



**SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS  
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# **Identifying with fun and family in the time of changes and downsize**

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## Abstract

- Title:** Identifying with fun and family in the time of changes and downsize.
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- Author:** Ellert Örn Erlingsson and Elvar Ólafsson
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- Key words:** Cultural family metaphor, Resistance, Cynicism, Organizational identity,
- Purpose:** To explore identification within a small office where employees emphasize family ideology and whether they use cynicism to cope with other organizational changes made in the financial crises.
- Methodology:** We have studied our empirical material by using reflective pragmatic approaches such as hermeneutics and critical theory.
- Theoretical perspectives:** This study's main structure derives from the use of three main topics; the cultural family metaphor, organizational identity and the use of cynicism in resistance.
- Empirical foundation:** Empirical data was gathered through qualitative open-ended interviews of employees from a small freight office in Sweden. The employees were interviewed one at a time by the

two researchers, who followed list of topics that where to be covered in the interviews.

**Conclusions:**

Employees at Shipper use the family metaphor to tighten them together in several ways in this *hard times* and they all identify them self as proud employees due to the good *family* environment within the office. But due to the fluid and unstable concept of the organizational identity it may be necessary to try to focus the identity construction of the employees to reflect on what they do.

We have identified examples where the employees use cynicism to protect and/or justify themselves in situations where they are powerless.

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Ellert Örn Erlingsson

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

This research is based on a case study of a freight company in Sweden. This company has office operating at numerous locations around Europe and their headquarters are located in a foreign country. The research is done in spring 2009 while the crisis has hit hard on world and especially on Iceland. Since this office's operation revolves 80% around export and import between Sweden and Iceland then you can assume how dramatic consequences the downfall of the Icelandic economy can have on the company.

When we first contacted the company to do the research then they had seventeen employees. When it was time for the interviews the office had been downsized to eight people. According to the employees the office has done a good job of maintaining a good moral the reason presumably being the employees understanding of how the market situation is forcing the company to downsize.

Few of changes that have been made lately have made a critical impact on how the office operates. Apart from downsizing, the headquarters have made changes in routes to Sweden that even decreased the workload of the office.

One of the employee's that was downsized was the office manager. Now there is one general manager for all the Scandinavian offices located in the Copenhagen office. Today there are eight employees at the office. There is one Financial Manager, a Sales Manager, an Operation manager, four office workers and a warehouse worker.

The employees all live within 15 minutes distance from the office. The distance to the workplace was a factor for some of the employees where the majority of them are local. Their working hours are all from 08.00 - 16.30 where 8-17 is a standard working hours for this industry but they all take a shorter lunch break to be able to get off earlier.

We have changed the name of the company along with the names of the employees to eliminate traceability to their comments. The company will be called Shipper throughout our thesis.

## 1.2 Problem discussion

It is often in the organizations best interest to keep their employees happy and satisfied. Which might seem easy in a good season, but on the other hand it might be a bigger challenge in the times of cutbacks and dismissals as have been the case on the work market since last autumn.

We wanted to see what kind of culture was in the small office of Shipper. Can we expect to be any different than in the whole organization? Although we are not analysing the headquarters, we do know their culture through personal interactions.

As the office hasn't been deprived of these *hard times* we wanted to see how the employees respond to the crisis and cutbacks, e.g. through the office culture, their identification, and if or how they resist the changes deemed necessary by the headquarters.

With employees emphasizing the family ideology and environment at the office we wanted to view how *the family* function among employees, e.g. bounding among employees, balance between work and personal life, and the interplay of *fun* and *family*. Also, is the diffusion of power clear within the office as often is in families, like between parents and child? Furthermore, we want to look into the interplay of salary and family environment, e.g. how important role does these two factors play in their work? We will look into how far the family environment reaches within the office and the organization, does it reach outside this office and to the Office Manager and the headquarters?

Like mentioned before then one of the changes implemented last autumn is that the Scandinavian offices will have one office manager, Gustaf, who is located in

Copenhagen. We wanted to look into how the employees will adjust to having three managers instead of one.

Following the family metaphor we will look into identity and see how the employees identify themselves with the organization? How strong is the identification and what does that mean? We will look into what motivates the employees to do a good job and the role of compliments in a small office where routine tasks are usually solved in groups. We will look into the social identity of the employees and analyse what controls their behaviour and priorities in different circumstances.

It is often difficult to operate as an autonomous office but at the same time be under the authority of a foreign headquarter. How are the offices communicating with each other? How are changes implemented and how do the employees accept them?

Despite everything that has been going on everybody stated that they were happy and furthermore acted like that as well. We wanted to locate subtle hints of resistance in the time of crisis. Surely it should be difficult to cope with the loss of co-workers and unstable business environment. Due to the cutback and dismissals it might be possible that the environment at the office has been damaged because employees have lost their focus of the tasks and might now be thinking more about *who is next?*

Following the cutbacks we will look into the employee's perceived job security, how they cope with the dismissals and justifying it for themselves. What is the role of the unions in the context of dismissals and have they backed up the employees in the process?

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

Social research develops an understanding of social life and discovers how people construct meaning in their natural settings (Neuman, 2003). The goal of an interpretative researcher is to learn what is meaningful or relevant to the group being studied, or how they experience daily life.

In this chapter, we will explain the method we have applied while conducting our interviews and collecting our data. Moreover, we will explain the reason why we chose to do so and the constraints we have had during the application of these methods.

We went into the research with the objective to study motivation and commitment. These two topics had intrigued us in the program *Managing People, Knowledge and Change*. We formulated a research question of *how does Shipper motivate its employees and influence their commitment*.

According to Neuman (2003) most researchers conduct a case study of a small group of people by observing and interact with them for a period from a few months to several years. However due to lack of time given, our research approach was in the form of interviews and data analysis to support our case. All social research systematically collects and analyses empirical data and carefully examines the patterns to understand and describe social life. There are two types of styles to perform a social research: qualitative and quantitative. The difference lies in the nature of the data. The former uses *soft* data, e.g. expressions, words, sentences, symbols and so on. Furthermore the qualitative researcher tries to look at interpretations or the creation of meaning in a specific setting. The latter uses *hard* data in the form of numbers. Another difference of the two styles is how the researchers often hold different assumptions about social life and have different objectives.

We decided to do a qualitative research and conducted open ended interviews. The benefits of an open ended interviews is that it is an open exchange of feelings and opinions, where judgements are stated and one attempts to persuade the other of a particular point of view (Neuman, 2003). The topics can rise and fall and either person can introduce a new topic, often leading to something that wasn't anticipated but is relevant or interesting.

There are some issues that might have influenced our research question and perspective. Such issues are, among others, the language, the pre-understanding of us as researchers the dependence of empirical data on interpretation and theory (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2007). We processed the data received from those interviews using *critical theory* and *hermeneutics*.

The reason why we used hermeneutics is that we need a lot of interpretation and insight to get the underlying meaning from the interviews. Hermeneutics also emphasizes on the part and the whole so in the case of Shipper for example we can't really analyse the employees at the Swedish office without considering their communication and interaction with other offices within the organization. On top of hermeneutics we used critical theory. Since we approached Shipper they didn't really have a perceived problem. Our task was to reflect on their society and try to problematize what seemed natural and self-evident, which is one of the core features of Critical Theory (Muhr, 2009).

After the interviews we had to revise our research problem and re-construct our research questions. We found it interesting to look closer to the fragile use of *resistance* during a crisis and how the *family metaphor* is influenced in the same process. We also reflect upon ambiguous use of *organizational identity*.

We have examined and analysed the related literature from previous field studies in order to support and get different views and perspectives for our argument. We also speculate for and against the validity, objectivity and reliability of our research.

## 2.2 Hermeneutics

The main concept of Hermeneutics from Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2007) point of view is to view cases from intuition, interpretation and insight. Facts, logic and the analysis should not influence one's interpretations. Hermeneutics aims for the underlying meaning of the observations, survey, and analysis etc. but not the observations themselves (Muhr, 2009). By using Hermeneutics one should be able to intellectually access reasons behind the meaning of a text. It teaches the researcher to critically look into what he hears and reads.

The very core of the hermeneutic process consists of, firstly pre-understanding and understanding and secondly the part and the whole (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2007). These criteria should give us a bit different values when interpreting what is normal and what is acceptable. Although the main elements of interpretations could be similar you should expect a little variation in the answers. The first element is our perspective and how our pre-understanding affects our formulation of understanding through the interview process.

The second element, the part and the whole, has a little better contact with the text. A good way of explaining this would be to say that "*the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole*" (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2007, p.53). You have to take a look at how the current financial crisis is affecting the organization's operation. Another thing that has to be considered is that the office have a foreign headquarter that has the ability to take decisions that influence the offices operations.

The next layer of the hermeneutic process deals with 4 aspects: patterns of interpretations, text, dialogue and sub-interpretations.

The most basic of the aspects is the pattern of interpretations. It's about your reflection of the situation and whether you use consistency in your arguments for or against its statements. This should include facts from the interpreted interviews which made the individual detail of the context understandable.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2007) argue that facts emerge from the text, or from interviews, through interpretations and that they are results, not the point of departure.

The dialogue refers to the idea that you should never take what the interviewee says for granted. You should approach the interview with a little sceptical attitude. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2007) highlight the process of asking questions to the text and trying to listen to the possible answers, trying to read between the lines to find answers.

Sub-interpretations were highlighted by Hirsch, (1967) as cited in Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2007), as the difference between the interviewee's meanings with his statements compared to the significance of his statements for us.

Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2007) speak of Betti's hermeneutic canons, which are the 4 main criteria for guidance in hermeneutics:

Canon 1 reflects on the hermeneutic autonomy of the object which mainly focuses on that the understanding is supposed to be structured more on its own standards and criteria, and less on its original intentions behind it. However, a common interpretative problem is when the data in hand has contradictory statements. You also have to look into the interview and access what is the point of the story? Are the researchers or the interviewee trying to make a point by making statement? Alvesson (2009) argues that reality is complex and elusive, and every interpretation is purely subjective. Therefore you have to bear in mind that there is a chance that other researchers might interpret the interview differently.

Canon 2 revolves around the coherence of meaning. This means taking a look at what is the whole and what is the part. Since the whole and the part are rarely defined then it's up to us to develop our own opinions about it. What is the whole? Is it the whole Shipper organization, along with its competitors, or is it the whole transporting industry? This can cause problems since we don't know if the information that might influence our perception of the whole or the part was not mentioned.

Canon 3 is about the actuality of understanding. The understanding is a creative, reproductive act where pre-understanding plays a big role, defining what is normal and what is acceptable as stated earlier. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2007) highlight Distance and Dependence as a source of criticism on understanding. Distance refers to how remote the source of the story is. Do we possess enough knowledge of the company's culture and tasks to interpret it properly? Dependence emphasises that stories can change with time and persons, usually making it more interesting along the way. An example of that can be our discussion with our supervisor where we explain our findings. She will then try to guide us in the best way she can, according to how she interpreted our understanding of the problem.

Canon 4 is about adequacy of meaning in understanding. Here, the reader uses empathy; that is, mentally placing him into the characters shoes. When reading text or doing interviews there is always a tendency to think what you would have done facing the same situation.

### 2.3 Critical Theory

According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2007) critical theory is to critically access and reflect on society. It is characterized by an interpretive approach combined with an interest in critically disputing actual social realities. Critical theory doesn't look on a particular text but increase awareness and provides guidelines and ideas about the ideological-political nature of broader social research.

Critical theory is consistently maintaining a dialectical view of society, claiming that the phenomena must always be viewed from its historical context. One aspect that usually is prominent is the influence of power; i.e. who has it and how it is used?

Critical theory doesn't accept what people think is true and represents a long history of criticising positivism. Taken-for-granted realities and what seems natural and self-evident is reflected critically by researchers through the lens of Critical theory (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2007), or as Muhr (2009) highlights; "It's about finding things and shaking them up, but not verifying them".

The idea of critical theory comes from Frankfurt school where they try to clarify the relationship between what is empirically given and the historical context of which it was created from. They also derive that the social phenomena is best understood as changeable elements in a dialectical social development (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2007). Fromm's (1976, cited in Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2007, p.115) argues that social critique is more likely to seek compromise, to be more humanistic and more open to hope.

Habermas's theory (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2007) of communicative action involves the possibility of dialogue that aims to arrive at mutual understanding and agreement. We also need not simply let ourselves be steered by traditional ideas and values. We should scrutinize and question the empirical text, reaching out towards increasingly reasonable views (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2007). In Habermas opinion there is also no point in discussing anything unless it can be assumed that it attempts at sincerity, truth, socially acceptable norms, and intelligibility dominates over lies, distortions, the expression of socially unacceptable norms, and incomprehensible statements.

You can also comment on communicative rationality that signifies perceptions as being based upon statements in which are intelligible, and that statements reflect on honesty and sincerity, that they are true or correct (given what we think we know) and that they accord with the prevailing norms (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2007).

When expressing your view you should not expect everyone to carry equal weight. This can depend on, for example, knowledge, wisdom, experience and the weight of the argument presented. The arguments should however be open for questioning.

Critique of Habermas's theory of communication involves the fact that Habermas's views are too intellectualized. In reality the better argument doesn't always win but rather the one who is more convincing. Not everything has to be pinpointed and logged, thus you don't have to formulate your arguments precisely. Rational argument is intended to bring us closer towards consensus (Muhr, 2009).

There are a few things that influence how you formulate your arguments:

“Critical theory perceives modern man as manipulated, objectified, passive and conformist in relation to the machinery of society and the dominant forms of rationality” (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2007, p.124)

You could also view this from a technical cognitive interest. There, knowledge is assumed to be able to manipulate nature in a predictable way. Critical theory also offers more criticism of positivism and empiricism and not in constructive suggestions but rather trying to create a problem out of the writer’s statements. This continues in the way that researchers inspired by critical theory usually tackle empirical issues by using secondary empirical material.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2007) argue that there are three powerful reasons for not regarding empirical material as the whole truth. One is that the author of the material is usually trying to prove a point, thus subjectivity limits the aspects of which the phenomenon can be in the particular study. You thus have to de-familiarize yourself with the subject so that you won’t take everything for granted. The second is that social conditions operate, sometimes unconsciously, behind the back of subjects. This means that the results of interviews and questioners can be ambiguous. The third reason is that the material keeps our focus on the subject that the author wants to explore so in a sense it is political and interest-biased. Therefore we cannot focus on what the result can be. “*A good interpretation forces us to think – and rethink*” (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2007, p.136).

There is a weakness in the representation of empirical material and that is that even though it’s supposed to be interpreted according to the author’s will, then unintended arguments and assumptions can prevail. Researchers must always make sure that they use critical reflection and autonomy from social and ideational patterns.

## 2.4 Data Collection

As Clarke and Dawson (1999) pointed out, data collection sources are categorised into secondary and primary data. The primary data of this research was collected

through interviews with Shipper's employees. To reflect upon the concepts that arise within the primary data we used secondary data.

#### 2.4.1 Interviews / Primary data

The interviews took place at the company's office on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 2009. Seven out of eight employees at the office, including managers, were interviewed. One employee was not interviewed because he was not at work that day. The interviews generally lasted between 30 to 50 minutes and they were all recorded. The original idea was that we were going to interview employees separately; three to four one-on-one interviews but from the company's point of view that was not possible because they couldn't lose two employees into interviews at the same time. So the outcome was that we carried out the interviews together, one was leading the interviews and the other was viewing and listening from the sideline and adding only to the discussions if finding something interesting or that needed further explication.

The interviews were conducted from a qualitative perspective so that we were able to engage the problem in depth (Neuman, 2003). Before the open ended interviews we prepared a list of topics that we wanted to touch upon and used a non-standardized approach throughout, where the list of topics was used more as guidelines for us to cover the same basic issue in each interview, but still have some flexibility to adjust to the situation and context. We managed to ask the questions we had prepared but we were also able to go deeper in some areas that we found interesting or controversial.

All relevant collected data is used in our research. We agreed that name of the company, along with the employee's, would be changed in order to prevent any comments to be traced back to them. We also got permission from the interviewees to contact them with follow up questions if any would arise.

The interview's guidelines included a job description and family situation, individual and corporate identity, culture, and the company's HRM strategies. The combination

of topics was structured to examine motivation and commitment at the company and the topics were structured carefully in order to get the right information from each interviewee (Cohen & Manion 1994).

After critical and careful study of all the data that was assemble from the interviews the authors attention was drawn away from motivation and commitment as the data indicated something else that might be interesting, the shake in the family metaphor at the company and the cynicism and scepticism during the changes following the financial crisis over the last months.

#### 2.4.2 Empirical/Secondary data

The secondary data was collected from materials, such as books, course literature, articles and other publications and information that were related to our topic, in order to reflect on the topics and the source material from the primary data. In the search for empirical data we searched for material and data that contained key words such as *Family metaphor*, *Resistance*, *Cynicism* and *Organizational identity*. After great amount of research we were able to find authors like Fleming, Spicer, Casey, Kunda, Alvesson, Sewell, Gioia, Whetten and Mumby that have published considerably empirical data concerning our topic, and through their work we found myriad of material, both from above-mentioned and others authors.

#### 2.5 Validity, Reliability and Objectivity

Validity in research refers to the data, or in our case the interviews, will display a true picture of what is being studied (McNeill & Chapman, 2005). This does not insinuate that we or the interviewees are lying; they are saying what they believe is true. But since this is a qualitative research we are more interested in authenticity (Neuman, 2003). Authenticity is about giving a fair and honest account of a social life from someone who experiences it every day.

One factor that can influence validity is the role of language. Language barriers can increase the risk of misunderstanding and misinterpretations (Neuman, 2003).

English is neither our native language nor the interviewees but due to our and their proficiency level in the language, we do not think we experienced any communication problems.

The data from the interviews and articles can be influenced by our interpretations as researchers like mentioned in our chapter of Hermeneutics. To complicate this even more then you have to have in mind your interpretations of our text:

“For instance, Hirsch (1967), a proponent of the objectivist school, distinguishes between the author’s original meaning with the text and the significance of the text (for us)” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg 2007, p.58)

Since the researcher is the primary instrument for the data collection and can adapt his external input to prove high internal validity. On the other hand you need to bear in mind that there is a chance that the interviewee may willingly or unwillingly have left out information that he or she thinks is un-necessary but could have influenced our perception and interpretation.

Since this research is based on interviews one must bear in mind that it's based on our interpretations on the interviewee's perception of truth. We did not observe them in their daily routine to verify their perceptions.

Reliability revolves around the dependability or consistency. It concerns the repetition of the method. That is, if the research result will be the same if the same researcher or someone else uses the same method (McNeill & Chapman 2005; Cohen & Manion 1994). Since this is a qualitative research then the reliability can have a different meaning since it reflects reality at the time it is collected. Two factors can highly influence the reliability, one is the pre-understanding and the bias of the researcher and the other are factors that influence the atmosphere of the interviewee like workload, co-operation with co-workers and so on.

Despite the influence of pre-understanding and bias, the interviews allow us to capture facial expressions and body language of the interviewee's which helps us

interpret their answers which would not have been possible to notice otherwise (Malhotra & Birks 2003).

Objectivity is one of the main tools in ensuring the reliability of a research. It means that the researcher should not let his personal values and biases influence his research (Macionis & Plummer 2005). But again, we needed to make a lot of interpretations and we approached this with an open mind and we were as objective as possible during the interviews. You can always speculate about the two sentences: “I believe it when I see it” and “I see it when I believe it” (Alvesson 2009). These two sentences represent the importance of interpretation. It can play a huge role whether you approach a topic with an open, impartial attitude or if it has been tainted to be biased by your own pre-understanding of the subject.

## 3.0 Frame of Reference

### 3.1 Family Metaphor

The family metaphor is incessantly used in everyday practice. Organizations are sometimes described as being like a family or as possessing a family environment by their members (Schein, 1998; Brotheridge & Lee 2006). In normative conditions the family metaphor is seen as positive and generative social practices within organizational culture (Casey 1999). It's a powerful metaphor which often actively evokes images of kinship bonding, symbolically suggests consensus, normative unity and loyalty, integration in social relations and shared struggles against adversity. In the case of small firms and small business sectors some argue that they are primarily *flooded* with *family* ideology and rhetoric (Ainsworth & Cox 2003; Casey 1999; Fleming & Spicer 2004).

An important contributor to job satisfaction and performance levels is the work environment and that's why managers may try to create a family atmosphere and environment in their workplaces (Baum 1991; Moos 1981; Brotheridge & Lee 2006). By signifying devotion for a family atmosphere, managers can be suggesting a desire for employees to work together effectively in a warm and caring environment, or use the metaphor to grasp potential candidates to join the family (Casey 1999; Brotheridge & Lee 2006). Familial metaphors are also invoked sometimes within small firms to symbolize the nature of workplace relationships in order to restraint and manage (Ainsworth & Cox 2003; Fleming & Spicer 2004). In context of restraint and manage Casey (1999, p.159) highlighted;

“...that the discursively constructed corporate family that elicits and simulates warm feelings of bonding and belonging simultaneously functions as a regulatory and disciplinary device.”

Therefore managers within the family environment have to have an attentive need to be both on relationship and task issues in order to create an effective work atmosphere, along with his regulatory and manage issues (Brotheridge & Lee 2006).

Casey (1999) argues that structures and processes of the family-style culture convert outdated bureaucratic workplaces, and simultaneously increase employee's participation, motivation, commitment and empowerment, team-working and interpersonal skills. The family concept is collective that's provides more opportunities for experiences of competence and achievement, encourages loyalty from the employee and protection by and from the employer, and increase performance and organizational productivity (Casey, 1999; Atchison, 1991). The family concept is, according to the studies of Fleming and Spicer (2004), more strongly intensified among labour workers and other blue collar occupational groups and as Atchison (1991, p.53) argues:

“The concept of family is collective. It encourages loyalty from the employee and protection by and from the employer. The push towards ridding the organization of low performers and downsizing in general are antithetical to the idea of family. Families turning out or leaving behind children are illustrations of the most extreme negative circumstances in literature and history.”

The similitude of organizations and family may be due to their many similarities and that they share common characteristics, e.g. they are both social systems comprised of people and can be regarded as open systems existing within a context of larger network, but containing their own network (Brotheridge & Lee 2006). This similitude indicates that they may become emotionally interdependent (Fitness 2000) and both may come up against similar kinds of challenges, e.g. managers can develop parental bounds with their subordinates while workers may develop on sibling bounds with their peer co-workers (Brotheridge & Lee 2006; Morgan, 2006).

In organizations and families are obvious and covert subsystems (Morgan, 2006). At organizations they may be in the form of management teams, work groups, divisions, and peer co-workers. Husband and wife, parent and children, brothers and sisters are instance of coexisting subsystems within each family (Fisher, 1986; Brotheridge & Lee 2006; Morgan, 2006). Families and organizations both have a hierarchy with a

traditional power distribution where members may assume and adopt multiplex roles and tasks (Brotheridge & Lee 2006; Morgan, 1986).

According to Merkel and Carpenter (1987) workplace ills, such as disperse or enmeshed boundaries, divisions within a alliance government, detoured conflicts, tangled hierarchies and unproductive rules and rituals, have been traced to problems also found in families. Organizations and families can both come across problems in negotiating the move to development and homeostasis changes, such as change of a leader or change in his personal life, a merger, organizational change, transfer, promotion, or even retirement, which might cause issues of segregation and loss (Brotheridge & Lee 2006; LaFarge & Nurick 1993).

Families and work units can both be considered as social systems, which have an established leadership body which help support and control a group of members. These members experience variable degrees of cohesive and conflict just as parents and children that have a distant relationship, lacking mutual respect and trust (Graen & Scandura 1991; Brotheridge & Lee 2006). Similarly, as a parent may try to control a child's every movement, so too can supervisor micro-manage, particularly those who interact on a periodical basis, in a small unit, and have a history of working together over a long period of time (Brotheridge & Lee 2006). According to Casey's (1999) study the emotion that comes with the close involvement of employees as members of the family can be generated intense commitment or alienation in ways that rules, regulations and procedures can never foster. Kunda (1992) emphasizes that aspects of work and nonworking social ties require constant definition and redefinition, and that they are hard to separate and never fully resolved.

The family-like identification can, as Fleming and Spicer (2004) argue, represent contradictions, negative and gendered implications for social relationships. Some organization try to make employees feel more *at home* when working, as Fleming and Spicer (2004) argue, by reproducing private spatial practices in a number of more controversial ways. That can cause employees within the family culture to find their family and personal lives suffered because they gave so much of themselves to the organization and experienced burnout, task contradiction and other types of

pathologies, such as alcoholism, divorce, heart attacks, etc. By attempting to transfer workplace activities into the home, organizations might affect the workplace as a place that has often been a space where employees can escape the traumas of home life.

According to Gray and Sandler (2000), can a feeling of guilt and conflicts among organizational members be a result of blurred boundaries within *one big happy family* culture. In organizations the family concept can be repressive and can develop into interpersonal conflict and varying degrees of cohesiveness and their own variant of family secrets, just as in families (Fleming & Spicer 2004; Casey, 1999; Hochwald, 1990). These conflicts often arise in conditions to poor interpersonal relationships and issues relating to the distribution and conclusion of duties or tasks within organization and families (Brotheridge & Lee 2006).

McKenna and Wright, (1992) as cited in Brotheridge & Lee (2006), argue that generally there is a greater emotional interdependency in families than in the workplace. They also highlight, along with Brotheridge and Lee (2006), that the nature of goals for organizations and family is notably dissimilar, and where families tend to emphasize relationships while organizations tend to focus on tasks, in more formally proscribed or well defined way than those in families.

Based on previous discussion one might argue that family and organizational environment constructs possess of similarities, certain congruence. But they also have their significant amount of overlapping variance. And although metaphors may help us to realize organizational activity, they are incomplete a thing representing another thing (Brotheridge & Lee 2006). Finally, one thing must be remembered;

“People can enter a family only by birth, adoption, or marriage and, even though they can be shunned, estranged or expelled from their family or experience divorce, they truly only leave by death. However, people choose to join or leave an organization or their employment may be terminated against their wishes” (Brotheridge & Lee 2006, p.145).

## 3.2 Organizational Identity

Alvesson (2004) notes that identity is broadly accepted as crucial for the understanding of the functionality of an organization and how people perceive their working environment. Identity can be seen on two levels, individual and organizational. Both options try to answer the question who am I or who are we? Following an answer to those questions people tend to formulate their own priorities and motivation, the thinking and acting of the individual or organization. For managers it can be an important tool for influencing organizational control, creation of an organizational basis for image management, a way to secure loyalty and retention and finally a way to counteract uncertainty in order to build confidence and self-esteem at work.

There can be a number of different levels and entities of identities. You can belong to number of them, each controlling how you should act and feel. Alvesson (2004) argues that because of the social context of the work environment the individual identifies with his: organization, division, gender, age, and nationality. He also states that a person with a strong organizational identity will be inclined to take the companies best interest into account when making his decisions, thus internalizing the group's ideas, values and norms.

There are a number of ways of which an organizational identity can be highly influenced by organizational life cycle transitions. An example from Whetten's (2006) for such a transition is a retirement of an organizational founder. His core argument was that bona fide identity referencing discourse is best observed during periods of organizational upheaval.

Organizational identity is often portrayed as the core and distinctive characteristic of an organization. Gioia, et al., (2000) argue that because of the interrelationship between identity and image, organizational identity is better viewed as a fluid and unstable concept. Both concepts deal with individual and organizational issues and both lend insight into the character and behaviour of the organization and its members. This view is essential to most theoretical and empirical treatments of an organizational identity. They further argue that the durability of identity is actually contained in the stability of labels which the organizational members use to express

what they believe the organization is. They want to re-conceptualize organizational identity and highlight how unstable it is, due to its frequent redefinition and revision by the organizational members.

Whetten (2006) typically portrays organizational identity as the collective understanding of the employees understanding of the features presumed to be central and relatively permanent which distinguishes their organization from other organization.

We agree with Gioia, et al., (2000) concerning the fluidity of the organizational identity, otherwise the organization could be under the threat of stagnation in an inevitably changing environment. They argue that identity, both individual and organizational, is a social construction that derives from repeated interaction with others. They further note the reflexive awareness of self-identity that is actively created and sustained through interaction with others for example customers, media, rivals and regulatory institutions.

Even though the core identity appears to be stable, an organization can express its core values in different forms without the customer noticing it. Gioia et al., (2000) note the example of Hewlett Packard's identity, which has been expressing their core value from the idea of the *H-P Way* even though the specific values and actions of the *H-P Way* has changed many times over the years.

Ashforth and Mael (1989) introduce the Social Identity Theory which has a classification that serves two functions. One is cognitive segmenting and classifying the social environment which helps the individual to define others. A person is classified and will be expected to act in a stereotypical way. Second is the social classification that allows the individual to define himself in the social environment.

They also suggest four principles that are relevant to group identification. The first one is the perceptual cognitive construct without necessarily associate it with any specific behaviour. The second is the personal experience of success and failure in the group. The third is that social identification can be distinguished from internalization and finally the fourth group identification is the reciprocal role

relationship where the individual partly defines himself as a social referent (e.g. husband-wife, doctor-patient).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) also argue that through social identification and comparison the individual will vicariously participate in the success and status of the group where positive and negative group comparisons will affect the member's self-esteem. Group identification or favouritism can occur even if the group doesn't possess a strong leadership. While we agree with Ashforth and Mael to a certain extent that this is often the case, they do not however anticipate the affects of resistance in the form of cynicism when the individual doesn't agree with group's value or direction.

Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) address that strong work identity may contribute to a feeling of personal fulfilment through work activities. However a loss of status in the relevant group can have a reverse affects on psychological health.

Ashforth and Mael (1989, p.23) reflect on the definition of organizational commitment. In their view commitment is influenced by:

“(a) belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values, (b) willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and (c) desire to maintain membership.”

An employee can have high commitment, not because he perceives a shared destiny with the organization, but rather that the organization can be a convenient platform to achieve his personal career goals. His commitment could become very fragile if another organization would prove more convenient to his goals. His departure would prove to be harder if he would have a strong identification with the organization.

Organizational image is generally referred to as a shared cognitive representation or a view of an organization. Image however is sometimes equated with organizational identity and sometimes it is left outside of the identity (Whitten, 2006; Gioia, et al., 2000; Gioia & Thomas 1996). Therefore, it is common to study identity and image from the insider and outsider view of the organization.

Gioia, et al., (2000) note a few forms of image. One is the *Construed external image* which is the employee's perception of how outsiders perceive their organization (Dutton & Dukerich 1991; Dutton, et al., 1994). Another is the *Desired future image* where the organization has a visionary perception they would like outsiders and internal members to have of the organization sometime in the future (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Gioia & Thomas 1996). The third is the image of *Corporate identity* which is the representation of the organization emphasized through the management of the organizations symbols and logos. This is strategically planned and applied to internal and external self-representation. This is especially developed by top management that has made some sense of who they are as an organization. The fourth is *Reputation*, that is, the relatively stable, long term and collective judgements made by outsiders of the company's actions and achievements.

Gioia, et al., (2000) argue that there are two distinctive ways of changing your identity and image. We could change how we think about ourselves, that is, obtain a new desired future image or we could change how outsiders think about us and obtain a new desired corporate identity. In either case, the organizational history plays an important role since both identity and image are constructed and/or reconstructed from the meaning of past events or in other words, the current needs and desired future state fuels the reinvention of the past.

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) state that it is assumed that organizations try to control employees by applying appropriate structures, procedures, measures and targets. Furthermore resistance from the employees is considered to be symptomatic of poor design or poor management and can be solved by restructuring along with training or staff replacement. They argue that the managers have failed to pay attention to the negotiated and problematical status of shared meanings, values and beliefs for organizational control. Although they regard identity regulation as a pervasive and increasingly intentional method of organizational control, there are examples that attempts to increase employee commitment, involvement or loyalty have had the opposite affects, amplifying cynicism and resistance.

### 3.3 Resistance and Cynicism

Many studies of culture engineering have the assumption that workers values can be completely controlled by the organization. Managers have absorbed this logic and enforce culture building with the aim of trying to control the identities of employees so that they will become the person the company would like them to be. The focus of this is to get the employees to have the same values as the company, and therefore they will feel it's in their best interest for the company to succeed. Of course there will always be workers that resist these managerial controls.

There are a number of possible ways to resist indirectly, that is, without the use of unions, strikes and coordinated output restrictions. An example of those resistances can be: irony, scepticism, humour, alternative interpretative repertoires and cynicism. All of these resistances and especially cynicism revolve around the notion of power, e.g. what the worker can do when facing a task he doesn't want to commit to. Fleming & Spicer (2003) along with Mumby (2005) argue that cynicism as a mode of distancing has the potential to reproduce the very power that the employee seeks to escape:

"Du Gay and Salaman (1992) and Willmott (1993), for example, interpret cynicism as an unplanned ideological phenomenon that unobtrusively reproduces relations of power because cynical employees are given (and give themselves) the impression that they are autonomous agents, but they still practise the corporate rituals nevertheless. When we dis-identify with our prescribed social roles we often still perform them-sometimes better, ironically, than if we did identify with them." (Fleming & Spicer 2008, p.160)

Fleming & Spicer (2003) highlight three views on cynicism. One is the managerialist literature view which notes cynicism as a psychological defect that needs to be corrected. The second is the radical humanist approach which views cynicism as a defence mechanism or as Kunda (1992) and Casey (1995) claim that workers use it to protect themselves from the ubiquitous culture machine before it gets to claustrophobic. The third and final view suggests cynicism as a process of dis-

identifying with cultural prescriptions while performing them. This inclines that employees, while thinking they're autonomous they still practice the corporate ritual they pre-oppose never the less.

Fleming & Sewell (2002) constructed the concept *svejkism* as a form of organizational resistance that involves a degree of ambiguity. The term *svejkism* comes from Jaroslav Hasek's novel *The Good Soldier, Svejk*. Svejk was a soldier in the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army that practiced a very subtle form of resistance i.e. in the form of foot dragging, false compliance, false ignorance and so forth. These actions were a form of silently disengage and dis-identify with the normal prescription of managerialism through cynicism. It's important to note that although managers don't like acts of resistance like strikes, laziness and absenteeism; they at least understand the rationality of those actions. They also say that; "OK, so we pay our workers low wage but, in return, we turn a blind eye to pretty pilfering and gold-bricking, up to a point" (Fleming & Sewell 2002, p.860).

In small businesses where the family metaphor is quite strong it can be difficult to resist and object: "Strike? Why do you want to strike? We're all in this together. We're all friends now. We're part of a family" (Fleming & Sewell 2002, p.860).

In this sense it is much easier for the employee to use more subtle resistance like irony and cynicism.

But a *svejk* always gets by, simply by doing just enough for him to appear to be doing his duty and serving his own agenda without drawing enough attention towards himself to make him a subject to discipline. He always makes sure that his actions are never at the expense of his co-workers.

When referring resistance, researchers have the tendency to view it as *Fordist* social structures of accumulation like for example organized strikes where workers openly voice their opinions and concerns. Fleming & Spicer (2008) argue that just because employees do not directly oppose towards a management initiative, then it doesn't necessarily mean they agree with it. Fleming & Sewell (2002) along with Mumby (2005) highlight the importance to view the other side of resistance in the form of cynicism. Mumby (2005) argues that this particular emphasis on routine, everyday

form of resistance seems to have increased, partially due to realization of decreased possibilities of collective, organized confrontational form of employee resistance. Fleming & Sewell (2002) agree and emphasize that manufacturing consent has been too apparent recently and not enough attention has been given to how employees oppose new managerial changes, harbouring feelings of resentment and discontent. Sometimes the employee would go as far as to reverse employer initiatives. It has been shown that cynics do not internalize the values of the official company culture; they actually make an effort to ensure that they are not internalized while acting as if they believe in the company culture, a *svejk* like behaviour.

Fleming and Spicer (2003) also highlight the visibility of the cynicism. They take two examples to illustrate their point. One is of the McDonald's worker that is supposed to identify himself with the values of the training programmes, that is, quality, team work, cleanliness, efficiency and so on. The employee might be very cynical towards the company and is perhaps wearing a *McShit* tee-shirt under his uniform. However, and crucially, he performs efficiently as a member of the team while doing so. At that time, the employee does not identify himself with the values of the organization, but acts as if he believes in them and then the cultural power is operating in its most potent form. The second example is from the TV show *The Simpsons* where Homer Simpson points to the fact that he attends church every Sunday. In his perception he thinks he's a good Christian even though he usually sleeps through the entire proceeding.

There is another form of cynicism which is: believing too much (Fleming & Spicer 2003). In this form the employee, willingly or unwillingly, over identifies with the company culture. Examples of such behaviour might be if you're asked to contribute to the suggestion box and you add hundreds of suggestions. The problem with this resistance is that these suggestions might all be good and valid but the overflow of suggestions might discourage the organization from processing them.

Humour often plays a big part in resistance. Ackroyd and Thompson (1999) highlight the important feature of humour. They identify three types of humour: clowning, satire

and teasing. All of these require a high degree of conscious comic intent, that is, that humour is a serious business. They argue that employee's and researchers should see jokes as a form of oppositional resistance in the same way as intentional disobedience.

We agree up to a certain point although they seem to take humour very seriously. It can have both positive and negative sides. The positive side can be that with an ironic tone the employee may have looked closer at the situation, putting more thought into what could have been done instead. The negative side can be the decreased moral as a result of the humour.

Fleming and Sewell (2002) state that the svejk doesn't protest or display stubborn disobedience He's more covert, using guile and cunning actions in an ironic style. Svejkism always revolves around a conflict of moralities and there is a lot of ambiguity of interests where the argument of where the duty lies. The svejk does not necessarily wish to change the status quo since that can be the very foundation of how they are able to do as little as possible. This irony and cynicism of the svejk extends the normal interpretation of humour:

"...the ironic performance in particular is offered as a joke, something that need not be taken seriously; which is, of course, a neat piece of mystification. Do not take seriously the fact that we behave as if we do not take the organization seriously!" (Bailey, 1993 cited in Fleming & Sewell 2002, p.865)

Kunda (1992) argued that managers have a common view that if a worker does not subjectively buy into the ideas of achieving excellence and constantly seeking continuous improvement then they can be pathologized by managers and can be transformed into organizational outcasts by fellow team members. Resistance from workers is rather seen as a matter of display of personal problems coming from their home, in a sense inclining that the problem comes from the employee, not from poor management.

Kunda's (1992) views are similar to Abraham Maslow's (1943) studies on the hierarchy of needs theory. He argues that human beings have a hierarchy of five needs, beginning with the basic physiological needs in the bottom of his pyramid and when you have fulfilled that need you can finally focus on your next one, taking you higher and higher towards the top. The five levels of need are as followed: physiological -, safety -, social belonging -, esteem - and the need for self actualization. Kunda's view about managers can be explained by the loss of a lower level needs like e.g. food and safety. If an employee is again unable to fulfil a basic need, then he will not put a lot of effort into maximising his potentials at work before that problem has been resolved.

We think resistance can occur when basic needs have been met but the employee thinks he's unable to climb higher in Maslow's pyramid due to being powerless against managerial decisions. The easier option would be to pretend to go along with the plan. In this scenario the employee can persuade himself that he can take credit for good and bad results. If a managerial decision was wrong he can reveal his resistance and tell his peers that he never liked the idea in the first place. If however a managerial decision is correct then he can lay low and take partial credit for the team's success.

Up to this point we have reviewed cynicism from the employees' point of view, which seems logical since they have little power against their managers. *Flannelling* is another form of cynicism. Flannelling is said to occur when for example middle managers have to convince their workers of the benefits of a task or a change while at the same time not displaying their disbelief's in it (Fleming & Sewell 2002). Unlike an *arse-kisser* or a *company suck up* who display a suspicious devotional adherence in hope of gaining preferment, a *flanneller* does not do this in order to get benefits for himself. On the contrary the flanneller might exercise a degree of scepticism and cynicism with regards to their organization's justification of what they do. In this way, the svejkism is a little bit different. It's not about hand to hand fight against a more powerful individual or system. Here, a svejk may choose whether to fight or sit out particular battles.

In conclusion we can highlight Fleming & Sewell's (2002) argument for ambiguity around resistance. The ambiguity is usually in a form of discussion regarding the effectiveness of a particular employee resistance. The strongest argument being that some forms of resistance can end up reinforcing the domination rather than challenging it. In that case the distinction between resistance and consent is blurry. They made arguments that researchers have a difficult time observing resistance like *svejkism* probably due to traditional definitions of resistance the emphasize open and organized dissent. In our analysis we will try to locate cynicism in the employees' comments.

## 4.0 Analysis

### 4.1 Family metaphor

Throughout the interviews all the interviewees, once or often, addressed the members of the office as a *family*. This is common among small firms and business (Ainsworth & Cox 2003; Fleming & Spicer 2004). The office is located in a small town, where all the employees live in, and employees have been working together for two to nine years, so they have developed a bond in a several ways, e.g. as colleagues at the office, as neighbours in the small town, or as friends outside work. Reference to the family environment is therefore well understood by the authors. The work environment is also comfortable and enjoyable according to the interviewees;

"We have fun and that's fun" (Dan).

"It's great fun to come in every morning and say *Good morning* to everyone" (Emil).

"We work hard and at the same time have fun ... Happy with the people that I work with" (Hanna)

"Much *wakeup time* at work...important to be happy and have lot of laugh ... there is a good morale at the office...you have to have good time during the day because you are working so much" (Maria).

The two last quotes above strongly indicates the employees commitment to the office, they work *much* and spend a lot of *time* there, but that is alright because they are surrounded with good morale and fun within the family environment at the office. They also have commitment to their co-workers and maybe that's why they work so hard, i.e. they don't want to fail their *family* members. Employee's commitment to each other is e.g. to make everything work within the office by doing their tasks, because if one don't does his task then it become someone else's problem at the office. This is not in the spirit of e.g. kinship bounding and unity that the family metaphor appeals to.

Another sign of commitment among employees is how they all agree up on the flexibility at the office concerning their work. Indicating that employee could meet up against some situations and tasks outside work if needed, such as sick children, doctor's appointment, day off due to some specified etc. But majority of them would need their co-workers to fill in for them, therefore it all depended on their peers to help them out and backing them up. A help that everybody at the office were willing to offer according to the interviews and nobody saw a problem with this kind of arrangement. This is related to the family ideology and the sibling bounds among office members, as highlighted by Brotheridge and Lee (2006).

#### 4.1.1 Boundary

Throughout the interviews all the interviewees mentioned the work atmosphere at the office in a positive way, e.g.:

"Fun to go here" (Sara).

Employees thought the comfortable and enjoyable working environment, as Sara's quote above, to be equal or as more important at work in the context of discussion about payment and salary. That also indicates that the belonging to the *family* is an important factor of motivation and commitment of the employees within this office, which is logical to argue when five out of seven employees were not satisfied with their salaries. Keeping that important factor as it is, the managers and employees stressed the boundary between work and family life with meetings and activities outside work. Employees meet irregularly outside work, where they come and do something together, e.g. have dinner, go bowling, or go on short weekend trips etc. These meetings outside work is something that employees addressed in the interviews as an important thing and are in line with Moos (1981) argument about how important contributor the work environment is to job satisfaction. And employees were aware of that, like one said, that that they would be;

"...working better together if you have been seeing each other in another environment" (Maria).

Once a year all the employees at the office go on a weekend trip together. The firm pays the half of the cost versus half from the employee's mutual fund. Spouse's do not come along with the employees and the trip is mainly thought to fulfil the quote above; to shake people together so they can work better together. But we argue, why not take the spouse along in trips like that and shake people, employees and spouse, really together and even make other kind of bonding and even a deeper one. This way the social relations between employees can become deeper than they already are after many forty hour workweek and some weekend trips together over the past years.

These outside work meetings also call out for employees sometimes to choose between families, their private-family or their work-family. Because out-side-work meetings overlap time and space that employee's otherwise spend with their spouse and children. And that's something that was indicated in the interviews, that they didn't always participate in these out-side-work meetings due to obligations with their private-family. In this context we think the family metaphor is fragile within the office.

#### 4.1.2 Subsystems and roles

As within others workplaces and families this office have some subsystems, such as management teams and peer co-workers or as parent-children and brothers and sisters subsystems (Fisher, 1986; Brotheridge & Lee 2006; Morgan, 2006). In a way the managers can be seen as parent of their children at the office, for example as one manager says in the interview:

"These guys here are depending on my work" (Emil).

Thereby he puts him in the shoes of the breadwinner of the family, just as parents are within families. Another example is the work of two managers to do something that hasn't been done in a long time, at the company. They are going to the companies in

the town in search for new customers, to increase sales and business for the office, with other words to breadfeed the family. As the same manager said so clear;

"...if we don't perform then we don't have a job tomorrow"(Emil).

Although the managers see themselves, in a way, in the *parent*-role within the office, the subordinates do not see the clear line. They know they are managers, but don't know clearly who is *the boss* at the office so we argue that the subordinates see their managers more as older sibling than in the *parent*-role. With the middle-managers at the office as part of siblings the boundaries of power become unclear because the hierarchy at the office has become tangled, just as it can be within families (Merkel & Carpenter 1987).

In the interviews, some employees did touch up on the unclear boundaries of power at the office. They all connected that with the changes last autumn, that is, the disappearance of the Office manager and the extended responsibility that three middle-managers at the office got and the location of the Office Manager in another office in a another country. Now employees have to figure out what problems or issues apply to which manager. It might not be problem in the majority of cases, but some problems and answers might be relevant to more than one manager, and employees might also get duplex answers and message, depending on which manager employee's talk to.

#### 4.1.3 Communication and compliment

"We have open attitude and we have discussions ... some have been working here for some years, so we know each other ... so if we don't agree, then we listen and respect each other ... it's like in a family"  
(Maria).

The quote above is how Maria sees the relationship and communication between the three managers at the office. It might be suitable that there are three managers at the office that come together and discuss, as the quote refer to, and then take decision,

which all agree up on or as the majority has decided. But then, instead of clear husband-wife/parent metaphor within this family, they have a *threesome* which have some authority at the office, and as indicated before, can result a misunderstanding and unclear power distribution among subordinates.

General all the interviewees were agree up on that the communications within the office between managers and subordinates, and between co-workers were alright. But in that context, many mentioned the communication with the Office Manager. Employees feel themselves distant from the Office Manager, where they don't communicate, not through e-mail or phone and little as nothing when he comes by the office;

"He just came here and talked to the three managers and didn't even address us, that was disappointing" (Emma).

The managers on the other hand didn't see any problems with the location of Officer Manager, as they were regularly in contact with him by e-mail or phone. As it turned out, managers and their subordinates don't always have the same view of the situation. That came clear in the interviews when discussing compliment at the office. Throughout the interviews the employees do not agree concerning the compliment within the office. Employees feel that there is a lack of compliment for a job well done and some even say that good job isn't even notice at the office by some managers.

"I don't think they really know what I do here" (anonyms).

Seeing this quote from the family point of view, we as parents know that parents want to know what their children are doing. Managers on the other hand all agree that they give compliment to their subordinates. This paradox might be due to disperse boundaries and tangled hierarchies at the office, i.e. because they are so few and, allegedly close, that managers might not see the need for much compliment. For the same reason employees might be calling for more compliment for further recognition within this close and small family. Maybe managers are sending employees compliments, but in an unclear and informal hierarchy and bureaucratic way that doesn't get through to employees, for example, one manager said:

“Good work is noted and people gets new responsibility” (Maria)

It all looks normal in the quote above, but what if managers just hand over the new responsibility to employees and don't explain clear enough why there are new responsibilities in their work. That might just sound like more work in the mind of the employees. Although all interviewees said that communications within the office were good, a clear message path for compliment is needed and communications in this context are missing.

According to the managers, the Office Manager is well informed about things at the office and they all agree up that he compliments them for job well done.

When it came to the communication and connection with the Office Manager unlike their subordinates, the managers consider them self to be in good and clear connection with the Office Manager.

“...sometimes I get a call in the evening or on weekends from the Office Manager about good job ... [saying that] this was a good job” (Dan).

#### 4.1.4 Office Manager and headquarters

With the Office Manager located elsewhere is something that the employees disliked, especially because he rarely came to the office, and not as often then he was supposed to.

"He is suppose to come here once in month, he came in November and then again few weeks ago" (Emma).

As mentioned earlier, managers and their subordinate's didn't always agree how to view things. That also applies to the location of the Office Manager, where the middle managers at the office saw no flaw in his location, and one manager said;

"I know if there is something big then he would drive here directly" (Dan).

That might have been the Office Manager problem within this *family*, he wasn't around and when he came it might be due to something big or something negative,

"When he [Gustaf] came, someone got laid off. So we were thinking about locking the door [she says with a smile]" (Sara).

This might be due to the reason that the Office Manager isn't *family*-orientated, that might also apply to the headquarters, where this office is a part of a bigger system, where the ideology and environment of family isn't necessary the case. This doesn't have to be surprise where the firm might emphasize above all on tasks rather than relationships as in families (Brotheridge & Lee 2006).

This makes the *family-life* more difficult at the office, where the family metaphor doesn't always make sense, i.e. in context with normative unity and integration in social relations (Casey 1999), because how powerless the *family* members at the office stand opposite headquarters. *Family* member's don't have the power over or within the family as the headquarters do.

Some changes from headquarters are made against office's wishes and it's often how they are establish that's frustrate *family* members.

"They [headquarters] throw in changes ... with little or no notice" (Emil).

In this context of changes, many interviewees mentioned the dismissal of managers last autumn, where all the interviewees agree that the managers got a hard treatment, and weren't in line with how the *parent* treats the *child* within the family. Managers and some salesmen that were dismissed got a phone call where they were informed about their termination and then they had to quit immediately at the office. One interviewee, with a sense of humour, described it when the Office manager came to the office to *terminate* the managers like this;

"Gustaf came with axe" (Dan).

But Dan also realised that this treatment doesn't apply to all employees;

"Just managers are treated like that ... that will happen to me one day"  
(Dan).

As Dan said that this treatment only concerned the managers and all interviewee's agreed that other employees that were dismissed got a fair treatment from the firm. Julia, an employee that was laid off in February and was filling in at the office during the interviews, confirms the treatment in her interview;

"It was my turn to go... They treated me very well" (Julia).

The attitude toward these cutback changes among office members demonstrate again how powerless and exposed they are against headquarters. It doesn't matter although the ideas of family is antithetical toward downsizing (Atchison, 1991), because the headquarters decisions isn't based on the family idea and office members have little to say about the decisions. The attitude reflects in quotes like;

"People were not happy with the laying off but at the same time we understood" (Hanna).

And others interviewed put it in a similar way, emphasising *we* in that context. And one might argue that, although they are unhappy with the changes, they have to do the best of it. Those who survive have to tighten the *family* bounding and keep on their work unknowing what will happen next.

By emphasizing the family environment and the fact that office members have fun at work might be a reason to on the positive, family and fun, despite their position against headquarters and these hard times at the firm. Which also makes one think if it is the fun at work that's making them feel like within a family or is it the family ideology making them have fun at work?

Despite all the fun and happiness at the office as employees empathize some employees haven't been that inspired, because;

"Some have quit because they were unhappy" (Sara).

Here is Sara referring to some employees that, for some reason, have quit and left the office, which is something that you can do as an employee in a firm but can't do as a family member. We therefore argue that the family metaphor within the office is fragile in the context of dismissals and exit of employees. Can you fire someone from the family when family members can "truly only leave the family by death" (Brotheridge & Lee 2006, p.145).

## 4.2 Organizational identity

We asked the employee's if they had heard of Shipper before they started working there. Four out of seven interviewee's had never heard of the firm before applying for their perspective jobs. One employee had seen their containers but didn't exactly know what they did. The last two employees had heard of the company since they had been working in related businesses. This problem continues when the employees tell their friends where they work;

"Nobody knows Shipper. I always have to explain what we do. The industry knows, but not normal people" (Emma).

Even though apparently few people outside of the freight industry have heard of the company the employees perceive their image to be positive. Office members express strong organizational identity with Shipper mainly due through the family culture. This works well with Alvesson's (2004) answer to the identity question *who are we*. Overall the employees tend to emphasize how happy they are with their co-workers rather than identifying themselves with what they do.

Since identity is often portrayed as the core and distinctive characteristic of an organization, would it have dramatic consequences if Shipper would have too many employees? In this sense the organizational identity is a fluid and unstable concept (Gioia et al, 2000) and therefore if the company would grow, the employees would have to find a new reason to prioritise and motivate themselves.

"It's nice to be in a small office, involved in all kind of decisions... It's very personal here...I used to work for Maersk. There I was just a number" (Emil).

Here Emil indicates how important it is for him to identify himself with a small company where he gets the opportunity to express himself and to be noted.

#### 4.2.1 Group identification & rivalry

There are many kinds of group identities. You can belong to number of them, each controlling how you should act and feel in that particular group. The interviewees all identify themselves with Shipper in general although if we look closer, there are some sub groups within the organization. They strongly identify themselves with their own office with comments like *we decided...* but when the headquarters were mentioned the quotes always started with '*they*'. This indicates that they perceive their group to have a slightly different values, ideas and norms than of the employees from the headquarters.

The management tries to organize parties and get to gathers where the employees from different offices meet each other. This is particularly helpful in helping the employees identifying with the whole organization. It is difficult to identify yourself with people you have never met before. How can you be sure that your behaviour, values and priorities really go a long with the co-workers from other offices if you have never met them?

"I went to [the headquarters] once, it was nice to see the people, put faces behind the phone calls and the e-mails" (Hanna).

The employees mentioned that visits between the offices have decreased during the crisis, due to lack of funding. In the short run this is acceptable, the employees are busy trying to make ends meet, but when the situation gets better the managers have to make sure that this part of identity construction will not be forgotten.

There are a number of other sub groups within the office. The managers have to identify themselves as managers to rationalize their behaviour. You can have completely different conversations with an individual, depending on if he is talking to you as a co-worker, a friend or a manager. Let's say a manager's subordinate has to leave the office for a personal reason. It then becomes a question of which identification is stronger for the manager. Does he identify more with being a manager or a friend? The employees felt they had a fair rule which was if someone could cover for them or at least act as a backup if something comes up then the employee could attend his personal matter. If the employee couldn't get anyone to cover for him, the manager would probably have to identify stronger with his position.

We asked if the employee's would meet each other outside work. Some do that but not a lot; "I don't really meet them that much outside work. They are doing that more, because of the age" (Maria). Maria socially identifies herself with older people and therefore classifies the *younger* employees to act in a more stereotypical way. It's worth to mention that Maria has kids so she might have other responsibility to attend to that the younger employee does not have.

When confronted with the question of what makes her work hard, Maria socially classifies Shipper's employees with the hard working ethics of the Swedish people (Ashforth and Mael 1989); "Swedish people are generally hard working" (Maria). Alvesson & Sköldberg (2007) would argue that her reason for doing this is to build up confidence and self-esteem.

Shipper has a main rival company. The two companies have the same structure and provide almost identical service. There is generally no communication between the two companies but they do observe every move the other makes; "Identification is associated with groups that are distinctive, prestigious, and in competition with, or at least aware of, other groups," (Ashforth & Mael 1989). If asked, the interviewees were usually quick to respond that Shipper was better than the rival, often indicating that with irony or a humorous tone, thus indicating strong group identification as Ashforth and Mael (1989) introduced. Being acknowledged as bigger as or better than the rival would be a collective victory for the employees and strengthen their organizational image.

#### 4.2.2 Consequences of the headquarters organizational changes

When asked if the employee's liked working for Shipper, every one of them replied yes and furthermore, all agreed that they would recommend working there to a friend. We believe that most of them were really honest about those comments, with the organizations culture being what they liked the most. There appears to be a good working morale at the office and they seem to get along well. They are usually happy with the service they provide with some exceptions. One example of what they don't like is when the headquarters make changes in the service or routes with little notice:

"They [headquarters] throw in changes, it's very annoying... we heard it the day before they closed the [other] Swedish offices. We had no time to talk to the customers and we had no info about the change. We had to explain what they [headquarters] had done. It was terrible. We still suffer from that change. Customers ask *but when will you close that route*. We were hurt from that change. We have to inform the customer in time" (Emil).

It's not to say however that the headquarters will always implement their decisions without consulting the managers at Shipper. Usually the headquarters or Gustaf will discuss future changes with the local managers before they implement any changes. He notes that their reputation has been damaged by the headquarters actions in the past, something that could have been prevented with communication at an early stage. It can be difficult to regain trust when decisions are not always in your own hands. This does however place the managers in the role of the *flanneller* (Fleming & Sewell 2002). Now the managers have to justify the changes for their employees although they do not necessarily agree that it is the right thing to do.

#### 4.2.3 Desired future image

As stated before, all the employees agreed that Shipper was not well known and they usually said that when friends would ask were they worked they would have to explain what Shipper does. This would indicate that the image of the company is not

very strong in the surrounding area, although they did imply that people within the industry usually know them. The sales manager and the operations manager have recently started going from business to business, introducing the company. There are probably two reasons for this introduction. The obvious one being that because of the crisis they are in need of increasing their business. The second and the one we are more interested in, is that they might be trying to strengthen the *Construed external image* (Gioia, et al., 2000) of Shipper. The managers have a desired future image. In five years they want to have twenty people again in the office and to be bigger than their main rival.

### 4.3 Resistance

The crisis has had a huge influence on the organization. Employees have been downsized from seventeen to eight. Knowing that many companies are in the same situation, the remaining employees should under, Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), be more concerned about their safety need or in other words the safety of employment than being concerned with achievements and self actualization. In this situation it is much easier for the employee to use more subtle resistance like irony and cynicism than a full blown resistance where workers openly voice their opinions and concerns. We will reflect upon how the employees at Shipper use cynicism to describe their working environment while sometimes hiding resistance in subtle humour.

#### 4.3.1 Job security and LIFO

Swedish unions have worked hard to maintain the LIFO (Last in, first out) in the job markets. All the employees we interviewed seemed to agree that this is a very fair way to figure out who deserves to stay and who has to go during a crisis and cut backs. We asked what they felt about their job security; if they were afraid if they would be next to go if Shipper would have to lay more people off:

"...no, I'm not worried, because she [Sara] has been working here for less time, so I'm not afraid" (Emma).

This fits perfectly into Kunda's (1992) and Casey's (1995) radical humanistic approach where the employee uses cynicism as a defence mechanism to escape from claustrophobia. Emma can now continue her work as normal and is relaxed when she goes home. In this scenario it would be wrong to criticise the cynicism she uses it only to calm herself down. Sara or the other employee's should not be affected even if they hear her comments because this is a standard procedure when retrenchment is needed.

"Caroline comes back in January and I hope the situation will be better then, otherwise Sara will have a risk of losing her job" (Emma).

We have to include this to demonstrate that we don't believe Emma is using cynicism to cause trouble for Sara.

"...but I don't think they [Shipper] will lay off more people because we are shorthanded enough as it is" (Emma).

Her view was echoed by most employees. It seems that this office has been downsized to a bare minimum so the next step if further downsize would be needed is to close the office, a decision that the employees don't think is likely.

"...as long as we keep the numbers in black [positive outcomes in book keeping] we don't need to worry ... I'm not that worried, if we close down there's plenty of work in Gothenburg" (Emil).

Emil displays a more positive view on his job security when asked if he believes that the headquarters will close the office in the future. But it is interesting to see his optimistic view on the job market. If the headquarters would close the office down it would mean that the crisis would have reach new heights. If that would be the case, why is he then so confident that there will job openings in Gothenburg? Maybe because he does have a good experience in sales, and that provides him with enough confidence that he will get a new job easily if necessary.

Returning to the LIFO system we think there is an obvious downside of it. Is there a possibility that you can be trapped at your current work during or just before a crisis? No matter what you are doing, if you decide to get a new job you will automatically be *Last In* at your new organization. You might have to evaluate whether it's better to stay unhappy at your current job or if you feel better being unsafe at a new workplace;

”I have the golden handcuff sensation, that I’d like to leave but the security and benefits are such that I’m not sure I could adjust my lifestyle. But I’m continually re-evaluating my position...” (Casey 1999, p.167).

We came across an interesting example of how the LIFO system can work. Julia is one of the employees Shipper had to lay off earlier this year. She had been one of the workers, implementing standard tasks with no previous experience from this sector. Representatives from the union came to make sure everything was done *by the book*. After making sure Shipper had a reasonable excuse for laying her off, the union representatives asked if someone at the office had been working there for shorter time than her. They found out that the sales manager had been there for the shortest time and immediately asked Julia if she could replace him. Modestly she turned it down due to lack of experience and qualification. Therefore the Union didn’t do anything, but this example was mentioned in few of the interviewees. It would have been interesting to notice how hard the Union would have fight for her right if she would have wanted his job. What would prevail in this fictional fight, the unions demand for the LIFO right or the company’s right of keeping their current qualified sales manager?

Following the above discussion about the LIFO system then it's necessary to think how this can affect your motivation. On the positive side then it does provide you with a sense of security which allows you to focus on your task at hand. On the other hand, in the time of crisis which is the case at the moment you might feel that you are stuck in a work place that you're unhappy in but don't want to quit because you don't think you can get another job. This decision to stay might enforce cynicism and svejk

like behaviour (Fleming & Sewell 2002). A svejk employee will act and pretend that everything is OK but at the same time do as little work as possible without getting caught. It's important to mention that we do not believe this being the case at this very moment. The employee's we interviewed had an incredible understanding of the companies situation, having accepted delayed in pay increases and still easily smile while the company has downsized from seventeen to eight people. We consider if the employees can expect to get the same understanding and co-operation from the organization as they have done themselves, when the market situation improves? Only time will tell what they will do when the situation gets better.

#### 4.3.2 Cynical view on motivation

We had a problem identifying what Shipper does to motivate their employees. Six out of seven interviewees expressed negative feelings about their wage and bonuses are never an option regardless of results. We also found it very interesting to see the different perception of compliments the employees have. Two of the three managers said that they give compliments to their employees for a job well done. The third one said that when they get new customers then everybody is happy, when they lose customers then everybody is sad, so therefore the employees might not need that kind of feedback.

Bearing in mind the answer of the previous two managers that inclined they did compliment their employees, then it was interesting for us to interview the four employees who all stated that they did not get enough compliments for a job well done. An interesting dilemma of course and it's impossible to tell who is right based on our data. The workers all implement rather standardized tasks which creates a lot of ambiguity around the definition of what is a job well done in that situation. It's very obvious to know when the employee has done a mistake or not done his job, if however he successfully does his job the chances are that few will notice.

It would be false to state the company doesn't do anything for its employees. The organization does provide the employee's with benefits and rewards such as a

massage every Monday and a gym card so they can stay in shape. On top of that they throw parties every once in a while, for example for all the Scandinavian employees so they can meet each other. These benefits however are not related to results, so they might work well to keep a good moral, but the motivating factor is more ambiguous.

When evaluating how much compliments the employee's need. You have to consider the difference in culture. One employee noted that; "You've done good work but that doesn't bring food to the table" (anonymous). This view is expressed by the only non Swedish employee at the office. There is a possibility that she doesn't need the emotional *pat on the back*, it might not be part of her cultural upbringing. Why should you get an extra credit for something you were paid to do? It's a rhetorical question really since within each culture there can be different values of how much motivation is needed.

During the interview the employees also implied that the location of the company also had a great influence when applying for the job. The convenience of being close to your home and not having to spend a lot of time commuting to work played a big part, almost all employees needed a maximum of 15 minutes to get to work.

### 4.3.3 Salary

We asked the employee's about the perception of their pay, that is, we didn't want to know how much their salary was but rather how they felt about their salary. If they were getting enough considering the effort they put into their work.

"NO! But I would not need a lot more to be happy [with the salary]. I think I have more experience now and deserve more pay... It's annoying that you have to change your job to get a pay increase"  
(Sara).

There is a bit of frustration in that comment. It might be true that it can be easier to get your experience evaluated in a job interview than in an appraisal although we're

not saying that is definitely the case in this scenario. You can put a lot of information in your CV that makes you look more desirable in a job interview. On the other hand your current manager does have some power over you in the appraisal. He should know how likely it is that the employee will look for a new job. When the market situation is like this the likelihood of an employee wanting to change jobs is quite low. Therefore the employee's negotiation powers are weak, leaving the manager with the power to delay any pay rises.

You could at the same time argue how motivated Shipper needs it's employees to be. When you have workers that perform more standardized tasks, you might not need them to be fully motivated to develop and initiate new ideas when their tasks have been completed. Fleming and Sewell (2002, p.860) state; "OK, so we pay our workers low wage but, in return, we turn a blind eye to pretty pilfering and gold-bricking, up to a point" Regardless of whether or not this is Shipper's strategy, the majority of employees agree that they could have better salaries elsewhere. But the salary is not always the most important part for employees;

"Compared what I have been offered by others it is not that good. But if I go and work for someone else than I know it will be strict work and I can't control my time like now" (Emil).

It is obvious that salary is not a motivational factor for Emil. From the quote you can see that autonomy is apparently a huge factor for him. He likes the responsibility received through his autonomy and it plays a large role in his identification;

"These guys here are depending on my work ...if we don't perform then we don't have a job tomorrow...a knife at your throat [he says with a smile]" (Emil).

From this quote you can see two things. First one is that he likes the responsibility and the recognition. He might not get any bonuses for a job well done but he gets the status symbol of being the provider. The second one is the knife joke. Although clearly offered as a joke, something that doesn't need to be taken seriously. It still is a metaphor of how he uses cynicism to distance himself from being powerless to help

his office (Fleming & Spicer 2003; Mumby, 2005). Even though all the employees don't believe the management will downsize the number of employees even further, there is always a danger of the office being closed down entirely, taking the shipment through the other harbours in Denmark and Norway instead. But they are on target with expected number of shipments so at the moment, and if the situation continues to improve, they don't have to worry.

## 5.0 Conclusion

In this last chapter of our thesis we summarize our main findings, contributions and arguments in our research. We will discuss our result from a little broader perspective and reflect on some conclusions and recommendations.

### 5.1 Family metaphor

The employees at the office are particularly saturated with family ideology and they all express how fun and good times they have at work. From the ambiguity point of view between fun and family, we argue whether the emphasises on the family metaphor and family environment is making employees have fun at work or is the fun and humour at the office making them feel like family? Either way, the employees are also feeling comfortable at the office, and at the same time making similar bonds and commitment as within families.

Our findings point into that the family culture within the office is a sub-culture in this organization. The organization is not family-orientated, at least not the headquarters, and the focus is more on tasks and numbers, then on bonding and relationships. The organization has the power over the office, which can put the employees in situations where they have to make the best of *it*, i.e. decisions that come from the headquarters. This makes the family environment at the office fragile.

This also reflects in the context of the Office Manager, who is in little or none rhythm with office employees, due to his distance, physically and mentally, from the office. With a *distant* Office Manager the office environment occur a tangle power distribution, e.g. in context of compliment to employees, where there seems to be a missing link between managers and their subordinates.

Our analysis also brings up the speculations if office members are using *fun and family* to compress the group/office members tighter together in time of changes and downsize.

From our perspective, the family metaphor is positive in many ways, e.g. as *fun* and *good* environment at the office have shown us, and kind bonding among employees which is positive for the employees as well as for the company. But sometimes the metaphor might occur tension and conflicts between work and family life, e.g. with too much work and commitment to the company, with outside work activities among co-workers, or because of unclear power distribution within the office. This tension and conflict that can occur make the family metaphor fragile within the office and we even suggest that the metaphor breaks when it comes to dismissals and laying employees off from the office. When can you fire a family member? That makes us realise that this is just a metaphor that can't replace or be accurately the same as *original* and *real* family relation.

## 5.2 Organizational identity

As we have demonstrated the office employees show strong identification with the organization due to the family metaphor. Although this social identification is very good in many ways, it is very fragile and can be shattered with arrival of an unfair and an unwelcome family member. Since the identity is the employees underlying basis for formulating their priorities and motivation, it is necessary for the management to make sure the organization appeals to the employees.

Here we argue that there is a need for the employees to identify them with the organization in another manner, like connecting to something that the company does, e.g. employees identify them self with the organization because how good and great service the firm is providing. By changing the employee's identification towards the strong company image the employees can better identify them with the organization as a whole.

We have already stated that the organizational identity is better viewed as a fluid and unstable concept. The organizational identity can be seen as a coercive control to influence the employee's behaviour. But it can bring us to the ambiguity about how

strong the identity must be; "It is not clear why weak conceptions of 'identity' are conceptions of identity." (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, p.11)

People have the need to socially identify themselves with groups in order to define who they are and how to behave. A weak identification would still mean that you have some idea of what your purpose is in a relevant situation. Even though the employees identify themselves with for example the organization due to the family metaphor which can be fragile and therefore considered weak, it still strongly motivates them at the moment and should therefore be considered as an identity.

### 5.3 Resistance

At the moment they are happy, they only use cynicism as a defence mechanism. There is no reason for the managers to eliminate this cynicism because of negative psychological influences. However, it should be interesting to follow this further and see when the situation improves, if the employees will still be as understanding as they are now.

In our interviews we witnessed a remarkable tolerance towards the organizations actions following the crisis. It's not every day that you hear from a former employee that completely understands that the company had to lay her off and furthermore thinks they treated her perfectly while doing so. When we managed to interview this particular employee, we thought we would get some contradictions, where we could prove their happiness was not strong as they insisted. That was not the case.

The organization must make sure that communication between offices is open while the business environment goes through a slump. The offices are supposed to be autonomous agents in a large organization, but they have been dealt a blow to their reputation, being accused of breaking promises due to decisions they had no part in. The negative effects of these decisions can leave the employees powerless towards their customer, leaving them with cynicism and irony as a weapon of choice.

The more discouraged the employee will get from being powerless in those situations, the further he will be driven towards the path of the svejk. If in fact the office has a svejk employee it should be impossible for us to notice just by taking a few interviews. The nature of the svejk is to act like he agrees with the company values so only people who know them should be able to notice a change in his behaviour.

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