the underlying reason to their actions (Weick, Sutcliff & Obsfeld, 2005).

Using organizational values is an attempt for organizations to get their employees to identify with the organization (Broms & Gahmberg, 1983). If employees possess an organizational identity this can guide them in their identity work and influence their behaviour (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008: Balmer, 2008). Carl talks about the uniqueness the values of E.ON bring to the company and how important it is that his values correlate with E.ON's values in order for the relationship between him and his employer to be favourable. Moreover he underpins the importance for him and his co-workers to act along with the company's desired behaviour and the importance of working together based on a united value base. During the interview Carl tells us how he at one occasion fired an employee because this person expressed opinions that were not coherent with Carl's values or the values of the organization. These expressed opinions made Carl feel uncomfortable. Carl's action can indicate how he internalize the values of E.ON which shape his identity and let the shared values affect his behaviour, since employees acting along with the shared values are under the influence of company control and employee behaviour can be affected by the organizational identity (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008: Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: Balmer, 2008).

All four employees perceive E.ON's organizational identity in similar ways, mostly positive. This similar organizational identity may be built as shared beliefs about the central and distinctive features of an organization which Scott & Lane (2000) stress to be sources of identification. Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994) characterise organizational identity as an employee's perception of special attributes of the organization. Since the four employees independently choose to describe E.ON with almost the same words and expressions, as for example as "the company of possibilities", this indicates that they have formed a similar picture of E.ON's identity. This can be a consequence of that organizational identity is built upon organizational characteristics (Balmer, 2008).

4.5 Living and Breathing E.ON

> *Many times the best solutions[8] come to me when I've been out running.*
> *(Lisa)*

During the interview Lisa talks about running as something of vital importance to do in her spare time. She likes to run because it lets her ease off mentally. She talks about how running gives her an opportunity to let go of her ordinary routines and not think about anything specific. But, as indicated in the quote above, some of the best work related ideas has come to her while she has been out running, even though it might be an unconscious action. This is most likely not something unusual, but can be a sign of her strong commitment towards E.ON. Lisa seems to be proud of working at E.ON, something she often comes back to in the interview and she cares about the well-being of the company. E.ON seems to be a part of her and one important component in her identity work process. Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) and Watson (2008) discuss identity as identity work as well as identity struggle, where identity struggle is referred to as the struggle to be able to answer questions related to ones identity. Lisa's identity struggle can be found in the action of her thinking about work in her spare time. As it appears she does not have a totally separated individual and work identity. As discussed by Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen (2009) working at one identity can be a way to strengthen another identity. Lisa is struggling to find a good balance between these two without going all the way in either direction. Sveningsson & Alvesson (2003) stress that it is possible to have one identity dominating over another and which one dominating depends on the context. In the case with Lisa it appears as she most of the time has one identity that is more dominating than the other. At home her individual identity appears to be more distinct and vice versa but it does not go all the way and this is why work related issues can be present while being at home. There is also another aspect of the quote above. As Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen (2009) discuss a person can take part in spare time activities as for example sports in order to nurture the authentic self. Lisa, in this case, nurtures her authentic self by running in her spare time. Although her articulated aim with running was to mentally ease off, we see how she despite her statement of not thinking of work, thinks of work. This can be a sign of what Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen (2009) talk about, how the goal of psychical exercises can be a way to develop a better corporate self. Lisa does not want to admit

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[8] Work-related, researcher note

having a specific goal other than mentally relaxing while running, but when she runs, it indirectly seems like she mentally connects with work and when this happens she comes up with work related solutions. We see indications of a struggle between her private self and work self. This can be a sign of how Lisa nurtures her authentic self to become more productive in terms of solving work-related problems. In other words, even though it in Lisa's case might be unconsciously done her running can, as Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen (2009) suggest, help create a better corporate self.

Even though E.ON is not a high-performance company, as for example the consultancy firms discussed by Alvesson & Kärreman (2007) and Johnsen, Muhr & Pedersen (2009) are, E.ON has an impact on its employees to live and breathe the organization. The difference between E.ON and these consultancy firms is, as Alvehus (2008) argues, the pressure consultants have to always increase their performance in order to move up the hierarchy. This kind of pressure does not seem to exist at E.ON. Instead the interviewees talk about a well implemented work life balance and Carl even tells us how he encourages his employees to take time off to spend with their families, something he himself did not do in the beginning of his career while he was working in the pharmaceutical industry and in the telecom industry. Carl regrets this today and this is one reason why he tries to motivate his employees not to do the same mistake as he did. All four interviewees imply that E.ON is a company who cares about its employees, which also Carl's behaviour underpins. This caring atmosphere might be a reason to why E.ON, even though it is not a high-performance company, gets its employees to live and breathe the organization. This can be linked to what Brotheridge & Lee (2006) present in their study, where they claim that there is a connection between work environment, performance, and the well being at work.

As mentioned before it is possible to have one identity dominating over another (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In the case of Maria there are strong signs of the work identity dominating the individual identity. For example she claims that she will think twice before changing employer because at E.ON she is somebody and it takes time to build it up again at a new company. Maria also gives the impression of feeling insecure of the fact that she would be "a nobody" at a new company. Another thing pointing toward a stronger work identity is the passionate way she talks about her future and how she not has any reason to leave E.ON for another company. Maria's conviction of E.ON being part of her future can also be a sign of loyalty, which according to

Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001) increases commitment. All these things together can be indicators of Maria living and breathing her company.

Fleming & Spicer (2004) refer to employees identifying with the organization as "company people", being strongly committed towards the work organization and caring about the company interests even outside the company. Mark talked about himself as being under the influence of the organization and how he was thinking of his behaviour even outside work. For example when taking the cab, he thought of maintaining a behaviour corresponding to E.ON's values. Mark's behaviour outside work can be deduced from strong organizational commitment and using Fleming & Spicer's (2004) expression he behaves like a real company person, always acting according to the book in order to not negatively affect the company image. Having Alvesson & Willmott's (2002) argumentation about how commitment increases loyalty in mind, another sign of Mark's commitment to the organization can be his conviction about working at E.ON and not for one of their competitors. Mark commented that E.ON and its competitors do almost the same thing. Despite the similarities Mark could not imagine himself working for any other company in the energy industry than E.ON. This could be another sign of Mark's commitment and loyalty to the company which is underpinned by the argumentation of Alvesson & Willmott (2002).

4.6 Disidentification

Regulating individuals' identity is not an easy process and there is an imminent risk resistance will follow. One way of resisting identity regulation is through disidentification. Reasons to disidentify with an organization are shifting and usually they depend on personal preferences (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). In a sense it is a way for employees to keep a separation between a work-self and a me-at-home-self (Elsbach, 1999: Collinson, 2003). Lisa tries to keep a strong separation between her family and her colleagues. On the one hand, she does not seem to put barriers between her family and work, as her office is decorated with personal things and drawings from her children. One of her sons has even done an internship at E.ON during junior high school. On the other hand, she does not socialize with colleagues and their families in her spare time, believing they spend enough time together at work. The ambivalence experienced by Lisa is not uncommon among employees, since employees spend a lot of time at work and make friends with their colleagues in the same time as there is a desire to get away from work when the day is over, a desire to retreat to the family life (Casey, 1999). The only time she used to

intermingle with other people from work was at different courses held by the company, where the course spawned two or more days and they had to stay over night at the course site. When Lisa described herself she said that she is a person who likes to spend time in the garden caring for her flowers, but also do long distance running. She said that she did not define herself through work, and commented:

Many of my friends do hardly know that I am working here. (Lisa)

Elsbach (1999) sees disidentification as an active separation between organization and self. In the quote above about Lisa's friends being unaware of her employment at E.ON, it appears as if Lisa tries to separate herself from the organization. This behaviour of not telling her florist friends about work can be a sign of the disidentification process discussed by Elsbach (1999). Ashforth & Mael (1989) argue for how social identity does not need to stem from work, but could come from other groups as well. This can enable Lisa's separation from the E.ON identity and make her identify more closely with other groups, for example her family or florist friends. As noted by Kreiner & Ashforth (2004), disidentification may involve concealment of the place of employment from others, something the quote indicates Lisa seems to do. Her disidentification might stem from a former wish of a career quite different from the one she has now. Before attending the education to become an engineer, she wanted to be a florist, but various reasons made her life take another path. Sveningsson & Larsson (2006) write that a fantasy about engaging in leadership can be a substitute for real influence in creation of identity as a leader. Lisa's fantasy about being a florist is still kept alive by her acting out her dream in her spare time and we think this activity can be seen as a substitution for the florist career that never materialized. Lisa holds on to the florist identity as an answer to 'who am I' and as a counter-image to the image of herself as an E.ON-employee, as it is suggested that anti-identity is important for the creation of identity (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Lisa might hold on to this identity because she is struggling in her current work situation to find comfort between her private self and as an E.ON employee, since identity work contains identity struggle (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

Lisa tells us how she does not think that she defines herself through work. This statement does not need to be a sign of total disidentification from her employer. It can indicate that she to some extent identifies with the organization, but she also seems to draw much of her identity from

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other sources as well. This behaviour Lisa shows is something Kreiner & Ashforth (2004) calls ambivalent identification. Kreiner & Ashforth (2004) describe ambivalent identification as a way to concurrently identify with some aspects of the organization and disidentify with other aspects of it, something Lisa seems to do as she is proud of some aspects of E.ON, for example the aspect of humanity in their values. Contrasting this is her disagreement on other parts of E.ONs operations, for example the company's use of fossil-fuel plants. Lisa seems to be proud of working at E.ON and does not repulse the values of the organization, but instead she is proud of the values. Kreiner & Ashforth (2004) resonates that one source of disidentification is rejection of the values of one's organization. Lisa does not show signs of rejecting the values of E.ON instead she buys into them and argues that values are something that one needs to accept to be able to work for an employer.

Carl seems to try to keep a strong separation between home and work, and he engages little in social activities organized by the organization, such as participating in the company floorball gatherings. He talks about how he always has seen the border between family and work as black and white. He explains this with examples of how he before never brought his wife or children to work. Lately however, his present superior has encouraged informal meetings with each other's families, as his superior's philosophy is that he has to know Carl's family in order to work better with Carl. This means that his wife and daughters have attended some of E.ON's company gatherings, a reason why Carl has been encouraged to loosen his view on the separation between work and home. As mentioned before, Kreiner & Ashforth (2004) stress that one sign of disidentification is the concealment of details of work from others. Carl's behaviour of separating his family from work and vice versa can be a sign of such an action. We do not fully agree with Kreiner & Ashforth's (2004) argumentation that his strong separation and in a sense concealment of work details, but also family details at work, is a sign of disidentification. Instead we think Carl wants to keep his work and family life apart because, as he tells during the interview, when he takes on something he gives a hundred percent. He exemplifies this behaviour by mentioning that he never will start golfing, because if he does he will spend all of his time trying to be the best golfer. For Carl separating family life and work life may facilitate the possibility for him to always dedicate himself fully to what he is doing, whether it is family or work.

According to Elsbach (1999) active separation between one self and the organization indicates disidentification. The separation between work and home by Carl and Lisa are conscious, they state that there are other things they identify with as well. Disidentification could also come from incongruence between the individuals' values and the values of the organization (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). Considering Carl and Lisa, value incongruence does not seem to be the case. Instead their separation between work and home can be a sign of how they draw identity partly from other sources than E.ON to differentiate themselves from members of the organization. The reason why they identify with other groups than their employer can be supported by Ashforth & Mael (1989) and their discussion of how other groups has characteristics more desired to identify with. In this way Carl and Lisa try to form an identity they find positive and congruent with their self-image. Carl and Lisa can not only be viewed as part of their families, they are also part of E.ON. According to Walsh & Gordon (2008) the individual is affected by the discourses at work in the company she/he works for, and uses these discourses to create both a sense of social belonging but also a sense of individuality.

Costas & Fleming (2009) compare the separation of selves to defence and protection. The spatial separation of selves can be a way to protect different identities by defending the behaviour in different contexts. Carl and Lisa are defensive when talking about family as they seem to put barriers to their private lives and selves. For Carl this separation is strong and in parts unconscious as he was reluctant to talk about his family during the interview. His answers to questions about family were vague and he gradually changed the subject away from direct references to his family. Carl described how he sometimes could draw the line very consciously and sharply between private self and work self. One example is when he is at parties, and he does not want to talk about work after a rough week. Then he can say:

> *Now there is a party, let's leave that[9]. I will not ask you about your job.*
> *(Carl)*

A reason to why Carl and Lisa separate their private self and their work self can be that they want to keep a feeling of having an authentic self at home, an identity which the company and their colleagues cannot get to and which is still experienced as genuine. The discussed

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[9] Work, researcher note

separation, done by Carl and Lisa, visualize how we perceive the protection mentioned by Costas & Fleming (2009) can be expressed. A separation also gives a feeling of satisfaction when there is a part of an individual's identity that is uninfluenced by the organization (Costas & Fleming, 2009). In Lisa's case this uninfluenced self could be the florist or mother, for Carl it could be the family father or being outdoorsy.

In the case with Lisa we interpret that she cannot separate work life and private life the way Carl does. Instead we feel Lisa has to draw a delicate but distinct border in order to protect the private self. She answers questions about family and talks warmly about them, but she has to point out that there is a separation between her private self and her work self. Both Carl and Lisa find the E.ON identity appealing, indicating there are other reasons for the disidentification than the unattractiveness of the E.ON identity. For example Walsh & Gordon (2008) suggest that the individual will identify with the group that is perceived to give the highest status and distinction. This theory can be connected with Carl and Lisa identifying with family when home and with E.ON at work. In this case we will argue that the identification is not based on gaining status but instead it seems to be important for Carl and Lisa to belong to a group, family or work. While they are at home they want to be "home" and dedicated to that context, and vice versa.

When Maria is talking about herself and her work, it is hard to find traces of a separation between her private self and her work self. Maria seems proud of working at E.ON and thinks the company has done a lot for her. For example Maria thinks that she could never have reached the position she has today if she had worked for another company. She has a strong commitment and loyalty to the company and to the brand, as shown by her willingness to defend the company outside of work situations, which is in line with the phenomenon of "company people" discussed by Fleming & Spicer (2004). When talking to Maria it becomes obvious that she knows a lot about the organization and how E.ON wants their employees to behave. Maria seems aware of how the hierarchy works, what the values mean and what E.ON thinks is appropriate behaviour according to these values. During the interview she never says anything about defining herself through other things than work, which is quite different from the theory of disidentification as presented by Elsbach (1999), who sees disidentification as an active separation between organization and self.

Maria seems to have submitted herself to the company. During the interview there are few traces of disidentification in her answers. On the one hand she is a bit critical towards the company in some issues, for example she thinks E.ON can improve their communication with employees. On the other hand she says she is proud of working at E.ON, she sees a strong congruence between the values of the company and her values and says she likes to participate in the social activities arranged by E.ON. Her criticism does not appear to be a source of disidentification, but instead her behaviour can be a sign of her identification with E.ON. This said since Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994) stress that an individual identifying with an organization will characterise her/him with similar attributes as the ones used to define the organization. Marias behaviour can be a reason for her identifying more with E.ON than her private self. We wonder if her identification with the company can lead to a disidentification with the private Maria, since the basis for Marias life seems to be work, and other things are bent around the schedule at E.ON. Her approach to work life balance was vaguely communicated, even though it was indicated by her that it was more weighted towards work than life. Because work takes a large part of Marias life, the boundary between her private self and work self can be distorted. The lack of disidentification can be related to her long hours at the company, as Costas & Fleming (2009) argue that there is little time to form a private self when working long hours at the office. However, Maria did not disidentify completely with her private self, as she mentioned that her working hours might have to be adjusted in the future, in the case she and her boyfriend have children. In a way she was also distancing herself from the thought of family life by talking about it in terms of eventuality and the future. We got the feeling she was struggling with what to do in the future and what to sacrifice in the eventuality of children. Maria argued that she and her boyfriend would have to split their workload to enable one of them to be with the children and one of them to focus on the career. In the end our experience of her work life balance was that she was struggling with finding a satisfying balance for her in the future.

Mark tells us it was only a coincidence that he ended up in the energy industry. It was not a planned career choice to stay at E.ON after his initial summer job, but when the opportunity of a full-time job arose he took the chance and accepted an employment.

It is not a sexy product. No one says 'wow, you sell energy, cool'. (Mark)

Mark seems to identify with the company and colleagues more than the actual product of E.ON, as the quote above indicates. Elsbach & Bhattacharya (2001) argue there may be a separation of identities from groups. Mark seems to identify with E.ON and the colleagues as a group, but he is not appealed by the product and tries to some extent to separate it from him and his organizational identity. As indicated by Mark, he tries to draw a clear line between his organizational identity and the product, something Elsbach (1999) stresses is a sign of disidentification. A reason for Mark drawing this line and disidentifying with the product might stem from, as indicated in the quote, his fear of what other people think of the product. Mark's reaction can be connected to what Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994) discuss about how an individual perceive the image of the organization and how this individual believes other people perceive the same image, which in turn will affect the organizational identity of the individual. In the case of Mark it is not the organizational image as a whole that renders a problem to his identity-work, instead it is the image of the product. As we interpret the situation, it is Mark's concern about the image of the product that might be the source of his disidentification with the product, even though he is identifying with the organization.

Mark tells us he likes to work in the organization because it offers many appealing projects and gives many possibilities to self development. Mark knows that there are many social gatherings in the company, but he says that his department has not been that good at socializing outside of work. Mark does not appear to have separated his work as sharply as Carl or Lisa, but there are indications that he at least draws a line, because he describes how he sometime goes to the gym to lose aggressions from work. This is in line with how Elsbach (1999) looks at disidentification, seeing it as an active separation between work and self. When Mark goes to the gym, we interpret that he tries to separate himself from work to let out his aggressions accumulated at work, which might be a sign of disidentification.

A possible explanation to why the two interviewees, Carl and Lisa, draw a sharp border between themselves and the company and the other two do not, might be reflected in their social setting. Carl and Lisa are the ones who have families and children and they do separate between home and work. The other two interviewees, Mark and Maria, have only a girlfriend/boyfriend and no children. Individuals need to belong to what they feel is an important social group and they also need to get their identities confirmed. This confirmation has to be from significant others

(Collinson, 2003). In this case, one way of viewing the identity constructions of Mark and Maria is that they get this confirmation from E.ON, as their colleagues and superiors are significant others, especially for Maria. It appears as family and friends are significant others for Carl and Lisa.

4.7 Cynicism

All four interviewees seemed satisfied with their employer and they show no signs of having a problem buying into the values of the organization. They seldom find a need to distance themselves from their employer or their colleagues because they are ashamed of them or not like to be associated with E.ON. Even so, there are reasons among the interviewees to disidentify with the organization, but they do not distance themselves because of value incongruence. Carl states that he likes the way the company is managed because, according to him, E.ON is a value-based company where the intention is to guide actions with a common value base which is supposed to be shared among the employees. At least among the interviewees these values were experienced as positive and a factor contributing to the high job satisfaction. Johnsen, Muhr and Pedersen (2009) claim cynicism can be a way for employees to resist the value based control imposed on them if they did not like them. In the case with the four interviewees this does not seem to be the case as they all perceive the values as similar to their own. Therefore they do not need to act cynical against this value base.

Overall the job satisfaction among the interviewees is high. No one sees their job as only a means to pay rent. They are aware of what they can expect from E.ON and what they can do in the company in the future regarding for example future career options. Looking at a job as a means to pay rent or being unaware of future possibilities in the organization are factors that can create cynical employees (Fleming & Spicer, 2008). E.ON seems to counter these potential sources for cynicism in ways experienced as positive among the interviewees.

> *Pretty much communication, it is much about communication. Sometimes I joke about it and say that I am a communication centre. That is pretty much what it is all about…it is partly about that you have a message, you make sure the communication works, you get questions, and you deliver answers. You make ends meet. You make sense of it. (Lisa)*

When Lisa talks about her work tasks she describes herself as a communication centre. Doing this, we can sense some cynicism in her voice. In the quote above she describes herself as a medium of communication and as someone who has to have all the answers. Parts of this cynicism can come from her current job assignment not including as much hands on work as she would prefer. Before, she was used to much hands-on activity at E.ON. This could also be related to her self-image as something other than the company woman. Lisa looks at herself as a person working in the garden, which is an activity that includes physical activity. Being a communication centre is different from how she herself perceives her identity. The fact that Lisa seems dissatisfied with the amount of hands-on work in her current job assignments can be out of her control to change. All this can be reasons for the cynicism we perceived in her voice describing her as a communication centre, as in the quote above. Lisa says that she has a choice, if she does not like her job assignment she has the possibility to quit. The fact that Lisa has been at her current position for a while and does not express plans to change job might indicate that her way of coping with her lack of hands on work is through cynicism. Through cynicism she is able to distance herself from the parts of her job assignments she likes less. Lisa's use of cynicism is a way to distance herself from and coping with the situation, because employees is said to use cynicism to cope with situations in their work setting and with feelings of not being in control of the situation (Fleming & Spicer, 2003).

According to Fleming & Spicer (2003), cynicism can be a way for employees who feel they are lacking control in the organization to regain a sense of power. One occasion when we perceive Maria to express cynicism is when she compares E.ON with a supertanker. She explains the supertanker as a heavy ship, which is very hard to turn around, but once it has turned and is set in motion it is very hard to stop. When interpreting this metaphor, in line with the argumentation of Fleming & Spicer (2003), Maria shows signs of cynicism due to the fact that, according to her the German decision making processes are far away. Although Maria did not express feelings of powerlessness in the E.ON organization, her metaphor of E.ON as a supertanker makes us believe that she in spite of her claim is a bit cynical to the decision making process.

Mark commented on how he felt the decision making process was long and that it required a lot of energy to make your opinion heard. Mark might not feel powerless in the organization as he thinks he can affect decisions in his own department, but his general view towards the decision

making process in the whole organization is that you have to fight to make your opinion heard. Based on Marks statements we got the feeling he felt powerless regarding his possibility to affect decisions made outside his department. We can see signs of Mark feeling powerless resulting in cynicism towards the decision making process in the organization, this said since it is argued that employees feeling they lack control of a situation may lead to cynical behaviour (Fleming & Spicer, 2003).

When interviewing Lisa, she comments on the fact that E.ON is owned by a German parent company and that this sometimes shows in the organization. Lisa explains that some of the most important decisions in the whole organization are made by the executive committee in Düsseldorf, and she says that if you do not like that, there is no one hindering you from leaving the organization. Lisa's statement indicates how she uses cynicism to cope with the decision making processes. We interpreted her comment to include some of the cynicism found in the work by Fleming & Spicer (2003) related to the feeling of being out of control when it comes to certain decisions. Lisa's way of handling being out of control in a situation is by cynicism and this is done by expressing her possibility to leave the organization if she does not like the situation, but we interpret the chances of her leaving the organization as small.

Communicating values to employees can render cynicism, as employees might try to distance themselves from the values if they do not like them (Fleming & Spicer, 2003: Costas & Fleming, 2009). All interviewees state that E.ON's values are widely used in the organization. One way E.ON tries to communicate its values is by using small red cards[10] in the size of a regular credit card. When asked about the red cards, there were signs of cynicism about the way the company expected the employees learning the values.

> *It's not like I'm studying the plastic card [...] I can also think that it gets*
> *a bit nerdy to print values onto a plastic card. (Maria)*

In the quote it is indicated that Maria shows some cynicism towards the cards by saying that she thought that without good leadership it does not matter how many fancy red cards you print. Fleming & Spicer (2003) argue that cynicism is a way to keep the propaganda of the organization at bay and that it is a way to keep a part of your mind free from the values of the

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[10] Appendix [3]

organization. Comparing Fleming & Spicer (2003) with the quote and statement made by Maria her cynical remark is not about distancing herself from the values of E.ON, for her it is more about the way the cards are used to communicate these values. Neither Maria nor the other interviewees at E.ON seems to use cynicism as a way to keep the company propaganda away. They think the values are something they themselves can back up. Especially Lisa seems to have thought the values through and talks about how she can "reconcile with" them, even though there are some differences between her values and E.ON's values. Carl and Maria are the interviewees we found to have internalized the values of E.ON to the largest extent and they spoke happily about the good work E.ON does implementing the values. Internalizing the values of the company is one of the strongest indicators of deep identification with the employer, which leads to less cynical behaviour (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008: Balmer, 2008: Broms & Gahmberg, 1983: Fleming & Spicer, 2003). The interviewees seem to internalize the values as they spoke about the values as something they can stand for and/or reconcile with.

Among all interviewees there was some focus on the work-life balance offered by E.ON. During the interview Lisa expressed herself in cynical terms about this work-life balance.

> *Sometimes I tell my husband, we are no good role models, we work too much. (Lisa)*

Making this quote, Lisa does not seem to be accusing herself of working too much. It seems in a sense to be a remark about the fact that she feels powerless about working too much, and when employees feel powerless cynicism can be a way to cope with the feelings of the situation (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). It appears as if Lisa is aware of her work taking a lot of time, but that she likes her work very much and feels it requires of her to work much to be able to keep it. In the same time she is also drawn to her family and her spare time activities, making her feel drawn between two activities, work and family, to which she want to devote her time. This was probably her source of powerlessness. Being aware of working too much and continue to do so despite feelings of regrets over it is not unusual, and even though there is an awareness about working much the individual is not always willing to change the working behaviour (Jeanes & Muhr, forthcoming). Lisa is aware of her work taking a lot of time and it seems as she wish to work less but that she in the same time is not willing to change her working behaviour and instead she copes with it by using cynicism. The comment about herself and her husband

working too much is probably a cynical remark about the outcome of her life, built around the creation of her identity as someone who does not want to define herself through work, but seems to spend a lot of her time at work anyway.

4.8   Skepticism

Among the interviewees there were some cynicism, but there were also signs of skepticism. Maria shows signs of skepticism in her otherwise positive attitude towards E.ON. This is done when talking about decision-making in the company. Maria says it is very easy to affect decisions in the organization. But after further questions, Maria admits that it is only easy to make decisions and affect the company to a certain extent. She says that E.ON Sverige after all is part of the E.ON Group, with head quarters in Germany, and it is hard to affect the minds and decisions of executive committee, and in this way it becomes a bit impersonal in the company. Maria was a bit skeptical about decisions being made at the E.ON Group's head quarter, when they could have been done closer to the markets. In this way it would be quicker decisions made by those operating at the local market. Mark and Lisa are of similar opinions saying that locally, on their respective division, it is quite easy to make their voices heard and affect decisions but at a certain level of E.ON Group it becomes more difficult. Relating this to the feelings of not having control of a situation mentioned in Fleming & Spicer (2003), this could be seen as cynicism about decision-making at E.ON. Contrasting this to the view of Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky (2005) Mark, Lisa, and Maria will instead be seen as skeptical because their opinions are about management and the way decisions are being made in the organization.

Talking about the red cards by which E.ON communicates values, Maria expresses some skepticism towards the cards and how E.ON tries to affect employee identities by using these cards. She is dubious about just printing values at cards but instead she thinks managers and peers in the organization have to take actions to support implementation of the values. As described by Alvesson & Sveningsson (2008) it is very hard to bring about change if there are no supporting actions and behaviour from managers. Maria does not seem to be skeptical towards the values, she is skeptical of implementing them through cards. Maria's opinion is that values on cards become just words without meaning. According to what Alvesson & Sveningsson (2008) argue managers need to actively support implementation of values in organizations. Since the words on the red card can be seen as one of the strongest discourses through which the

organization influences employees and their identities, managers have to give the words content and teach the values to the employees in order to help the employees make sense of them. Having Alvesson & Sveningsson (2008) in mind we would say Marias skepticism towards using the cards as an implementing tool of values is legitimized. Considering Mark he seems aware of the red cards as he has used them in educational purposes, but just like Maria he is a bit skeptical about printing values on cards without underpinning them with supportive actions.

There has to be communication in the organization to help employees make sense of the values (Ford, Ford & D'Amelio, 2008: Weick, Suitcliffe & Obsfeld, 2005). According to Mark, the cards are an easy way to distribute and communicate the values of the organization. Maria on the other hand is skeptical towards the cards as she thinks the cards themselves cannot help employees make sense of the values. Sensemaking help organizations shape identities by guiding employees into an organizational identity differentiated from the identity of their competitors (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obsfeld, 2005). According to the four interviewees E.ON tries to work with sensemaking on several occasions, as when having general meetings or performance reviews. None of the interviewees was skeptical towards working with the values in this way and found more logic to that than printing them on cards. Carl even expressed how positive he was towards having activities such as playing board games in order to learn the meaning of the values in an active way.

Lisa's view, on how she feels management of E.ON sees their employees as a homogenous group is skeptical, because one of the criteria for skepticism is that it is directed towards management (Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2005). Lisa feels that a company like E.ON should work harder to get minorities into the organization. During another employment in a small town, she worked with people of 14 different nationalities, but when she started working for E.ON in Malmö, she commented on that there were almost only Swedes at the company. Lisa says there have been improvements lately, but there is still work that needs to be done to be more diverse. Lisa questions the ethnical homogeneity at E.ON and how management has handled the issue before. Even though there have been improvements, Lisa thinks there is more to be done and employees questioning actions this way can be seen as being a bit sceptical towards some of the behaviour of management (Stanley, Meyer & Topolnytsky, 2005).

Lisa is positive about much of what the E.ON brand stands for and feels it is consistent with her own values which we think helps her in identifying with the E.ON brand, as a consistency between an employee's and the organizational values facilitates the identification process (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). In the same time her view is that the brand is visible in too many occasions. She feels that E.ON has invested in quantity rather than quality when it comes to visibility. Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail (1994) claim that employee identification is dependent on the experience of images communicated by a company. The skepticism Lisa express towards the visibility of the E.ON brand can result in her identification being negatively affected and even though there is a coherency between her values and the values of E.ON she might identify less with the E.ON brand.

Both Carl and Maria questioned the benefits offered by E.ON. Carl wondered if E.ON offers too much, and if the benefits really have an impact on the performance and job satisfaction at E.ON. Maria also wondered if the well-being at work was too good, implying that work performance was affected because the environment at E.ON did not push the employees harder. Her motive for making the environment at E.ON more oriented towards performance was:

Pressure makes diamonds, irritation makes pearls. (Maria)

5 Conclusions

5.1 Reflections and Findings

The aim of our study was to show in what different ways four E.ON employees, through identity work, identified with and committed to E.ON. Our findings are based on a theoretical framework and on empirical material from the interviews with Mark, Maria, Carl and Lisa.

In the study we found that there are various ways to work with identity at E.ON. Our findings show there are different discourses which the four E.ON employees use in their creation of identity and there is no specific discourse in the company that is strong enough to offer a singular sense of self which result in our interviewees drawing their identity from different discourses, both from within and outside the company. One finding in this study is the strong discourse drawn from the values of E.ON communicated through various media, for example group gatherings and red cards. Another is that there is a strong family discourse, in terms of work and life balance, both promoted from the company and experienced among the interviewees.

Findings show that the four E.ON employees worked and struggled with their identity in different ways. These differences can in some ways be derived from variations in social setting and family situation. There are also some similarities in how they work and struggle with their identity at E.ON, since they work for the same company this is natural as they are affected by the same corporate discourses.

5.1.1 Mark

Mark is affected by the company discourses and is very aware of the company values and how to behave as he has worked with the values in educational settings at E.ON. His good knowledge of the company discourse has an impact on his behaviour and he is almost like a role model for how to behave[11] as an E.ON employee. In our study we perceive Mark as an employee with strong commitment to E.ON. The basis for his identification with the company is the congruence between his personal values and the values of E.ON. The identification is directed towards the company and his colleagues and Mark struggles with the image of the product. This does, however, not affect his identity work to a large extent. Skepticism is displayed towards the

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[11] Appendix [3]

decision-making process higher up in the hierarchy. Our findings show no signs of Mark's skepticism affecting his identification with E.ON nor does it affect his loyalty towards the organization. Mark does not explicitly communicate a distinguished separation between his organization and individual identity, although findings indicate a notion of a separation of the identities.

5.1.2 Maria

We found that Maria identifies with E.ON due to the strong congruence between her personal values and the values of the company. In our study we found that E.ON's corporate discourses affect Maria's identity work strongly and that Maria draws much of her identity from the organization. She embraces the E.ON identity and displays commitment and loyalty to the company. Although our findings show that Maria is a bit skeptical when talking about value implementation. Maria believes that managers have to personalize the values in everyday work-situations in order to make sense of them to employees. She, as a manger, therefore internalizes the values of E.ON which leads her to identify with the organization.

In this study we see no prominent separation between Maria's individual identity and organizational identity, since she for example does not hesitate to defend the company outside the work setting. This said because there is no real separation between her individual identity and her organizational identity. The lack of separation can indicate, what we would like to claim is, a disidentification with the private Maria. In this study Maria does not imply that she finds other sources attractive to draw identity from and she wants to have the identity she gets at E.ON. We think she has no need to separate her organizational and individual identity as they are very similar to each other.

5.1.3 Carl

Carl is identifying with E.ON and we found that he is affected by the discourses in the company. His identification does not stem from the social activities the company provides, such as floorball and after work, as he does not participate. Instead this study shows that he creates his organizational identity based on the values of E.ON, because of the strong congruence between his values and the values of E.ON.

In our study we found Carl was struggling with separating family and work. Even so, his behaviour of accepting his superiors wish to bring the family to work gatherings demonstrates Carl's commitment to the firm and what he is willing to sacrifice for E.ON. Carl struggles with his identity at E.ON as he is devoted to the company and feels committed and loyal to it. He usually defends the company in various social settings outside of work, although we found that he sometimes draws a very sharp line between his private self and the company by not discussing work related issues at parties' etcetera. We could not find that Carl's identification with the company had been negatively affected by this behaviour.

Findings show that the significant others to Carl is his family and it is through them he draws much of his identity. Even though he tries to keep the strong separation between home and work, the findings did not indicate that Carl's separation affected his identification with and commitment towards E.ON in a way unfavourable for the company.

5.1.4   Lisa

According to findings in this study Lisa is affected by a variety of discourses. She draws her identity from her family and spare time activities, but she is also affected by the discourses of E.ON. Lisa wants to separate her individual and organizational identity by not thinking of work at home. Despite this believed separation this research shows that Lisa works on her individual identity by bringing home to work and she works on her organizational identity in her spare time, for example while running. This action is unconscious. One action she is conscious about is the way she tries to separate her identities. Our findings show of how Lisa struggles to find a balance between her organizational identity and individual identity. She is, in a way, contradictive and shows an overlap between her individual identity and her organizational identity, for example because of decorations at her office which are of personal nature. In our study we could not find that this deliberate separation affects her identification and commitment towards E.ON in a way unfavourable for the company.

For Lisa it is obvious that she has a strong separation between her individual and organizational identity. The reason for this, found in this study, is that she has a fantasy identity about being a florist which is kept alive and nurture her image of her authentic self. This leads to her unconsciously being able to work on her organizational identity outside work without resisting this identity work. If she would not have had the florist identity fantasy she would probably have

been more aware of her organizational identity work in her spare time. Since her intention is to separate her work and private life she would have found it easier to resist this integration which would have had an effect on her identity work process.

For Lisa E.ON's values are important and affect the way she behaves at work. The values of E.ON are congruent with Lisa's values, but she displays some skepticism whether E.ON always act according to diversity and social responsibility. Despite the incongruence it is shown she draws much of her organizational identity from E.ON's values and displays commitment towards the organization. Findings also show that Lisa finds it easier to identify with smaller groups, for example she identifies with her family and her department to a larger extent than with E.ON as one large organization.

5.2 Comparison of the four E.ON employees

Mark, Maria, Carl and Lisa show high congruence between their personal values and the values of E.ON. All four of then use values in a similar way in their identity work processes. Using values as a base for identity work facilitate their organizational identification with and commitment to E.ON.

This study implies that there are different sources to identity work. We have seen two main sources of confirmation of identities displayed by the four interviewees. Carl and Lisa try to get much of the confirmation from their families. Mark and Maria draw much of their confirmation needed for identity work from E.ON. A reason to this difference can be the differences in social settings present among these employees. We will not claim that one source of identification is better than another regarding identification and commitment towards an organization. In the case with these four employees we can see a difference in their identity work in terms of using differ sources of confirmation. Even though their identity work processes are different, the outcome, the amount of identification with and commitment to E.ON, are about the same.

Another difference is the level of disidentification, in this case the separation of organizational and individual identity. Both Carl and Lisa express a separation between work and home. Mark and Maria do not express such a distinct separation. This difference in extent of separation can possibly derive from the fact that both Carl and Lisa have children and Mark and Maria do not. The difference is to be found in the process of identity work. Separation or no separation the

outcome, in this case, seems to be the same in terms of strong identification with and commitment to E.ON.

Carl, Lisa, Maria and Mark use quite different identity work processes. Despite of this, the findings in this study all point in the same direction showing these differing identity work processes resulting in the same outcome, a strong identification with and commitment to E.ON.

5.3 Future Research

During this study a couple of interesting question arose and these led to suggestions of future research. The first suggestion of future research is to conduct a similar study on employees not having management, or similar, positions within E.ON. If this new research results in a different outcome, is there any specific differences in the way these employees are doing their identity work which can explain these differences?

A second suggestion is to do a similar study on four Swedish employees working at an E.ON department in Germany. Will the outcome be different? If yes, is there any specific differences in the way E.ON treats its four employees in this study and the way the E.ON department in Germany treats its employees that can explain the different outcomes? Or is there other variables affecting the outcome?

6 References

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7 Appendix [1]

Intervjuguide (Swedish)

Hur länge har du varit anställd på E.ON? (Sydkraft?)

Kan du berätta lite om din karriär inom E.ON
-Varför sökte du dig till företaget?
-Hur gick det till när du började jobba på E.ON? (arbetsklimat)

Hur skulle du beskriva din roll på företaget? (ansvar, arbetsuppgifter)
-Hur skulle du beskriva dig själv på jobbet?

Vilka är fördelarna med att arbeta på E.ON? (trivsel)
-Finns det någonting som skulle kunna göras annorlunda? (vems är ansvaret?)

Hur jobbar E.ON för att privatlivet och jobbet ska fungera bra?

Hur skulle du vilja beskriva dig själv privat?

Hur skulle du beskriva E.ON för en utomstående?

Står E.ON för något som du tycker är bra? (skiljer sig värderingar etc. jämfört med konkurrenter)

Vilka är E.ON:s officiella värderingar? (Integritet, Öppenhet, Förtroende och ömsesidig respekt, Mod, Samhällsansvar)

Hur kommuniceras dessa värderingar? (ledningen, kollegor, media, hemsida)

Vem skapar dessa värderingar? Har du möjlighet att påverka? Anpassas de på de något sätt?
Hur anpassas det tyska moderbolagets värderingar till E.ON Sverige?

Finns det några andra ord eller egenskaper som du skulle vilja beskriva E.ON med?

Vilka typer av aktiviteter har ni för att förstärka E.ON som företag (identitet, projekt etc.)
-Vilka riktar sig dessa aktiviteter till? (potentiella anställda, anställda, övriga)
-Har ni några återkommande aktiviteter? Vilka deltar? Var äger dessa möten eller liknade rum??

Anordnar företaget några gemensamma aktiviteter? (after work, frukost, fortbildning, utbildning, konferenser, sportaktiviteter)
-Har du själv deltagit på några sådana aktiviteter?

Vad är det som gör att du trivs på E.ON? (värderingar, framtidsvisioner, arbetsklimat, framtidsmål) Vad gör företaget för att du ska trivas? (realisera, implementerar)

Hur uppfattar du E.ON:s egna reklamkampanjer?

Hur uppfattar du personligen kritik som riktas mot företaget? (positiv resp negativ)

Interview guide (English)

For how long have you been working at E.ON?

How would you describe your role at E.ON?

As an employee how would you describe yourself?

Tell me about your career at E.ON, so far?

What are the advantages of working at E.ON?

How would you describe yourself at home?

How would you describe E.ON for an outsider?

Does E.ON stand for something that you consider good?

What are the official values of E.ON? (Integrity, Openness, Trust and mutual respect, Courage, Social responsibility)

How are these values communicated?

By whom are these values created?

How are the values of E.ON Group being adjusted to fit E.ON Sverige?

Are there any other words or attributes that you want to ascribe to E.ON Sverige?

What kind of activities are there to strengthen E.ON as an organization?

Does the organization arrange any activities for its employees?

What makes you flourish at work?

How do you perceive E.ON's own commercial campaigns?

How do you, personally, perceive criticism towards E.ON? (Both negative and positive)

8 Appendix [2]

Research Question

The one given to the interviewees

Vi vill undersöka individens och organisationens samspel och vad detta samspel har för påverkan på hur individen identifierar sig med organisationen. (Research question, in Swedish, as given to the four employees, 2009-03-30)

We like to study the interaction between the individual and the organization, and how this interaction affects an individual's identification with the organization. (Research question, translated, as given to the four employees, 2009-03-30)
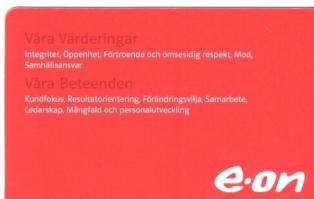
In this study

In which different ways do four E.ON employees, through identity work, identify with and commit to E.ON? (Research question in this study)

9 Appendix [3]

Red card

OneE.ON

Vår Vision

E.ON ska bli världens ledande el- och gasföretag.

Vår Affärsidé

Vi ska bli uppskattade av våra kunder för konkurrenskraftiga och tillförlitliga lösningar som ger dem komfort och bekvämlighet i deras vardag och arbete. Vi blir framgångsrika genom att vara ett integrerat el- och gasföretag som genom att kombinera internationell styrka med lokalt fokus kan ta tillvara de bästa idéerna inom och utom koncernen. Genom att göra detta skapar vi ökat värde för våra aktieägare och de bästa möjligheterna för våra medarbetare.

Våra Värderingar

Integritet, Öppenhet, Förtroende och ömsesidig respekt, Mod, Samhällsansvar

Våra Beteenden

Kundfokus, Resultatorientering, Förändringsvilja, Samarbete, Ledarskap, Mångfald och personalutveckling

e·on

E.ON's Values[12]

Integrity: We act honestly, ethically and legally in every thing we do. We honor our commitments and take personal responsibility for our actions.

Openness: We are open to new ideas and change. We are open and candid with one another and promote knowledge sharing freely across all barriers and boundaries.

Trust and Mutual Respect: We treat everyone with fairness and dignity. We trust our colleagues and are trustworthy in all that we do.

Courage: We have the courage to act on our convictions. We sacrifice individual self-interest when necessary to preserve these values. We do and say what we think is right and engage constructively in all discussions.

Social Responsibility
We are responsible to our colleagues, customers and suppliers, the environment and the communities where we live and work. We seek to improve lives everywhere we operate, aiming for a healthy, safe and sustainable environment. We consider the needs of the present generation and also anticipate the needs of future generations.

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[12] Source: http://www.E.ON.com/en/unternehmen/2105.jsp, 2009-05-14

E.ON's Behaviours[13]

Guided by our values, these key behaviours are essential to achieve our mission:

Customer Orientation: We strive to satisfy the needs of our customers and add value creating solutions to homes and businesses. Our customer orientation is reflected in our business processes, systems, organizational structures and procedures. In dealing with our suppliers we aim at long-term relationships which create lasting value for both parties. Our suppliers are essential contributors to quality customer service.

Drive for Performance: We focus our strategies on the individual markets in which we operate. We seek profitable growth to achieve sustainable success. We set ambitious performance targets to produce superior returns for those who have entrusted us with their capital. We constantly search for best practice and rigorously pursue efficiency and excellence in our operations. We are reliable and results-oriented. We work with a long-term view, focusing as much on the future as the present. We are passionate in the pursuit of our vision and mission.

Change Initiation: We are never satisfied with the status quo. We look to the future and the opportunities it brings. We promote constructive change and we readily accept such change when it comes. Innovation is the key to improvement and we will constantly seek ways to improve what we do. We value creativity and seek ways to build solutions ahead of crisis.

Teamwork: We accomplish more by working together. We value one another's insight and cooperation. We trust one another's good intentions. The group optimum is "a win for all is a win for each of us." Good teamwork requires our active participation, sharing of our talents and resources and sensitivity for how our actions may impact others.

Leadership: We are at our best when we have strong, capable leadership throughout our company. Working within their own area of responsibility, each leader serves the broader strategies and interests of the entire organization. We strive to grow our leadership skills and to reward effective leaders. Our leaders provide the motivation, guidance, coaching and creativity to inspire the best from our teams. They recognize and reward superior knowledge, competence and performance. Every leader shares the obligation to model our values and behaviours.

Diversity and Development: Our people are our most important resource. We serve a diverse world and we seek to reflect that diversity and inclusiveness in the approach we take to all our tasks. Our company and our colleagues thrive when exposed to different perspectives and methods. We seek equality but difference. We invest in our people with consistent coaching and meaningful development to help them reach their potential.

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[13] Source: http://www.E.ON.com/en/unternehmen/2105.jsp, 2009-05-14