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IDENTITY REGULATION IN PRACTICE

STORYTELLING AS AN EXAMPLE

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ABSTRACT

Title: Identity Regulation in Practice: Storytelling as an example

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Purpose: The purpose of this study is to investigate how identity regulation can be enacted and enhance the understanding on storytelling as a powerful identity regulation device.

Methodology: The research is a qualitative study in which data is collected by semi structured face-to face interviews with selected employees of the company.

Theoretical perspectives: The study is based mainly on Alvesson's work on *identity* as well as on Alvesson's and Willmott's (2002) classification of practices for *identity regulation*. Barley & Kunda's (1992) work was used to support theory on normative control. Theory on storytelling was illustrated by Gabriel's (2000, 2004) as well as Tietze, Laurie & Musson's (2003) work.

Empirical foundation: Empirical foundation is based on the case study of Rainbow S.A, the official distributor of Apple Inc. products in Greece.

Conclusions: Our case study showed that there is a number of different practices an organization might involve when working with employees' identities. Particularly storytelling is recognized and illustrated as a powerful identity regulation device, which has implications on employees' self-understanding.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In this first chapter we would like to introduce our work. The aim is to inform the reader about the field of the particular research. Objectives as well as the purpose of the work will be illustrated.

1.1 Background

In this essay, we will attempt to touch upon the field of organizational control. It has been widely observed that control in the organizational environments has taken different forms or ways of being expressed in the past years. As Barley and Kunda (1992) write, we have experienced a shift from rational and direct control towards a normative one a lot of times, and the latter is the case in a lot of situations nowadays. The interesting fact is that some authors argue that the forms of control exercised nowadays are rather original. For example, Gabriel (1999: 197) believes that *"current controls are not merely intensification of earlier controls, but in some respects novel"*.

According to the normative control perspective, organizations try to persuade their employees to bring their identities to the company, engage themselves fully in their work and achieve the maximum of their performance (Alvesson&Willmott, 2002, Alvesson, 2004). This commitment is perceived as crucial if the employee is to do the best he/she can. Particular interest of our work is to investigate what practical ways an organization uses to enhance this kind of commitment, in order to achieve its goal (maximum productivity of the employees, thus maximum profits for the company).

The study will be narrowed down to the topic of identity regulation as a sub-category of normative control. According to a number of academics, identity regulation is argued to be an increasingly significant modality of organizational control (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Costas, 2007). Through this type of regulation, the employee is encouraged or even persuaded to develop certain images of itself at work and general work orientations, which are expected to match with organizational objectives (Alvesson, 2004). In this study we would like to explore how normative control is enacted through the practices of regulation of organizational members' identities.

In relation to the practices an organization uses to manage employees' understandings in order to reach certain goals as mentioned above, we would like to consider here this aspect: the rare study of work in situation and the preference of researchers to engage with theoretical studies alone.

Based on Barley and Kunda's article "Bringing work back in" (2001), we argue that this is also the case for the particular topic. Although the concept of normative control is described and analyzed in a lot of different works, we rarely read about what really happens in organizational contexts in terms of practices and how things are actually *done*. As Alvesson and Willmott (2002:628) state:

"*Despite a growing number of studies of cultural-ideological modes of control, very few have sought to explicate the specific means, targets and media of control through which the regulation of identity is accomplished*."

Even though recently there have been some crucial efforts to return to the study of practices, these are still relatively rare while two main weaknesses can be traced in the majority of the theoretical studies. According to Barley and Kunda (2001), those are the conceptual inversion and the environmentalism. The first refers to the tendency of theorists to formulate images of organizing by contrasting traditional models with new ones - usually perceived as their opposites. The second describes the tendency to explain organizational changes solely in terms of environmental forces, thus ignoring actions and the role of actors involved. (Barley & Kunda, 2001)

Having that in mind and trying to link it to our particular case, the question is not whether or not normative control exists or what external factors lead this form of control. We do not imply that these or other questions, like what are the differences between the normative control and its opposite, are of little importance. We do think, however, that issues like these have reached or can reach saturation quite fast.

According to Barley and Kunda (2001), there is immediate need to reintegrate work in organizational studies if we are to develop better images of organizations, resolve possible existing dilemmas or improve our understanding of organizing itself. In this essay, the aim is to explore the practical side of the field of normative control.

1.2 Research question

The need to link work with organizing would mean that questions of a somehow different nature should be raised. Instead of asking “if”, we would rather ask “how” and in “what ways” the concept is developing. In our case it is very much important to see how normative control is exercised daily in a working environment, what particular practices are engaged and how people understand and interpret them. This would support the idea that normative control does not reside only in people’s heads, being an abstract phenomenon, but actually exists.

In this essay we are going to investigate how normative control is exercised through the management of identity in daily work life; in what practical ways an organization manages or tries to manage the identities of the employees. Therefore, our main research question is ***how identity regulation could be enacted***.

Based on the case study and our empirical material we will suggest that especially *storytelling* can be a fruitful practice of identity regulation and illustrate how management of identities is enacted through the particular practice.

1.3 Purpose

We are challenged by the aim to deepen the knowledge on the practical means by which normative control is exercised. To be more precise, the purpose of this paper is to describe and enhance our understanding of storytelling as an identity regulatory device. In general, by writing this work we aim to contribute to the field of organizational control and work on the development of the ground for further studies.

2 METHODOLOGY

In this section we would like to let the reader of the essay know how we proceeded with the research throughout this time, so he/she can better understand our aims and the way of thinking. In order to get a picture of the research nature, the chapter will be an illustration of the following topics: research process, company selection, sample of interviewees, data analysis, validity and objectivity of the study.

2.1 Research Process

The point of departure of this work was identifying the most interesting field for us personally to study based on the knowledge gained during the Master studies. The step was followed by defining the exact topic of the research. We collected relevant theory from the program's literature and previous educational backgrounds. This constituted the theoretical background of the essay.

The next question to answer was "how" we were going to investigate what we had agreed upon studying. Since our aim was to study practices related to normative control, or in other words "work" as opposed to abstract concepts, we were in need of an organizational context in order to see what happens in reality, i.e. a real company. Studying practices means that we would better embrace methods that yield detailed descriptions of daily work life (Barley & Kunda 2001) and/or thoughts and opinions of the actors involved in these issues. For this reason, we excluded right from the start the perspective of using any quantitative method as we realized that this would probably give us a great deal of data but not the opportunity to go deeper and investigate meanings and how they connect to the situated practices of a company.

As a consequence, the research was continued with the help of qualitative methods. To be more precise, we interviewed a certain number of people working in the particular organizational context. We found interviews to be especially helpful for understanding how people make sense of their work, if and how they engage in certain practices and how they relate to those. However, we acknowledge that since work practices are so contextualized people often cannot articulate how exactly they do what they do, unless they are in the process of doing it (Barley & Kunda 2001). Often, being able to reveal the "native's view"

and grasping the insider's perspective by observing things is necessary for appreciating the meaning of work practices (Barley & Kunda 2001).

Unfortunately, due to the limited time we were unable to include observations as a qualitative method in our research. We concentrated particularly on the interviews and tried to reach credible conclusions this way. However, we realize that one could see it as a one-sided research.

Seven in-depth interviews were conducted including people in various positions in the company. The fact that the interviewer was an ex-employee of the firm and already knew in person some of the interviewees was beneficial for the research process. It saved us some time in creating a "cozy" environment for the interviewees and in understanding faster what might be possible hidden meanings behind their speech.

The interviews were face-to-face, lasted on overall 40-60 minutes each and were designed as semi-structured. This means that the interviews were flexible, allowing new questions to be brought up, depending on what our participants were saying. We aimed not to use a formalized and limited set of questions. Informal grouping of topics and questions were asked in different ways and to different participants.

The interviews were recorded (with the exception of one which was conducted over the telephone), transcribed and translated from Greek into English. In the final stage we discussed, analyzed and tried to interpret the findings that came out of our qualitative data, reaching certain conclusions.

2.2 Company Selection

Apart from pragmatic reasons that limited our choices when trying to decide upon the organizational context we would like to use for our study, there were some other reasons that influenced the final decision.

Since the interest was in studying practices related to normative control, we needed an organizational context that was actually engaged in such practices or at least was trying to develop with such a philosophy; probably having an established Human Resources department and a certain number of employees in its workforce.

Due to the limited time, we were not able neither to search extensively in order to find such a company nor speculate on which company might function under those practices. Therefore, we decided to go for a company that we knew or at least that we perceived it to be working that way.

Moreover, we believe that getting unmediated and undistorted data is almost impossible (Alvesson & Sköberg 2000). However, it was aimed to the extent we could to reduce such possible obstacles by selecting particular company. We think that having a good access to the context and an established trust between the interviewers and the interviewees is of crucial importance when discussing around thoughts and feelings because it creates openness in communication where people are not afraid to be honest, make jokes and discuss about their views. This is the case in our particular situation since the interviewer was an ex-employee of the selected company.

Being able to speak the participants' native language was also a positive element, since some of the distortions related to the language could be avoided.

2.3 Sample of Interviewees

As far as the sample of people is concerned, we would like to explain the choice to interview a rather diverse group of people in terms of background, sex and job position.

Companies engage in different work practices and managers intervene in order to influence people's minds more or less intentionally and more or less effectively (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). This means that sometimes the practices are carefully designed and implemented by the management that tries to take advantage of any relevant circumstances and in some other cases they are not.

As a consequence, we cannot exclude, the fact that some of these practices might also "emerge" out of the employees' action or that they can be very closely related to other factors (for example, to a strong corporate brand). This calls for more or less indirect managerial intervention. For this reason, we strongly believe that a diverse sample of interviewees is necessary in order to reach credible conclusions about what practices are used.

We selected people occupying various positions in the company, who were available during the period research was conducted and willing to participate in the study. The interviewees included middle managers and employees from different departments.

2.4 Data Analysis

Empirical material was collected and written down. We tried to interpret it, find possible connections between the different parts and draw some valid conclusions. The qualitative data was treated with much respect and attention, as this is very important when trying to understand complex phenomena like the one we are developing in this essay. However, data was not taken as a starting point: being very much close to it and trying to codify it like in data oriented methods, such as grounded theory. (Alvesson & Sköberg 2000)

We followed a rather different way, approaching our data mainly through a hermeneutical way of interpretation. According to this method, knowledge is acquired not in a usual, rational and reasoning way but is illuminated by a kind of mental flashlight. Intuition then becomes crucial (Alvesson & Sköberg 2000). We tried continually to keep in mind the link between the part and the whole, as well as between pre-understanding and understanding (Alvesson & Sköberg 2000). For this reason, we read particular paragraphs (parts) of the text in relation to the whole interview and we took into consideration the general context as well (i.e. the whole company). We asked questions to our text in order to reveal hidden meanings and understand what lies beneath the surface.

Furthermore, post-structuralism and discourse analysis were our inspirations in some cases. These focus on the discursive and linguistic patterns central to the production of subjectivity and identity (Alvesson & Sköberg 2000). Language, discourse, symbols and meanings are key words here. Thus, we tried to include to our reading how the interviewees acted, the way they talked, or how they made use of symbols throughout the procedure of the interview.

Finally, the socio-political context was taken into consideration to some extent in this work as we tried to proceed in a critical reading of the data as well. Since organizations are assumed to be political (Alvesson & Sköberg 2000), we had in mind while interpreting the material that power issues, special interests and unconscious processes were very likely to affect employees' statements, as they are also political beings.

To end this part, we would like to state that all interpretations were made in a reflexive way, challenging and reconsidering assumptions and beliefs of what data are all about (Alvesson 2003). According to Alvesson (2000:288), *"good qualitative research is not a technical project; it is an intellectual one"*. This means among others that same data can always be interpreted slightly differently by different people or even by the same people in different periods of time. We tried to stay close to our topic of investigation and use our judgment while interpreting the material. We have to admit, however, that ambiguity was always a part of the game.

2.5 Validity - Objectivity

Validity refers to the problem of whether the data collected shows the true picture of what is being studied or not (McNeill and Chapman, 2005:9). Here the word "true" is in a way problematic. When something is perceived as "true"? And in relation to what it is so? Discussing about feelings and opinions even if they are on "practices", thus for things that one *does* rather than just feels or thinks, we can never be absolutely sure for the level of the "truth" involved.

As mentioned previously in this section, one cannot have absolutely unmediated data. This means that it is not possible to have pure facts without distortions stemming from the use of language, power relations and other reasons. We do have to keep in mind, that one cannot escape those distortions in most of the cases. The way one speaks, what he/she says, how he/she perceives and interprets things are always fused with a lot of different things (background, personal values, likes and dislikes, the historical-political context, etc.).

What comes out in the end of the study is always a combination of many parameters. We, on our part, did our best to reduce any of those distortions could be diminished and that could otherwise make the research more difficult. Though, we must acknowledge that such thing as "total objectivity" cannot be guaranteed.

3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Normative control and identity regulation are the two key interrelated topics in our study. We see identity regulation as a type of normative control. The aim to explore the means of control, which are based on the identity regulation and see how employees are directed to develop certain images of them selves and work orientations, which are anticipated to match with organizational objectives. We will start this chapter with a general theoretical review on the normative control, which will be followed by a more detailed discussion on the identity field. Further we will touch upon the topic of storytelling as a very specific and interesting illustration of a practice of identity regulation.

The following section will demonstrate the core ideas of normative control. We believe that one can understand better and faster what something is, through the description of it's opposite. Therefore, a brief comparison to the opposing perspective – rational control – will take place as well. Discussion on the nature of normative control is crucial for obtaining a better understanding of the field for further analysis of the empirical material.

3.1 Normative Control

Through the history of managerial discourse a number of distinct perspectives on organizational control have taken place. As Alvesson (2004) states in his work, management may involve a multitude of different forms of control but in various ways. Each is inclined to promise a greater efficiency and profitability to the organizations but offers different means for achieving these ends. In the most Western cultures social order is presented by an opposition between normative and rational perspectives. These general perspectives on control are two thematically contrasting sets.

According to the work of Barley and Kunda (1992), managerial theories are traditionally viewed as sets of propositions, but these could be additionally assessed as rhetorics or ideologies. American as well as Western managerial discourse has been elaborated in waves that have alternated between normative and rational rhetorics. There are five distinct rhetorics which have markedly taken place in the managerial thought and practice. These rhetorics could be classified into two major groups which have been mentioned above: the ones inspired by the ideas of normative control and the ones inspired by the contrasting perspective - rational control.

The authors state that rational control is presented by the waves of “scientific management” and “systems rationalism”. This set of rhetorics emphasizes that productivity could be facilitated through carefully articulated methods and systems. From this perspective organizations are seen as machines. Effective whole could be produced by analyzing, modifying and reassembling its component parts. Workers are viewed as calculative performers who have an instrumental attitude towards a work task. One of the fundamental ideas is that control should be targeted through careful planning and manipulating structures and systems.

The opposing perspective - normative control - could be referred to the following rhetoric waves: “industrial betterment”, “human relations”, and “organizational culture”. It is based on the idea that compliance could be better secured by shaping employees’ attitudes and sentiments. Proponents argue that workers could be more effectively regulated by managers’ thorough attending not only to their behavior but also to their thoughts and emotions. Moral authority could be achieved by winning employees’ hearts and minds. (Barley and Kunda, 1992)

Ouchi (1980) refers to this type of control as a “clan” control. Organizations do not need to measure the performance of employees or direct them because employees have natural (socialized) desire to do what is best for the company. Later on, Alvesson (2004) also brings up the concept of “clan” control. He states that market-like forms of control make employees concentrate on what they are rewarded for and eliminate willingness to do beyond what is demanded. Clan control, on the other hand, facilitates a wider engagement and intrinsic motivation.

It should be mentioned that the idea of normative control is not simply controlling values for its own sake but that through shaping employees’ believes and values organization could gain financially. In other words, strong cultures would impact productivity and, therefore, economic advantage would be achieved.

As it has been already mentioned, managerial discourse did not develop linearly but appeared to have rotated frequently between ideologies of normative and rational control. Even though theory of cultural constraint is not capable to predict the timing of each wave, if we rely on the analysis of Barley and Kunda (1992) and try to predict the future by analyzing the past, it

could be assumed that the current stress on normative control will be followed by a renaissance of rationalism. However, our study is still denoted to the field of normative control and we would like to contribute by exploring the practical means by which this type of control could be enacted.

To summarize, according to the normative perspective, control in an organization could be achieved by shaping employees' identities, emotions, attitudes and beliefs. As it has been already mentioned, particularly in this work we would like to focus on the identity regulation, which could be seen as a powerful sub-category of normative control. We will discuss on the organizational domination, which is targeted through constituting the identities of its members. For that reason, the following section will be a theoretical review on the identity and its regulation.

3.2.1 Management of Identity as a Medium of Organizational Control

Identity is one of the key themes of interest in organizational studies. Although to some extent a problematic concept, it is considered to be central in understanding how a person relates to work, what he/she thinks or does within the working environment and how organizations function. Identity regulation is considered to be an increasingly significant modality of organizational control. (Alvesson, 2004; Costas, 2007)

Identity is a central field for our study to be analyzed due to the claim that its regulation is significant for processes of organizational control. To be more precise, normative control is enacted through the means of regulation of organizational members' identities. However, the field of identity is huge and we abstain ourselves from providing the overview of the entire field. Rather we will try to concentrate on the theoretical material within the scope of interest for the particular study. The target of this chapter is to discuss upon the nature of identity and explore different means of pursuing control in organizations through the regulation of identity. We find this theoretical background essential in order to work on interpreting our empirical material later on in this essay.

"Identity" as a term can be used in a variety of ways referring to different levels and entities. Some examples are corporate identity, personal identity, professional identity, identity of a country, etc. Identity can be seen *"as a matter of the characteristics (essence), coherence,*

and distinctiveness of whatever one is referring to when identity is addressed" (Alvesson, 2004:189).

Alvesson (2004) identifies individual and social identity. Individual identity is characterized by a person's construction of a particular version of him/herself. It could be illustrated by a response to the question "Who am I?" Social identity, on the other hand, concerns a group category that an individual identifies with. It could be a company, club of interest, gender, occupation, etc. In general, identity is about how individuals or groups understand and define themselves. Personal feelings, values and thinking are guided to a certain direction through the subjectivity involved by identity. It is assembled by a mixture of conscious and unconscious cultural elements.

However, it should be acknowledged that actually identities are not fixed and could be rather seen as constructed and changeable. People are continuously involved in *"producing, repairing, maintaining or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness"* (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002: 626). According to Alvesson (2004), identities are formed through social interactions and are highly related to organizational context.

Therefore, we can view organizations as an imperative source of employees' identity. It is necessary to note that organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping employees' identity. However, it should not be confused with the identity itself because culture refers only to shared meanings and ideas while identity goes beyond and involves personal issues as well. (Alvesson, 2004)

Identification of employees with an organization is a desirable aim for managers in different types of organizations. It means that an organizational member would define him/herself with the same attributes of a company (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008:39). When an individual identifies him/herself with an organization, corporate identity then informs self-identity work. Gabriel (1999: 184) argues that what happens is that "*employees come to regard their relationship with their employer in personal rather than collective terms, developing a new dependence which becomes constitutive of their identity and selfhood"*.

One of the most significant assumptions is that through the production of identities organizational control could be achieved. It is considered to be *"less obstructive and*

potentially more effective mean of organizational control than methods that rely upon "external stimuli" (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002:620).

Identification work targets at the internalization of the "right" orientation by employees. It is tempting for managers to influence employees' identity in order to guide their thinking and behavior in accordance with the organizational interests. In other words, identity could be seen as *"an anchoring point for management control and regulation to create a "subjectivity base" for the right kind of action, one that is in line with the appropriate image, rhetoric, and orchestration of social interaction"* (Alvesson, 2004:207).

Here it would be relevant to mention shortly the concept of "loose-tight" controls by Peters and Waterman (1982). They state that identity regulation might "shun bureaucratic overregulation" but tight employees through the self-regulation. However, we should note that even hierarchical or so-called technical control involves identity work to a certain extent. For example, bureaucracies call for individuals who see themselves as rule-oriented and acquiescent. (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Gabriel, 1999)

Still it is crucial to acknowledge that identity work might also have negative consequences and confront different types of resistance from organizational members. Moreover, such concept as dis-identification also exists (Costas, 2007). That means that employees try to differentiate themselves from corporate "designed identities". Cynicism, humor skepticism and irony are just few examples of multiple forms for employees to dis-identify with an organization. (Costas, 2007)

Identity regulation involves social practices, which influence processes of identity construction and reconstruction. As our particular interest in this work is to investigate means of control which are based on identity regulation and explore how employees are directed to develop certain images of them selves, we would like to bring up few examples of practical means for the identity regulation discussed by Alvesson (2004).

In his work the author states that there is a variety of material and symbolic means available for organizations in order to facilitate individual identity construction. Control is enacted by communicating guidelines on how to think, feel, value and behave. For example, cultural material, such as symbolic management performance, storytelling, rituals, material artifacts and others establish orientation in a company as well as promote employees' definition of

themselves. Through the mobilization of diverse corporate media processes of organizational control could be shaped and influenced.

Also Alvesson (2004) brings up another example of mode for identity control, which is the "subjectification". This refers to the construction of an individual's self as a distinct kind of subject through accepting particular templates and definitions which structure and guide existence. Management could get involved into influencing the subjectification process, for instance, by providing job criteria, feedback, certain trainings and tests. It is based on the idea that people actually do things in order to confirm that they are particular types of people.

In the next section we will carry on with the discussion on the practical means for identity regulation and will illustrate the classification of such means proposed by Alvesson and Willmott (2002). We are planning to rely on the particular classification when analyzing our empirical findings.

3.2.2 Modes of Identity Regulation

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) in their study specify different media of pursuing control in work organizations through the management of identity. The authors claim that there are diverse ways in which identity regulation is enacted and suggest that four general groups could present the modes of regulation.

The first group focuses on the employee and illustrates regulations in which the organizational member is defined by defining others. In other words, individual is distinguished from others by certain characteristics. He/she can be identified also by reference to the characteristics of specific others. This type of control can be enacted through the formal procedures or through informal ways. Examples of such practices could be providing a certain job title or defining a competitor.

The second group of means is based on the action orientations. This includes regulations in which the field of activity is formed with reference to appropriate work directions. It involves, for instance, a specific vocabulary of motives that guides a person to what is important and natural to do. In other words, employees are encouraged to realize the meaning of their job. Explicating morals and values also belongs to this group. For example, through stories with a strong morality it is possible to lead identity to a certain direction. Oneself is

defined accordingly to specific morals. Also a person's identity could be regulated through the construction of knowledge and skills as "knowledge defines the knower".

Another category focuses on social relations and consists of regulations of belonging and differentiation. It is based on group categorization and affiliation. Identity regulation can be facilitated by ascribing an individual into social categories. Division of the world into "us" and "them" can be seen as a powerful tool for influencing identity. Feelings of belonging and the sense of community facilitate a certain self-understanding. Examples could be referring to the organization (or department) as a "family" or "team". Hierarchical location could also be related to this group. Status and position in relation to others tend to be central for self-identification.

The last group includes regulations, which indicate the type of identity that matches the particular context in which the subject exists. For example, establishing regulations or so-called "set of rules of the game" provide guidelines on what is necessary for corporate work to operate. Naturalization of certain norms and rules of the game leads to the adaptation of a particular "self". To this group of practices we could also relate explicating certain conditions in which organization operates as identity is shaped by describing a specific version of the scene in which an organization functions.

The authors state that the practices for influencing identities can address the actor, the other, motives, values, expertise, group membership, hierarchical location, rules of the game, the wider context, etc. The forms of identity regulation mentioned above are mainly based on the means of discourse. Organizational control is targeted through the management of identity, which is reinforced by the use of diverse media. In fact, the modes of regulation might take place simultaneously. This co-existence might reinforce or even contradict each other. Besides, organizational members are also actively involved in the "life" of discourses and, therefore, can be more or less receptive or resistant to the identity-based modes of organizational control.

What makes it even more challenging to regulate employees' identities is the claim that individuals have multiple identities (and conflicting) in an organization. According to Gabriel (1999), identities tend to fragment or even to disintegrate and cannot be viewed as autonomous psychic formations. Moreover, organizations are multi-discursive, meaning that there are a number of various discourses which are constantly circulated and which can also

influence identity formation. Therefore, it is argued that there is a limitation for management-driven regulation and identities can be shaped only partly by controlled processes (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

Concluding this section we would like to stress the important aspect that identities cannot be directly controlled. The various means can only facilitate and guide identity constructions. (Alvesson, 2004) Our interest in this study is to explore which practical means for shaping identities of its members are employed by the case company. Inspired by the theoretical categories of the methods for identity regulation mentioned above, we believe that those could be appropriately applied in our work for illustrating the results of the empirical study.

3.3 Storytelling as a Practice of Identity Regulation

Bringing this theoretical background to an end, we would like to finish by arguing for storytelling as a practice of identity regulation. We aim to narrow our discussion even further and touch upon this very specific practice of identity regulation, which is included in the category of "specific vocabulary of motives" by Alvesson and Willmott (2002). We found it to be of special connection to what we finally decided to analyze in the "findings" part.

The first question to ask is: what stories really are?
Stories can be viewed as cultural accounts and depositories of meanings. They are a part of cultural heritage, providing individuals with a mean to express and shape their identity. (Tietze S, Laurie C, Musson G, 2003) Human beings have been called "homo narrans" (Fisher, 1984, 1987) and *"all forms of human communication have been seen fundamentally as "stories"* (Fisher, 1987:13).

Within this thinking, storytelling can be placed in the center of human activity through which identities are constructed, changed or confirmed. Social actors engage in storytelling often in order to make sense of the complexities of human relationships, to define and shape the concepts of themselves or to influence unfolding events. This way, stories are meaning making devices and can represent, reflect, and confirm cultural values; they can provide templates for behavior and moral judgment. (Tietze S, Laurie C, Musson G, 2003)

Being in the center of human activity as said before, stories and storytelling can be found everywhere, in all aspects of human life. As far as the organizational life is concerned -

which is the wider context of this essay - a lot of studies have been conducted starting in the late 1980s' as part of the emerging interest in organizational and corporate cultures. Later on, stories together with myths, rituals, language, jokes and others, became established items of research agendas (i.e. Martin, 1982; Martin et al 1983). Since then narrative forms of knowledge have entered the field of organizational studies in many different ways such as organizational research that is written in a story-like way (research cases).

Working environments and organizations in particular can be considered fertile ground for stories to be "born", developed and narrated, transferring different sets of meanings including the meanings stories carry right from the start and those the storytellers adjust on them consciously or unconsciously through the practice of storytelling. For example, a manager in a firm may be presented as - lets say – a powerful man through a story he says to his employees or through stories the employees in the firm narrate about him (maybe stories from their own experiences with the manager, e.g. a meeting where they got to meet him better). Either true or not, these stories function often in a symbolic way providing certain images people can identify with or reject. This way the process of defining the "self" is guided into specific directions. If we examine this closer we find out that it can become even more complicated. When the participants add or adjust, as said before, personal interests, interpretations and other features of their "own selves" to the story, the whole process may end up being like the "Chinese whispers" game and the original meaning of the story may deviate significantly.

The role of the audience and the actual process of decoding can be considered relevant in this point. There is a dynamic relationship between the narrator and the audience. As implied before, meaning is made not only by the narrator but also and, perhaps most importantly, by the audience. Storytellers use their poetic license to embellish the narrative, exaggerate some aspects or sketch out the particularities of the situation. (Tietze S, Laurie C, Musson G, 2003).

In the end, whether a story is indeed going to be successful, thus pass on the "right" message and make the audience "let" the story influence or even shape its identity, is connected to two issues.

First, it depends on the type of meaning the story carries. It is argued that people tend to trust a story partly if it is in line with their own beliefs and value system. (Tietze S, Laurie C,

Musson G, 2003). Secondly, it depends on the indication that the story carries a certain degree of verisimilitude. (Gabriel, 2004) When these two issues seem to appear in the context, the possibilities that the audience will suspend its disbelief and become part of the storytelling become greater.

To sum up, storytelling can be seen as a multi-sided phenomenon with various features that need to be taken into consideration when studied. It can also be closely related to identity regulation. The next part of this essay presents a case study and is an attempt to investigate situated practices, particularly storytelling as an identity regulatory tool in a real organizational environment through qualitative data.

4 INTRODUCTION OF THE CASE

Rainbow S.A was founded in 1980 as the official distributor of Apple Inc. for Greece and Cyprus. It is located in Athens, Greece. Apart from the headquarters it owns two Apple demo centers (situated in central Athens) and operates an online store (www.applestore.gr). The company performs all the marketing communication activities (advertising, press releases, exhibitions, merchandizing, etc.), and has its own technical and services department offering high quality support to its clients.

At the beginning, Rainbow's main activity was the promotion of the consumer products of Apple in the Greek market. For this reason, the company created and managed a wide network of authorized resellers in the field of computer commerce, achieving important co operations with large retail chains. However, during the years it has expanded its activities by distributing peripherals of other well-known manufacturers for Mac and Windows platform and was also involved in the distribution of popular software products.

What is more, Rainbow, based on its know-how and long term specialization in Macintosh computers, has developed its own products most of which are focused on the education market. The company has also created an "education center", providing seminars and classes on the MACOS operating system as well as on other applications and related programs. In general, Rainbow acts as a local office of Apple in the area. The company is listed on the Parallel Market of Athens Stock Exchange since 2001. (source: www.rainbow.gr)

As one understands, Rainbow consists of different departments that call for a rather diverse workforce in terms of educational background. However, the company is one of the few in Greece paying much attention to the selection process, focusing more on the personality of people rather than degrees alone. The right "fit" seems to be of special importance. Choosing a "homogenous" workforce in terms of age, personal characteristics and values that seem to be in line with those of the company can create the perfect ground for a corporate culture to develop. This fact in combination with the power of the brand name the company represents (that of Apple) can shape conditions that affect not only the way the employees make sense of different issues that take place within the company but also the way they tend to view and define their own selves at the particular working environment.

5 FINDINGS

The aim of this chapter is to present the empirical findings based on the interviews with seven employees of Rainbow. The empirical material will be analyzed in a reflexive way, involving theoretical background in order to explore the practical means of exercising normative control employed in the particular company.

5.1 Practices of Identity Regulation

We would like to remind the reader that mostly semi-structured interviews were engaged in this study in order to have people *talk* about the identity regulation practices that were observed and/or experienced within the working environment of the particular company.

These interviews resulted in general discussions as people were asked to give their opinion about different issues and describe their relationship with their colleagues, managers, boss and clients. Different stories came into the surface right from the start as employees were using them quite often as a mean to answer to our questions and transfer to us the picture of the company and the position it held in various issues.

The most widely narrated stories in the company that seemed to affect employees' identities deeply included the strong image of the company's CEO. That is why we will later on analyze in details the actual practice of storytelling around him and its relation to the control exercised.

In the meantime, it should be mentioned that under the light of the stories that the participants narrated to us around the different issues asked, we recognized other practices (apart from the one of storytelling) that were used in the company and seemed to have implications on the employees' identity. We would like to refer to them briefly in connection to Alvesson's and Wilmott's (2002) classification of identity regulation practices.

First of all, Rainbow seemed to address the employee's identity directly by using "meaningful" job titles frequently. These titles included words like "manager" or "specialist", even though they were not always referring to the exact obligations or job tasks of their "holders". They were mostly used in order to create a certain feeling around one's sense of work.

As Dominikos narrates:

"The CEO has a secretary who up until now was in charge of –you know- the usual tasks a secretary is in charge of. Lately she was given some additional tasks and her title also changed. She's now the "Marketing communication specialist". I mean…"WOW!"
(Dominikos, employee-Apple demo center)

This mini story became known quickly as nothing can be hidden within a small company. It is very likely to have affected the way employees see the image of the "important specialist" and their own selves.

Dominikos continues:

"It's all about our ego. I mean you feel special. And you might be special, with or without the title but the title-you know- it gathers attention. Then again it's very good for your CV. Having a powerful title … it adds value and it's a motive for some. But mostly, it's what I said before. Self esteem- it makes you wanna do better to meet the "meaningful" title…"

Christos adds about the practice of using "professional titles":

"Providing professional titles can initially help employees develop and move into doing new and exciting staff, in order to meet their title. In the long run though, if the salary does not meet the expectations of the title, then the challenge of the title becomes less important and the unfairness done on you gains importance" (Christos, Pro-Market, Business Development Manager (Domain: Music)

Secondly, we also found that the employees were addressed indirectly through the practice of referring to the *others* (in this case a competitor in the market) through negative comments (i.e. insincere), thus creating or reinforcing the image of the opposite (i.e. "professionalism") for the employees who were encouraged this way to see themselves as such. In practices like these a strong opposition between "us" and "them" is also created, thus strengthening the sense of "we" in the company, which is considered to affect the way people view themselves.

Yiannis described a meeting with the CEO that was related to this practice, in a form of a story:

"He (The CEO*) called us in a meeting to remind us that we are the "face" of the company. We had a situation then with two very popular Greek forums for Greek Mac users. Some people who were writing in these forums were very hostile to our company and particularly to us personally* (to people working in the demo stores*). We found out later that they were working for company SG* (the only competitor in the market*), so they did that in order to affect peoples' opinion about our company. And since we were the ones whom they could actually see- our stores were downtown and could be visited anytime by anyone- we were the "easy target". If we did a little tiny mistake they would write bad things about the company and us the next day. So the CEO reminded us that people are constantly watching us. That is why we should keep up the good work being as strong and close as we were…"*
(Yiannis, store manager- Apple demo center)

In this story, the CEO's message about who *we* are in relation to *them* (the others) could have influenced – among other things or stories- the employees' perspective:

"We are better than them! We have been in the market for such a long time. They have opened the store about 5 years ago. I am not saying that they are not good…but I think we are better"
(Kostas, store manager- Apple demo center)

Another practice we found to be related to the identity regulation through our interviewees' stories was related to the brand name the company represented. Bringing the employees closer to the products themselves and the philosophy of Apple provided an indication of the kind of identity they were supposed to have. Employees defined themselves as "experts" and "having special knowledge" that needed to be transferred to their clients.

"I can tell you one hundred stories about customers who visit the company and ask the weirdest questions ever. Sometimes I wonder if they truly want to get an answer or they just test us. We are expected to know everything! This is impossible of course, but they consider we have special knowledge because of the products we sell."
(Dominikos, employee -Apple demo center)

«People consider Rainbow as a very special company mostly because of Apple products that are targeting special people. Co-workers, sales people from within the sales network, even customers often adopt the attitude of being professionally important and respectful because of using Apple products"
(Christos, Pro-Market, Business Development Manager (Domain: Music)

"We are supposed to be Apple experts. If we can't satisfy our customers what kind of "experts" are we?"
(Pepita, employee- Technical department)

To conclude this sample of the practices we found before we focus on the practice of storytelling, we would like to refer to the effort the company did to engender feelings of belonging and membership. By encouraging people to work in groups or have fun together, they are also encouraged to see themselves in certain ways (i.e. as friends, family or team).

"Sometimes the company asks if we would like to organize seminars for the promotion of software programs related to Mac computers in our stores. This is happening with the help of marketing department of course, but mainly it's us the ones who are in charge to do it…have the creative ideas etc. We can say no any time, because this is not what we are «supposed» to do. It is something additional. But we never refuse. Actually if we miss one of those sometimes we feel sad. Last seminar ended up in a party. So many clients around our age were participating and we had so much fun altogether."
(Yiannis, store manager- Apple demo center)

Feelings of belonging and practices of working in groups are described by other employees as well:

"I had to work closely with all of the managers as my activities often affected work that had to be done by them. Departments are quite often interrelated."
(Christos, Pro-Market, Business Develop Manager (Domain:Music)

"Sometimes if I am not sure about something I turn to my colleagues or to the technicians directly for a solution. We might even call people for the demo stores or others from the headquarters and work in groups to get an outcome. You can reach everyone easily. We all contribute"
(Pepita, employee- Technical department)

However, as said in the beginning of this part, we decided to focus mostly on storytelling as a practice of exercising control through identity regulation. And there are two main reasons for that.

The first reason is related to the limitation of space and time. We find that investigating various practices leads to a difficulty to explore those with details within a short period of time and in one work. The second reason resulting from the first has to do with what we considered the most interesting and tempting to analyze in depth.

5.2 The Practice of Storytelling as a mean to regulate identity

5.2.1 The CEO? I have never met him but he is such a good guy!
Stories of unclear origin

In our case study, storytelling seemed to have appealing impact on employees' identity within the working environment. Particularly, most of the stories involved images of the CEO. This had some interesting implications on how the employees viewed not only the CEO or other situations but also their own selves.

People referred to the CEO with details on his educational background, working experience while a lot of them seemed to know many things about his personal life. What is more, almost everybody seemed to share deep feelings about him. What surprised us the most was that all the employees we interviewed had a very clear and justified opinion about the CEO, even though some of them admitted that they had never actually met him. This fact made us curious about investigating where did this entire information come from and what role did it play in the particular organizational context as well as in the formation of the employees' identities.

Here are some of the responses the employees gave us:

"Everyone thinks he's a genius (the CEO). *He's so well educated, smart and simple. People say he just built this company out of nothing and now he's so popular! I admire him for that. I didn't have the chance to meet him a lot of times though…"* (*Yiannis, store manager- Apple demo center)*

"*I think he is a very smart person* (the CEO). *There are so many stories about him. He was born in a small neighborhood and his family was poor when he was young but now he is so rich and popular. He has tried so much to build the company. And he did it the honest and good way, as people say. I respect him*" *(Kostas, store manager- Apple demo center)*

"I don't know if this is true but it is said that he always acted with honesty…I think this is the appropriate word…He never tried to deceive his partners or his employees. And you know there are a lot of people who do that. Not him. Maybe that is one of the reasons he strived."
(Pepita, employee- Technical department)

"I haven't met him personally yet. I have heard so many things from people in the company… I must say I admire him…he's certainly a very smart person. And I like it when smart people succeed because they tried hard. I have heard that he met a lot of difficulties in the past but he stuck to his dreams and goals. I think this is the best to do. You always have to try until you get what you want. Never give up."
(Dominikos, employee-Apple demo center)

The participants seem to talk on behalf of all the employees. The expressions "everyone" and "people say" as well as the fragmented stories themselves about the past of the CEO prove that there is indeed a practice of "talking" about him among the employees.

These stories seem to influence the way people think and guide their emotions. Strong feelings like those of admiration and respect are being created, even though no one seems to be sure about whether all these facts are true or not. What is more, it is unclear neither when the stories began circulating within the company nor who was the first to have narrated them.

However, certain images of the CEO are being created. Those images influence the way employees see their own selves in a symbolic way. Possible templates for what it takes to be successful, what is considered as "good and honest" way to succeed or even who can be considered as a good employee are offered to them.

The image of the *smart and honest man* who starts from nothing and manages to succeed in his work the "good way" is one image to be created around the owner of the firm. Another is that of the *dreamer* who has visions and goals and does not give up until he "gets what he

wants" no matter the difficulties. One could say that both images refer to a greater, *heroic* image of the person.

Often unconsciously images like these that the employees have to live with daily at work influence the way they define their own selves. In our case it means that the employees could see themselves as *followers* of a great effort (which led to a success) that started many years ago from a great and honest man.

Working for "such a good and smart man" who overcame all the difficulties of the past and reached the top can make employees proud and happy, thus give them the strength to work hard and give their best in order to continue this "story of success". What is more, employees get ideas through the stories about what it takes for someone to succeed.

If they can already define themselves as hard working and honest (meaning, good employees) with dreams and goals then they can be "sure" that sometime the bright future is to come, as the story taught them. In this case their identity is being reinforced. If not, now that they know how they will succeed they will have the chance to view themselves as such (hard working) and actually start engaging into actions that prove it. Actions, the company will benefit from in the long run.

The excerpts analyzed included stories that had to do with the background of the CEO, his life some years ago and the way he grew up. They have been created and circulated out of "what people hear" or "what people say". We could assume that the CEO himself has told some of these stories to his employees sometime in the past. In general though, these stories are rather of an unknown or unclear origin. There are few possibilities that the employees really know whether these stories about the CEO are true or not. There are even fewer that the employees actually experienced those facts by living the same situation with that person or even by just being there.

5.2.2 Stories through personal experience

In this point we would like to examine a slightly different case of stories which provide similar images and definitions of the "self". These stories are being created through employees' personal experience.

As Gabriel (2004) argues, the "voice" of experience can be a way of constructing authority. This means that stories that are made through our or other peoples' (who are close to us) experience can carry a bigger degree of "validity". We know that something truly happened because we (or our friends, family, etc.) have been there. If something really happened the chances to "accept" the story and let it affect ourselves increase.

This "experience" may refer to an event we attended where something (worth narrating) happened. It may refer, for example, to a personal meeting with the CEO in his office:

"*I can recall a couple of meetings I attended. He* (the CEO) *organized them and called all the people from the apple demo centers. Most of us had just been hired in the company then. I couldn't believe it was such a nice and funny atmosphere! I was used into something totally different until then. He was acting as if he was another employee of the firm not the CEO; making jokes, telling us about his dog… he is simple and easy-going. So is the company.*"
(Yiannis, store manager- Apple demo center)

This meeting with the CEO Yiannis (and other colleagues) recalled, was narrated often within the company as a story. The image of the *friendly* and *funny* CEO became popular. Employees themselves got specific impressions out of that story that made them behave in a particular way towards him (not being scared, feeling close to the CEO as he seemed to be "one of us", etc.).

What is more, it provided employees with definitions that they could use for their own selves. To be more precise, now they could also see themselves as "simple and easy going". Since the head of the company is presented like that, "*so is* (or must be) *the company*". In other words, a process of identification took place. The CEO functions as a *symbol* of what the company is or should be like and what is perceived as good and legitimate. Seeing him as *simple* and *easy going*, the employees get the impression that this is one of the acceptable ways of acting in the company.

However, not all experiences are the same and not everybody interprets or narrates a situation the exact same way.

"*I have a lot of meetings with the CEO, as I report to him directly…My job has a lot to do with managing customers' complaints and anger so I always have a lot of questions that only he* (the CEO*) can answer. I know the moment I enter his office that I will leave with all my questions answered in the end. He always has the correct solution for everything. I mean of course he has, it's not accidental that he owns the company*"
(Rea, customer support manager)

As Rea recalls from one of such meetings:

"*I had this anonymous mail by someone who- as I understood later on- was obviously being ironic. He asked me among other things if we had a store in Ammochostos* ("ghost town" in Cyprus)*, the place he lived, to visit. I didn't actually think what's wrong with that-as I have never been to Cyprus, but I wrote as a reply that we didn't have a store there and that he should better address our resellers in other cities in Cyprus. Before I sent it I asked to see the CEO- who had direct access to these e-mails and was always suspicious with anonymous ones- in order to be sure about my reply.*

We had this conversation:
(CEO): Have you ever been to Mystras? (Ancient fortified town in Peloponnesus)
(REA): Yes, I have been there a couple of times.
(CEO): Can you recall how it looks like there?
(REA): Yes, a couple of houses here and there and the rest of them ruined.
(CEO): This is pretty much how it looks like in Ammochostos. So, add a postscript in your e-mail, which is perfect as far as the rest, is concerned- and ask that guy:
"Are you sure you are living in Ammochostos?"

I just smiled and did what he told me. I had this feeling I have when I discuss with my dad."

This story was a very "catchy" one since it was related to historical and cultural facts that most of the employees were not just aware of but they had also shaped concrete opinions and

developed strong emotions about them through other "stories" they have been told during their lifetime (from their family, school, etc.).

It was also appealing because of the rather simple or funny way the CEO gave an answer to Rea. It soon became a popular story within the firm as a lot of people had heard it from Rea and narrated it to other colleagues who also knew her.

Once again, through the image of the CEO, employees are provided with templates around how a situation must be viewed or how they should define themselves.

The comment Rea did in the end of her story is "revealing". The CEO is compared to her dad. A *father* figure could then emerge making this way the employees see themselves as *sons and daughters*.

Just like a father, the CEO always seems to "have a solution". His experience and knowledge transfer feelings of security to those around him. As we saw in Rea's excerpt, advices and answers are given in a witty yet "teaching" way that could also characterize him "caring". On the other side we have the "kids" (employees). They know that there will always be someone to help them when they need help, but they also know that they have to try on their own as well and not exploit such a situation for their "comfort". Besides, this is a working environment, meaning that employees can not do whatever they like. The "father" can help and reward but he can also punish when someone does not seem to comply with the "rules".

"*When I used to work in the company's warehouse the CEO quite often paid a visit to us. He usually had a coffee with us or just a small talk…I don't know the exact reason he did that. Some say that he was coming to check on us, some that he was just being friendly. There was a guy, a colleague back then that didn't seem to see the difference…I mean no matter what, he is still the boss and we have to give our best. So the guy was maybe "seduced" by the picture of the "simple and easy going man" and he was so lazy. He never worked. Not even when the CEO was paying us the visit. I mean he could pretend for those 15 minutes that he works. Instead he was having fun with the CEO, talking to him as if he was his best friend. The supervisors had warned him a long time ago. Until his "best friend"* (the CEO) *fired him.*"
(Kostas, store manager- Apple demo center)

The above stories depict a very clear image of the CEO as a classical father figure that rewards and punishes (Gabriel, 2007). Through that image employees get a very clear message about what it is good or bad. Identity is being regulated indirectly through a story as example. Just like all stories this one seems to establish an unspoken code of proper conduct as well. (Alvesson M, Wilmott H. 2002).

To sum up this section, we found mainly two types of stories around the CEO in the working environment of Rainbow. The ones that were of an unclear origin and those that were circulated in the company through the employees' very specific personal experiences. These stories promoted certain images of the owner of the firm: the image of the "smart man", that of the "father figure" or the one of the "punisher". Through the practice of storytelling these images had appealing effects on how the employees viewed and defined their own selves. This way they could be seen as *followers* of the "smart man's" work or as *sons and daughters* who will be rewarded if they are hard working and descent or punished if acting not in accordance with the wishes of the owner or the company.

6 DISCUSSION

In the organizational context of our case study, we found a lot of different stories that affected the way employees thought and felt. Any story is a narrative with a plot, which "knits events together", thus requiring an action of sequencing that will allow us to understand the deeper significance of an event in the light of the others. In this sense, the "poor family background" of the CEO, "the difficulties he met during his life" or his "intelligence" do not mean much if seen alone, separated from each other. These should be viewed as a sequence with words like "despite", "because" and "therefore" linking the facts together.

In other words, stories are not just facts that happen but facts that happen in accordance with the requirements of the plot. Meanings then become obvious and facts are articulated and communicated as experience and not as information. (Gabriel, 2004)

The practice of telling stories over and over again can indeed function as a tool of identity regulation as shown in our case study. The whole practice begins with the creation of the stories. As described above, those can be either of an unknown or of a rather known origin. This way or another, the circulation of the stories within the working environment is necessary. If the stories are to affect employees through the practice of storytelling, they have first to reach them. Which stories become known and which are left outside the game is a matter of the text, the context and the actors involved in the procedure.

Upon reaching the recipients, the "plot" of the stories becomes a group of very specific images and pictures about people and situations. These images transfer meanings, thoughts and feelings. It is exactly these images that affect and manage – in many cases - to regulate identities. This happens through processes like the ones of *identification* or that of *creating fantasies*. In the first case "lessons to learn" become central while in the second a "magic recipe" can be seen relevant.

Let's begin with the first case. When an employee identifies with a story he/she actually views or defines him/herself as a particular actor from that story. Which actor each employee will choose to identify with depends on a number of things, such as his personality, goals, position in the company and others.

Living - even for a while - through the story, a person is provided with ways of behaving, thinking and feeling. These ways prove right or wrong in a symbolic way in people's heads and "lessons are learned" through the story. The story will end at some point but lessons will have been already learned. This means that the recipients of the stories have been affected in the ways they act and think in the actual daily life as a story might end but thoughts and feelings around it last. Identity then becomes regulated according to the plot of each story.

To illustrate that with an example of our case study, a lot of employees could place themselves in the position of the guy who was fired because he was lazy, by hearing his story. Especially, it could be so if they found themselves being lazy sometimes at work. At that time the employee who saw him/herself "matching" to the actor of the story is provided with templates of behavior and with the notion of "what happens when…"

Being afraid of getting fired, if caught not to work for a long period of time, the employee transforms any kind of "dangerous" behavior to an acceptable one in order to avoid such possible outcome. Its identity has been regulated as he/she saw him/herself as a specific type of person and his/her behavior was directed in certain ways through the story.

As far as the second case is concerned, an employee's identity can be regulated through the process of fantasizing about a particular image. This is quite different in relation to the process of identification described above. In the first a person can actually place him/herself in the position of someone else. The position or the situation is something rational and possible that *can* happen. In the second case imagination plays the most important role. A fantasy refers to the activity of *imagining* things, especially if they are very difficult or even impossible to happen.

As Gabriel (1997) argues, stories narrated by the employees can often provide a "core fantasy" about the supreme leader. The subject (leader) of the fantasy is usually surrounded by a "glowing aura", someone we would want to look like. Hearing a story that involves a character like that we unconsciously try to figure out any "secret recipe" that if followed as such is going to give us the same or similar outcome the leading actor of the story got. This "recipe" includes various ingredients that indicate to an extent what courses of action must be taken or what kind of people are those who hold the role of the "subject" of the fantasy. Again the person is given templates of behavior to be followed.

The popular stories in the company we studied involved particularly the life of the CEO. These stories presented him as a smart and good man who tried hard in his life. Following his dreams he overcame the difficulties and managed to succeed. A lot of the employees might fantasize about this life or future. This story-fantasy can represent to an extent what the employees would want to be like. In this attempt of theirs, some would think that if hard working with dreams and goals, they could have such a bright future. This way they "move" their behavior to directions that serve this aim. To the point that their behavior is being driven somewhere through the story, we can assume that their identity is being regulated.

In both cases employees were "made" to behave in certain ways without being asked to directly in an obvious or strict way. Storytelling served as a practice to address the employees indirectly through the narratives that targeted their minds and emotions. According to Barley and Kunda (1992), attempts to address employees' hearts and minds and not only behavior directly can be seen as ways of controlling them in a normative way. In this sense storytelling can be a practice to exercise normative control.

No matter the case, in order for a person to be able to identify with a character in the story or fantasize about a particular situation there has to be developed some degree of trust. There are two important characteristics that if existing at the same time, stories are more likely to be trusted by the employees. It becomes easier then for identities to be affected and stories can last over time being the "object" of storytelling. These two characteristics refer to the level of "truth" involved in a story, and to the particular kind of meaning this story carries.

The first has to do with whether or not the "plot" of the story carries verisimilitude; whether it accurately represents reality (Gabriel, 2004). It is easier for people to believe and actually let a story affect their thoughts and feelings when they know that this is something that truly happened and not just a fiction or a fraud. The second is related to Gabriel's (2004) question "So what?" It is the case when a story fails to carry meaning or carries a meaning that is either insignificant for those who receive it or difficult to be decoded or even "understood" (due to cultural, personal or other contextual barriers).

In addition, Tietze, Cohen and Musson (2003) argue that partly we come to trust a story if it is in line with our own belief and value system. In this case we suspend our disbelief and become part of the storytelling practice. Storytellers propose interpretations that audiences "may test, trying them out in their own imagination and seeing weather they work or not. If a

particular interpretation "resonates" with them they may accept it; alternatively they may reject or modify it" (Gabriel, 2000:43) If we accept this claim, we can assume that stories can mostly reinforce existing identities or shape identities that had the potential to be shaped to that direction right from the start. Using a story in order to transform a person's identity in totally "strange" for him/her ways is rather impossible.

This has some implications on the type of group of people storytelling as a practice is targeting. Communicating the "right" images of the self or ways of behavior fast to all employees in a catholic way, would call for a rather homogenous group of employees with the same or similar value system, which would be affected by the same stories the same or similar way. This seems to be the case in the company we examined. Employees quite often referred to their "similarities" with the rest of the personnel. It seemed that they shared a lot of common interests and general thoughts while a lot hinted that they were "selected" to match the culture of the company and other colleagues, right from the start.

Imagine what would happen if the employees of a firm were completely different to each other. The stories would affect some of them, but not all. They would probably be interpreted not only differently but rather in opposite ways, a lot of diverse minor things would be added to the story according to these different interpretations. In the end the message or the meaning of the story (if one and not many) would end up being something totally different compared to the original. Identities would be regulated in various conflicting ways and storytelling would not add much value as a practice within the firm.

Trying to see things spherically, we would like to add one last thing in our discussion. Stories, displaying different kinds of images about situations and people within a particular company, never function separated from each other. A story is not just facts but actually a sequence of facts that always need to be connected in order to provide a message or meaning (Gabriel, 2004). Same way, different stories within a company need to be linked together as well in order to create the complete puzzle of "what's going on" in the company. There has to be a certain combination of all the available images while the role of the particular actors and the context is not of little importance.

In our case study, the "simple and easy going" image of the CEO gives only a fragmented picture about who he is. If an employee defines him/herself according to that alone, his/her behavior is likely to prove wrong in the future, probably drawing a "punishment" or putting

him/her in an unpleasant situation. The CEO “easy going” image needs to be seen in relation with the *father* figure, the *punisher* or any other image there might be in order for the employees to have a complete template through which their own “correct” identity can be projected: The identity of an employee who is friendly and easy going just like the CEO; who has dreams and goals and his way of success passes through his work in the company, which he views as a chance to “continue a great effort”. Someone who knows what are his rights but also his obligations and performs his job tasks as good as he can.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this work was to investigate how identity regulation can be enacted and enhance our understanding of storytelling as an identity regulatory device. The flow of our study could be seen as a pyramid. First, we introduced the reader the general topic of our research which is normative control. Then the work was followed by an illustration of the identity regulation field as a specific type of normative control. After, the discussion was narrowed down even further to the topic of storytelling. The focus on the storytelling was an illustration of a particular practice for managing identities. To conclude our work, we would like to outline the major outcomes of this research.

The empirical study has illustrated that different practices which influence organizational members' identities are employed in Rainbow, our case company. Though, we would like to stress that it can not be claimed with certainty whether the practices we came up with in our research are intentionally used in the company for managing employees' identities or not.

To begin with, one of the most outstanding practices, which came up from the analysis of the interviews, refers to the case when an individual is distinguished from the others by certain characteristics. The practical mean for doing so is providing "meaningful" job titles to the employees. Another practice is based on social relations and regulations of belonging. In Rainbow we could overview the so-called division of the world into "us" and "them". The powerful tool engaged in the case company is distinguishing Rainbow employees from the competitor. Last but not least we can overview explication of certain morals and values within the company. It is tightened to the product and the philosophy of Apple brand.

We found that one of the strongest means for identity regulation employed in our case company is the storytelling practice. Particularly we have concentrated on the stories circulating within the company about its leader, the CEO. These stories are especially interesting because they seemed to influence the way people think and guided their emotions. As a result, they were used in particular ways in the working environment. Various images of the CEO became known to the "audience" through the stories.

In the findings we discussed about the images of the *smart and good man*, the *dreamer* and the *father*. Employees daily "live" within those stories and images, and they unconsciously get templates on how to see themselves in the working environment and the work itself. As -

in our opinion - people are naturally inspired to prove that they are “good” at something and willing to succeed, with the provided template through the stories their identities are guided in the direction favorable for the company. As an outcome, storytelling becomes a strong device for regulating employees’ identities and guides their self-understanding in a particular direction.

To conclude our work, we would like to mention several limitations, which might have influenced the results of our study. First of all, besides the positive effects that stem from the fact that the interviewer knows most of the interviewees in person, we acknowledge that this might have downfalls as well. For example, the participants might skip some important information due to the assumption that the interviewer is already aware of it.

Secondly, relying only on the theoretical classification by Alvesson & Willmott (2002) in analyzing the practices could be considered as deductive. It is due to the established pre-understandings which subconsciously limit the view of the findings.

Of course it should also be acknowledged that findings from the study of only one company cannot be generalized and considered as an ultimate “truth”. Limited in time, we concentrated particularly on the in depth illustration of only one practice, which is storytelling. However, we think that our work could be of some help for other researchers in the field of normative control.

Concluding, we do believe that it is important to examine processes of identity regulation in some detail and over time in order to elucidate those. Therefore, we strongly recommend that longitudinal observations in addition to semi-structured interviews be involved in further studies in the field.

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Appendix

Sample of Interview Questions:

- What is your personal/educational background?
- How did you find this job? What attracted you in it?
- How would you describe your job in terms of task, level of autonomy, teamwork?
- What role did your colleagues play when you first came here as a newcomer?
- What motivates you the most in this job?
- Do you feel you can identify with the company? Why?
- Would you say that you feel "controlled" when working? Do you have a supervisor? What kind of person is he/she?
- Has it ever happened you didn't meet the deadlines or did something really wrong? How did your manager react?
- How would you describe your relationship with your collegues/ boss/ clients ?
- Is it easy for the company to convince you to participate in activities that are not included in your job description? How?
- This company is perceived as an easy-going, simple and fun place to work in. However, hierarchical levels as well as distinct job titles do exist. Do you see it as a contradiction? Do you think this serves for a particular reason?
- To what extent are you allowed to bring yourself to the work? How about the way you treat/talk to customers or other employees? How about the way you dress?
  Do you feel like you are doing something that is «away» from who you really are?
  Can you give examples?