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# Creating coherence in a public sector organization

A study of the common value system in a municipality

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** The main purpose with this thesis was to describe the complexities involved when public sector organizations initiate changes in their organizational culture. This research also aims to depict how managers in a public organization interpret the implementation of two separate “shared value systems”, that originates from different parts of the organization.

**Research design:** This thesis employs an interpretative approach, where our understanding gradually evolved during the process of investigation. This falls well in line with the hermeneutic process that lay as a foundation for this thesis, the hermeneutic circle was used as a circular process where first the theoretical framework and the methodology was used as a dialectical process in which the pre-understanding develops into new understanding. Secondly the interviews and phenomenon influenced the pre-understanding, creating a gradual movement towards a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon. To grasp the empirical material a critical perspective was also employed in order for the researchers to get closer to the truth, meaning to not take statements at face value but to always ask the question of why. The research design built mainly upon 13 semi-structured interviews which were conducted with 11 managers in the investigated municipality. Secondary material was also used as a means for validating the data and also to get background information about the studied phenomenon. The empirical material was treated as a case study and also presented as a general case study which only served as a means for describing the investigated cultural change effort

**Theory:** The theories that were chosen were developed into a framework describing organizational cultural change as a dialectical process. This framework consists of theories describing organizational culture, organizational identity, identification, and power. These theories were chosen as a way of describing the inherent complexities connected to organizational cultural change efforts. The theoretical framework did not present an exhaustive account of all theories; rather it will show which theories and research lay as the foundation for the analysis and how these are connected to each other. The framework was used to analyse the change effort as a dialectical process.

**Findings:** The analysis describes that when colliding initiatives aims to influence the same organizational variables in the organizational culture, there are complex responses from the organizational members. The effects were found to be connected to a multitude of different theories but one important feature was found to be understanding. Even though the empirical material and the following analysis showed a complex situation as being a result from colliding cultural change initiative, a possible solution was derived from a dialectical change perspective.

**Originality:** Approaching a public sector organization with an interpretative approach will enhance the understanding of what inherent complexities could be found in the context of public sector organization implementing cultural change efforts. There is also an aspect that could be described as contribute to the world of academia in the sense that a dialectical change perspective might be well suited to explain the complexities connected to organizational cultural change efforts. Dialectical change might also hint at possible solutions for possible problems.

**Keywords:** Organizational identity, organizational image, organizational culture, value-system, municipality, Sweden

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# 1 Introduction

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In the book “*On the origins of species*” (1859), Charles Darwin describes how species are naturally selected - meaning that the ones most suited for specific circumstances will survive and others will eventually perish. In a world where organizations become subjected to new phenomenon at an increasing rate, other researchers have also mentioned the notion of survival of the fittest amongst economic entities (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). To tone down this ingress, lets shift the focus to a more common and less grandiose assumption, that organizations are susceptible to both internal and external pressures that might lead to changes in organizations in order for them to adapt to their environment. External pressures for these changes could be for example; political pressures, new laws or policies, technological developments such as communications or logistical developments (Kotter, 1996; Palmer et. al, 2009). DiMaggio and Powell (1991) describe influencing variables such as institutionalism as one possible force that can bring about change; a phenomenon mentioned as isomorphism describes when organizations become more like each other by partaking in the same sort of initiatives that already have proven to be successful. Even though pressures are affecting organizations there are numerous other factors that can influence organizations to instigate changes and for this thesis it will be assumed that organizations when subjected to pressures of different kinds, might try to change. Even though it is understandable that organizations have to change, it is not as easy to describe how this process unfolds. The strategies organizations deploy are one way of coping with the external or internal environment (Porter, 1987). Another way is to think of it as a gradient scale where one goes from emerging strategies to planned strategies, where the emerging strategies can be described as being reactions to, for example external pressures that forces organizations to change in accordance with these pressures (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). If strategies are the plan for action, what then guides the action? Could it be argued that the organizational culture plays an important part here? Jackson and Parry (2008) cites Deal and Kennedys (1982) definition that culture in organizations is “*how we do things around here*” and this is of course important if one considers that in order for the plans to be enacted, the ways organizational members do things could definitely affect how strategies are enacted. Dawson (2003) explains that the understanding of how organizational change should be tackled can be seen through a variety of lenses that directs attention to certain features or processes. With a technical-bureaucratic perspective the formal structural arrangements are in the centre of the lens where

systems of bureaucratic administration tackle the organizational change. Secondly, a political perspective has the focus of the implications of political processes and power relations on the behaviour of the employees – highlighting those different groups have different interest, values and understanding, and may seek different outcomes in change initiatives. Dawson (2003) also argues that culture has been an important perspective that has been central during the last two decades - showing an interest in shaping behaviours through beliefs and values and constructing systems of moral and meaning. According to Sandberg and Targama (2008) there has been a paradigm shift in management. Sandberg and Targama (2008) explains that “The central message is that a shift is taking place in management from using direct techniques, such as specific rules and instructions, to the development and use of more indirect techniques, such as vision, mission, culture and values, together with a leadership based more on dialogue rather than authority for managing human action” (Sandberg & Targama, 2008, p. 1). One way then of viewing organizations is by their inherent internal conditions - their culture. If we accept the notion that culture is “*the way we do things around here*” it is understandable that organizational culture at some point became a focus in the management literature during the 1980s (cf. Schein, 1985; Hofstede, 1990). Culture was thought to be the one thing that could lead organizations to success and organizational culture was becoming the new panacea for leaders in organizations to use. It was thought that culture could enhance the managerial aspects by for example creating normative control structures in organizations (Alvesson, 2004). Whether it is possible or not to change the organizational culture is a question that could be argued as having different answers. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) present three different perspectives. One stance is that changing organizational culture is possible if one possesses the right skills; a second stance is that the variables of organizational culture are plenty and therefore it is only possible to a certain extent to influence the culture. Thirdly the organizational culture is beyond the reach of controlled change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). Depending on what perspective that is salient in the organization the possibilities of managing cultural change differs and this is also true for what kind of leadership that is practised in organizations (Palmer et al. 2009). The values themselves are one important part of organizational culture considering that the values are mentioned as a fundamental part of organizational culture (Schein, 1985; Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Alvesson, 2001). The values are mentioned to be influential when regarding how organizational members act, interpret, and identify themselves in relation to organizations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). Alvesson (2001) bring forth an important aspect for trying to achieve some form of controllability in organizations, but rather than the whole culture as a

battlefield, the discussion focuses on the organizational identity. This is an important variable if we consider that the organizational members identify with the organization to different degrees, for example, how distinct the status and values connected to the organizational culture are (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This thesis will describe and analyze an organizational culture change effort in a public organization, where the focus for the change was to influence the organizational members by creating new values.

Since our investigated organization is active in the public sector, only considering that they are sometimes perceived as being less effective than their private counterparts (Brunsson, in Lind, 2002) could be considered as being one incentive for becoming more efficient. Since the 1980s organizations in the public sector have been subjected to numerous reforms that have the common denominator as being theories connected to the new public management (*NPM*) (Hood & Peters, 2004), these reforms describes different initiatives and ways for the public sector to increase their efficiency and accountability (Larsson & Bäck, 2008). To achieve this, adopting performance goals and measurements are one way to go; other ways are to flatten the hierarchy; or by lean concepts slimming the organizational form (Pollitt, 2008). It should be noted that the term *NPM* is somewhat controversial, it is sometimes used as an abbreviation that conveniently explains reforms that aims to mimic sought after effects from the private sector (cf. Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Politt & Bouckaert, 2004). This could also be understood as managerialism, which is that any organization successfully can adopt any successful model without realizing its potential shortcomings or idiosyncratic variables (Mueller & Carter, 2007). This then is thought to increase the accountability and/or efficiency (Politt & Bouckaert, 2004), but managerialism also becomes a part of the critique and the arguments focuses on the fact that organizations applying these concepts and ideas fail to realize the potential disturbance in neglecting possible shortcomings (Brunsson, 2002). For this thesis *NPM* will be understood as one way of promoting the acceptance and diffusion of the models and theories adopted by the private sector. Politt and Bouckaert (2004) describe *NPM* in a Nordic context where one focal point is customer focus, where the government acts by delivering the solutions. This then is said to be the case in Sweden were it has become increasingly common that public sector organizations, in their quest to become more like the private sector organizations, begins to refer to their citizens as customers (Brunsson, 2002). Public sector organizations are actively seeking to improve their organizations by adopting models and theories developed for the private sector (Politt & Bouckaert, 2004). To connect back at the discussion about organizational culture, one might view the fact that Phoenix in



1993 won a prize for being the best city in the world (Knutsson et al, 2005) as a seed of institutionalism where other cities were viewing their success as a possible way of becoming as good as them. One of their central initiatives was to print their *core values* and visions on cards. This was done after they had been developed based on results from a survey where the citizens were asked to comment on what they thought the city should improve (Knutsson et al, 2003). Even though one might argue whether cards with values is a serious attempt to influence the organizational culture or not, there are some evidence that The Swedish National Association for Municipalities (SKL, 2008) [Internet] have noted that a common set of values might in fact increase efficiency in public sector organizations. So it might not be a great leap to assume that public organizations that are seeking new ways of increasing their possibility to handle change can begin to contemplate whether organizational culture is a possible enabling variable.

It has become more common that public sector organizations actively try to create coherent images of their organizations, portraying themselves as unified entities, but according to Wæraas (2008) public sector organizations would do better to focus their energy in preserving their natural state of diversity. Publications from SKL such as “*Professional customer treatment*”, “*How to succeed with challenging missions*”, and especially “*Enhance the controllability with a common value system – results from a study among some municipalities and county councils*” (SKL, , 2002, 2008, 2010) [Internet] published in 2008, are examples of the fact that the discussion on new theories, when it comes to the Swedish public sector, is now taking ground. According to the HR manager in our municipality, who has been employed in the organization for more that 30 years, there where a lot of buzzwords and discussions about shared value systems as an important organizational tool when the first ideas came about implementing a culture change effort called the “Culture Journey” in 2004.

The current head of the executive office and the current human resource manager have worked together for over 30 years in the executive administration; they were the main founders and driving force behind the “Culture Journey”. According to respondent A:

“The management training and initiatives taken to improve the organization and its leadership have had a line of argument all the way back to the end of the 1980:s. The content of the development work that has been conducted regarding leadership and organisational development has always been built upon experience from previous

programs. We have always tried to come up with a common foundation in our heterogeneous organization” (Respondent A)

When going through the history of leadership development programs in this municipality, there are two major projects that stand out as early strategic thoughts regarding the quest to build a common “foundation”. SESAM (Service, experience, cooperation, work joy, motivation) carried out in 1989 in three phases, for managers, middle management and employees and “Kom ut” (Swedish abbreviation for, municipality development) carried out in the organization in 1995. In 2004 the work to create a common value system started, and with a three-year implementation plan the project aimed to create a common perspective, highlighting that the organization still experienced problems from not having a common focus among their managers. To create a common attitude or approach between the fragmented organizational cultures in the different departments became the primary goal for organizational development.

The introduction of organizational culture into the organizational research literature in the end of the 1970s, beginning of the 1980s, has had a major influence on organizational analysis (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2008), and in the 1990s it was “by many perceived as the single most important element in organizational success” (Alvesson & Sveningsson , 2008 p. 35.). The cultural wind that has affected the climate among private organizations seems to also have reached the public sector in the 2000s (Sandberg & Targama, 2008; Schraeder et al. 2004). The importance of a shared value system is assumed to have a major effect on the strategic controllability, meaning that the organization will increase the possibility to control the behaviour and by that the outcomes of the work performed by the organizational members. In a research assignment given by the SKL in 2008 to Beng-Åke Gustavfsson, he focuses in its description on the importance of a shared value system and the possible effects this might have on private organizations. The rapport that was finished in 2008 states that the reasons for adopting a shared value system can be summarized as:

- The controllability is enhanced and organizational and professional interests can be over won with a shared value system.
- The organization will become more effective.
- Organization legitimizes its internal and external operation.
- The identity of the organization will be affected resulting in a clear image towards the external environment. People will know what the organization stands for. (SKL, 2008) [Internet]

The organizational culture in public sector organizations has been argued as being significantly different than their private counterparts, due to the differences in how they react to external pressure (Schraeder et al. 2004). There are obvious idiosyncratic features connected to the public sector, considering that the it serves constituents, one can assume that there by nature are different goals for these organizations within the different administrations. When then adopting models and theories in the spirit of NPM how will these models effect the public sector organizations that adopt them? Can the willingness to become more effective and increase the accountability in modern and innovative municipalities, in fact become a burden? Will the striving towards an organizational cultural change effort go against the nature of the organization? Are managers in the public sector enchanted by the promises offered by the prêt a porter models of management and how will these organizational change efforts affect public sector organizations? According to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) the quest to implement shared values in order to form a winning culture are inherently ambiguous, dependent on variables such as context, change workers, content of the change program, tactics and processes that are applied. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) also puts forward that regarding implementation of values in organizations; “ It is, of course, important to have some idea of the change direction, but we think that a one-sided focus on values easily invokes a preference for ideals rather than what is realized and what people mean [...] The meanings and understanding of the basic elements of organizational culture that are targeted for rethinking need to be clarified [...] Clarifying problematic assumptions an wishful thinking calls for investigation an self-critique around meanings” (Alvesson & Svenningsson, 2008 p. 178). Sandberg and Targama (2007) also describes that the dominating rationalistic perspective and assumptions in management and organizational science needs to be somewhat questioned and replaced by a new paradigm, the interpretative perspective. “Human behaviour is not controlled by structures, systems and prescriptions as such. Instead it is how people understand those structures, systems and prescriptions that determine their behaviour [...] Building structures and systems will always be an important task for managers. But the design and construction of them only form a small first step in the process of management. The task that remains is to influence how employees’ understand those structures and systems” (Sandberg &Targama, 2007 p. 175)

## **1.1 Purpose**

The main purpose with this thesis is to describe the complexities involved when public sector organizations initiate changes in their organizational culture. Our research also aims to depict how managers in a public organization interpret the implementation of two separate “shared value systems”, that originates from different parts of the organization. The ideas behind and also the processes connected to the implementation of the two initiatives will be portrayed as two different change efforts that are colliding in the common denominator of values. By using an interpretative approach that draws upon hermeneutic assumptions and critical theory we will create a deeper understanding of the current situation and also analyse the complex situation emerging in the organizational culture of the municipality. This approach will derive a possible explanation to whether a common set of values will bring about greater effectiveness in executing the overall organizational goals in this public sector organization. The purpose of this thesis is then not to do a in dept analyse of all parts of a change initiative, but rather to try to get a basic understanding of the ambiguity around the understanding of the initiatives – and especially how this unfolds in a public sector organization.

## **1.2 Research questions**

How does the managers in a public sector organization interpret an introduction of a shared value-system, aimed at creating a common organizational culture?

How does the interpretation of two value-systems, influence the possibility to create a common organizational culture in the municipality?

## **1.3 Restriction**

The quest to explain the interpretations around the use of value systems in this organization is set to be discovered at the management levels in one of Sweden’s most successful municipalities – consequently this thesis is only dealing with the shared value-systems that have been implemented within the investigated public sector organization. The empirical material is primarily collected in the higher levels of management, both when it comes to the operative side and the political side of the organization. The focus is centred on organizational members that have had access to formal power to introduce and managed the implementation of the shared value-system, or is in direct contact with the current developments of the project.

## 2 Method

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*In this chapter the authors pre-understanding and conceptual framework will be presented and the way this investigation was conducted will also be described. The research design will be followed by a discussion of the credibility and also the inherent limitations of this thesis.*

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### 2.1 Epistemology and Ontology

This thesis build upon the preconceptions that reality is something that is socially constructed - meaning that reality is created by interactions between individuals (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). Social constructionism builds upon ideas from phenomenology which state that reality can not be seen as something objective - the reasoning being that reality is dependent on how it is perceived (Mearlau-ponty, 2002). This is argued to be connected to individual experience in the sense that one can only perceive reality based on ones experience. It is also described that different individuals might interpret and understand one specific phenomenon completely different, but in accordance with their own experience, and by that their pre-understanding of what reality is (Mearlau-ponty, 2002). Understanding and relating to reality as being constructed socially and being somewhat idiosyncratic might enable a less rigid preconception of what actually is going on in a social situation or interaction.

#### 2.1.1 An Interpretative approach

When it is the purpose for this thesis to understand the reality in a social context, it becomes necessary to counter our own pre understanding of how organizations are structured and works. Approaching the organization was done without a clear understanding of what was to be studied - so there was a need for an open mind. We employed an interpretative approach, where our understanding gradually evolved during the process of investigation. Bartlett (1991) describes that understanding of a phenomenon can be achieved by using the assumed problem as a basis for questions. This then is argued to enable the researcher to develop an understanding from where the phenomenon originated (Bartlett, 1991). In order for an understanding to be created, researchers need to use their theoretical framework in a dialectical process together with the methodology (Bartlett, 1991), and for it to be possible to derive what the studied phenomenon really was, this process allowed our observations to be understood in the organizational context and with our own pre-assumptions in mind.

The dialectical process employed in this thesis can also be understood as parts of the hermeneutic circle, where the pre-understanding serves as the basis from where understanding is created (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005). The hermeneutic circle is described as the relationship between parts and whole where one cannot be understood without the other. For this thesis, this could be seen as the process between the interviews and the phenomenon. By employing the hermeneutic circle the phenomenon build upon a circular process where first the theoretical framework and the methodology was used as a dialectical process in which the pre-understanding develops into new understanding. Secondly, the interviews and phenomenon itself influenced the pre-understanding, creating a gradual movement towards a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon.

To also use critical theory could be understood as developing an understanding of the studied phenomena, then questioning its current state (Mingers, 2000; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). This becomes an important part of the investigative process if it is to be possible not to only follow the path dictated by the assumptions given in, for example the theoretical framework or interviews. The critical theory act as a countermeasure against the influence proposed by genealogy, that describes how knowledge might influence conceptual understandings of a phenomenon (Calás & Smircich, 1999). To question a phenomenon might not in itself be fruitful; but needs some form of purpose. Critical management studies (CMS) could contribute by assessing possible actions to negate the perceived problem (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2009). For this thesis a combination between CMS and Critical Theory were chosen for the purpose to give practitioners in the investigated organizations an insight in one possible external perception of the studied phenomenon and also how this observation could be useful.

### **2.1.2 A qualitative approach**

This thesis aims to depict a phenomenon in a social context and it has been argued that researchers will have a greater chance of uncovering one possible reality when qualitative research methods are used (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) mention that qualitative research methods are not however suitable for all kinds of research; for example if the purpose is to extrapolate the results to a greater population a quantitative approach would probably be a better match. Our aim is to understand the investigated phenomenon from an interpretative view, but the researchers are critical of weather the results can be applied in different contexts. The results should via a qualitative approach create a

deeper understanding of what social phenomenon's are interacting in the investigated organizations internal environment. Interviews and interpretations therefore become central for this thesis; they were chosen in order to create a deeper understanding. Using qualitative research methods are not by any means unambiguous and positive, there are problems associated with this approach, for instance it is thought as being time consuming and subjective, but it gives the opportunity to dive deeper into the investigated phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

## **2.2 Strategic choices**

The methodological considerations will impose rules on what can be seen and what can be done, so in order to ascertain that the researchers methods coincide with the stipulated methodologies it is necessary to thoroughly plan and describe the methods that were applied throughout the investigative phase of this thesis. One public sector organization will be the focus of this thesis, the choice of organization became a question of accessibility, where the before mentioned organization showed a willingness and interest in having one of their change initiatives analyzed. Access to the company was basically given through personal contacts belonging to one of the researchers. The initial contact was in a meeting that took place at the organization where information related to what they had done in their organization was given. Respondents were selected with the assistance from our organizational contact within the researched organization, this was a conscious choice to ascertain that the individuals picked were pertinent and had information deemed necessary. The individuals were divided into three different groups (see appendix 1):

- Individuals on the operative side (8 individuals, 9 interviews)
- Co-workers lower down in the organizational hierarchy (2 individuals, 2 interviews)
- Individuals on the political side (3 individuals, 3 interviews)

### **2.2.1 Collecting empirical material**

The heads of the different administrative departments were interviewed; this was done in the operative side of the organization. The political side of the organization were represented by the local government commissioner and the commissioner of the opposition. The former local government commissioner was also interviewed. The department of Education, Leisure and Culture was single out for deeper research when it comes to hierarchal positions, and here people in the lower part of the organization were taken into consideration. To ascertain that the methodological considerations were followed, the choice of interview method fell on the semi-structured interview. As described by Denscombe (2000) this interview structure allows

for the respondent to have a conversation that is loosely based upon an interview guide (see appendix). It is also possible to include new questions that rise during the interview (Bryman, 2001), and considering that no clear understanding of the cultural change process was present in the beginning it became a suitable choice for the purpose of this thesis. Rubin and Rubin (1995) describes that it might become necessary to make ethical considerations, to assure that the respondents will not be reprimanded or in other ways negatively affected by partaking in the interviews. This aspect was introduced as a way of securing the anonymity of both the respondents and the organization, even though we are well aware of the fact that it is almost by nature impossible to avoid biases in the empirical material. One belief was also that this would make respondents more prone to divulge information. Even though the interviews were to be considered the primary source of information, secondary data in forms of internal documents, research documents, and also documents from associations related to the investigated organization were used. The secondary material was used as a source of background information and also as a way of validating the responses, and description of change projects, given by the organizational members.

### **2.3 Contribution**

This thesis aims to contribute in knowledge development on what theoretical considerations are needed when applying theories in the field of public sector organizations. By investigating a social phenomenon in a public organization this thesis will contribute to a deeper understanding of what complexities that exists in an organizational culture subjected to organizational change efforts. An in depth study of this kind of organization and their organizational culture change efforts could prove useful, considering that there is an interest in the kind of effort done in the investigated municipality. By interviewing the executive managers in this municipality a broad perspective might show fruitful in capturing the plurality and diversity that is salient in this kind of organization; this might also contribute in the understanding of the complex situations that are inherent in the governance of municipalities. This research aims to describe and critically discuss the studied phenomenon, and by that contribute by questioning the prevalent structures and understandings that are salient in the studied organization. By employing a dialectical perspective we will enhance the possibility to gain knowledge about how people handle organizational change in public organizations.



## 2.4 Credibility

Qualitative studies should focus on validity in the sense that it should be plausible, credible and trustworthy (Johnson, 1997; Huberman & Miles, 2002). Johnson (1997) describes that the researcher should take the role of a detective who in this role should look for evidence that can explain the studied phenomena. One way of increasing the *descriptive validity* is by using low inference descriptors, meaning to stay as close as possible to the respondent's accounts (Johnson, 1997). The researchers recorded all interviews and carefully transcribed them in order to capture the interview. Even though the transcripts were summarized so that the mass of texts should be easier to handle the transcripts were still used in order to get direct quotes from the respondents. The *interpretative validity* which is a way of assuring a correct repetition of the respondents accounts, and by that understand what the respondent actually were saying (Johnson, 1997; Huberman & Miles, 2002), was to some extent met by using participant feedback where the interpretations were checked against the respondent or other individuals familiar with the same phenomenon (Johnson, 1997). The interpretations in this study were checked in three different ways, first were the interpretations checked during the interviews if there were any questions regarding the meaning of the accounts offered by the respondent, secondly the contact within the organization was asked to comment on whether our understanding of the phenomenon was correct or not. As a third option the secondary material was used to investigate whether the accounts seemed plausible or not. Secondary material is often in summarized forms, and available to the public (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). This eases the process of getting an overview of the situation. The secondary material was hand-outs formulated by the investigated organization, and also internal documents. The material was used mostly to give a background description of the studied phenomenon and also to validate the comments and answers given by the respondents. It is important to have an understanding that the secondary material can be biased by it being written by individuals having a specific intent for its use (Stewart & Kamins, 1993). There is also the fact that all interviews and all secondary material is in Swedish, so there is also a possibility that some aspects might have been lost in the process of translating the empirical material. To completely rule out the possibility of misinterpretation is probably not feasible. By sheer deduction and using the social-constructionist perspective one might see how one view might not exactly coincide with another (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). *Theoretical validity* is a third kind of validity, this then describes whether the chosen theories fairly can describe the studied phenomenon, to ascertain this researchers might use theoretical triangulation to describe the phenomenon (Johnson, 1997). The theories used in this thesis were chosen during

the investigation and revised during the process; this to make sure that it was possible to describe the phenomenon in the right way. A fourth kind of validity is the *external validity*, which is mainly a way of appreciating whether the research could be generalized to a greater population. A qualitative study is not feasible for creating generalizable results (Bryman & Bell, 2007), and this being a study focused upon organizational culture makes it more so considering the ambiguous nature of this topic.

## **2.5 Limitations**

This investigation was done primary with the use of interviews, the respondents were anonymized so that there were to be no risk for them to express their thoughts about the studied phenomenon, and this will in some ways hinder future researchers to do the exact study again. Respondents were not randomly chosen, instead the selection was suggested by the inside contact in the investigated organization, so there are certainly some problems regarding to whether we could investigate the phenomenon from a viewpoint that encompassed a fair view representing a cross-section held by the organizational members. In light of this last critique one possible rebuttal is that the critical theory would suggest a questioning stance (Minger, 2000), possibly negating that issue by always ask the question of why? Even if this question is asked the problems related to biased interviews might never fully be negated. Johnson (1997) describes that an extended fieldwork should when possible be used in order to increase the theoretical validity. This investigation was conducted during a limited time span, so considering for example that environmental variables and social contexts change, the theoretical validity might be somewhat impaired, causing the analysis to be considered as valid in an alethic sense. By not using negative case sampling, meaning that the researchers study the opposite scale of a phenomenon, the conclusions derived from the empirical material might only be valid in the investigated organization (Johnson, 1997). Considering the idiosyncratic features present in organizations it is even more so that the conclusions only are viable to use as a departing point for discussions. By using other researchers experience and knowledge, peer review could prove helpful in creating a deeper understanding and also to test our conclusions (Johnson, 1997). Time constraints, also present in the reason for lacking theoretical validity, to use peer review has not been possible to an extent that would increase the validity in this thesis. One way of critically assess the findings in this thesis could be described by critical or evaluative validity, meaning that researchers make judgements on the studied phenomenon (Huberman & Miles, 2002). The authors of this

thesis have their pre-understandings of how organizations should or should not work; this could in turn influence the interpretation of statements and not accurately understand the respondent's accounts.

### **3 Theoretical framework**

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*In the introduction there are some descriptions of organizational change, in this chapter organizational change will be developed into a framework describing organizational cultural change as a dialectical process. This framework will later be used as a way of analyzing the empirical material. This chapter will not present an exhaustive account of all theories; rather it will show which theories and research lay as the foundation for the analysis and how these are connected to each other.*

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#### **3.1 Organizational change**

When trying to study organizations, and specifically the way they change, the image of the nature of change itself can become a battle of interpretation, in that the view of the organization itself might become a question of how the organizational members perceive their respective reality in accordance with the belief described by the interpretative perspective. For this thesis the focus will be on how change can be viewed as a dialectical process, where opposing paradigms or forces compete in becoming a dominating or primary organizational entity (Benson, 1977). Changes then would be described as being the results of theses, competing forces, stated by Van de Ven and Poole (1995), these opposing forces are the motors of change. *A dialectical motor* consists of a thesis and its antithesis, which compete within an organization (Benson, 1977; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995), resulting in a synthesis. The dialectical motor of change and the dialectical theory of change is recognized by “[T]he Hegalian assumption that the entity exist in a pluralistic world of colliding events, forces and contradictory values that compete with each other for domination and control” (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995, p. 517). Looking at change through the logic of dialectical theory requires that at least two entities confront each other, and embody these oppositions to engage one another in conflict (Benson, 1977; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). The competing thesis in an organization might not always result in a positive or creative synthesis; the antithesis might overthrow the thesis (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). It might also be the case that organizations do not want to challenge the thesis and therefore oppresses any form that could be regarded as being an anti-thesis (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Organizations might also want to remain in relative stability and in that case both the thesis and the antithesis would exist at the same time, but any change would result in some form of synthesis. Organizational changes are not only characterised by which motors that drives them. The perception of organizational changes has

evolved in their descriptions and focus. This have been exemplary described by Marshak (2002)

“[T]he keys to success in the context of industrial age, such as productive and/or technological capacity, certainty and stability, and independence and autonomy, are being replaced by market and/or customer orientation, speed, flexibility and innovation, and interdependence and partnership. Because of this change in contexts, contemporary organizational change also appears to be changing [...] addressing parts/segments of an organization to addressing more encompassing patterns/wholes, and second from episodic change to virtually continuous change [...] for example since the 1990s both practitioners and researchers have suggested that whole-system, rather than part-system, change is most likely to lead to successful organizational performance” (Marshak 2002, p 281-282).

To describe organizational changes will for this thesis become central, when trying to illuminate the complexities inherent to organizational cultural changes. Marshak (2002) describes a possible evolution of organizational change; but it serves a purpose to describe changes from different perspectives to illuminate the inherent complexities connected to organizational change. From one view, change could be described as being episodic or continuous (Weick & Quinn, 1999; Marshak, 2002). Episodic change can be described as changes that are initiated with a clear end state; they are discontinuous in their nature. Changes of this nature are argued as being a response to a perceived disequilibrium, the organizational effectiveness is decreasing and in order to achieve the sought after increase the organization needs to change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). The second perspective is the continuous change, an eternal process with no end state (Weick & Quinn, 1999). In the light of dialectical motors of change it might be possible to discern the nature of change as something that describes the extent of the studied organizational change. Another nuance on how to view change is to describe it as a developmental change which is a type of incremental change that aims to improve the existing parts of an organization (Ackerman, 1997; Marshak, 2002); or as transitional change, where the organization moves from one state to another; or as transformational change where the organization radically changes for example, organizational culture and/or structure (Ackerman, 1997).

In the light of organizational change being multifaceted and complex, one might ask the question why changes occur in organizations. The answer to the question of why might be explained as responses to external forces such as pressures from actors within the organization (Pettigrew & Whipp, 1992). This is described by Seo and Creed (2002) that “the dialectical perspective alerts us to the idea that social arrangements are produced and reproduced through political struggles among people with unequal power and that those who benefit from social arrangements are likely to be active in their reproduction and maintenance” (Seo & Creed,

2002, p.241). This implies that organizational members that are influential and that benefit from certain organizational aspects tend to defend their existing thesis, so in other word the antithesis would have to become powerful enough to challenge the existing thesis in order to create a dialectical motor of change. Pressures are not only relevant as political factors but there are other theories describing external factors that might influence organizations. One possible external factor that might pressure organizations to change is explained by the institutional theory, where organizations are presumed to adopt models and theories from other similar organizations due to the pressures from within an industry (Mueller & Carter, 2007). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1991) there are three different pressures. The first is coercive and can encompass the political pressures, the second is mimicking where adoption of concepts that are considered as successful are reproduced, the third is the normative pressure which could be described as the values adopted by managers. Whether the factors influence organizations to a degree where they act on them or not, one thing that could be assumed is that the influences somehow will get a response from the organizations. To understand the nature of change is an important factor when choosing strategy –for example in change cultural change programs.

How organizations react to the pressures could be described as two fold, either the strategies are of the planned kind where the assumption is that managers are actively seeking to improve the organization by stating clear and defined goals for a future position (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). On the other hand a strategy that builds on an emergent approach could be described as being how external and internal forces interact with the organization. The interaction then becomes the basis for how the organization chooses to either capitalize or in other ways react to the interaction (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Strategies then could also be described as being results of both determined (*planned*) and emergent ideas, even though some form of trajectory is needed, the strategies should be formulated so they take into account both aspects (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Strategies for change could also be described as being results of both determined and emergent ideas (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). To be able to manage the strategies they argue that even though direction is needed, this should be done in a way so that it is possible to react to both external and internal pressures during the continuous strategy process. This is also mentioned by Burnes (1996) that describe that the two strategic approaches should not be viewed as opposites but rather as complementary. Planned strategy is formulated from the top and passed down, this approach is best suited in stable

environments, as the opposite for change strategies that are emergent, these strategies are best suited for instable environments (Burnes, 1996).

Marshak (2002) describes that in order for organizational changes to succeed there are valuable lessons to consider, three of those are:

- Assumptions about what organizational changes are, is not the same for all individuals in organizations.
- Reflect upon how these assumptions limits ones way, of conceptualizing the dynamics of organizational change.
- Transformational changes would work better if metaphors are reworked so they fit the idiosyncratic features of specific organizational changes. (Marshak, 2002)

This shows that it is important to consider both assumptions and metaphors in use, and that these variables might influence organizational changes. The assumptions and ways of conceptualizing change are described by Palmer et al. (2009), where they describe how different mindsets of change agents will impose different rules in how to manage change. Palmer et al. (2009) presents a comprehensive perspective on how to understand the image of managing change. They present the “*six image framework*” in which they introduce six different perspectives on organizational change.

	<b>Controlling activities</b>	<b>Shaping Capabilities</b>
<b>Intended Outcomes</b>	Director -Change is achievable -Change is strategic	Coach -Can shape organization intentionally -Building on values and skills
<b>Partially Intended Outcomes</b>	Navigator -Change depends on external factors -Change is partly emergent	Interpreter -Creating meaning for organizational members -Uses sensemaking
<b>Unintended Outcomes</b>	Caretaker -Control is hindered by external and internal factors -Change is emergent	Nurturer -Can not control outcomes -Outcomes can not be shaped

(Table 3.1 Images of managing change Palmer et al., 2009)

As is shown in the above framework, the different perspectives view change in different ways, so when changes are to take place in organizations, the perspective held by the change agent will influence which type of change that is to be used and also how the change is handled (Palmer & Dunford, 2008; Palmer et al., 2009). The different images that can be seen in the six-image framework describe different views and perceptions on managing change and the understanding is somewhat limited to the managers in the organization.

When changes occur it becomes necessary for organizations to have change agents that can describe the change initiative when it is under way (Weick & Quinn, 1999) This process is called sensemaking, and has the purpose to infuse organizational members with understanding so they can better cope with change (Weick & Quinn, 2005). According to Weick and Quinn (2005) sensemaking can facilitate change by making organizational members used to what has been changed and by that institutionalizing the new behaviour. Individuals that experience ambiguous phenomena do not have to resolve it; they will search for meaning and after meaning is created derive the most plausible solution (Weick & Quinn, 2005).

We might then establish that changes in organizations are complex in that they can take many forms, as well as being interpreted and understood in a variety of different ways. Changes could also be understood as dialectical processes where opposing organizational variables constantly are jockeying for position; the dominant perceived thesis might be challenged by an emerging antithesis, thus creating a situation where multiple theses are competing and by that creates a dialectical motor of change. It is also possible to assume that change agents in organizations will influence organizational changes in that their assumptions and frame of reference dictates how they manage change. Organizational members could be understood as having different ways of conceptualizing change, meaning that they might have different interpretations of the changes. Considering that the focus for this thesis is organizational cultural change and builds upon the notion of cultures being “*the ways of how they do things*”, descriptions of changes are not enough in order to describe the complexities connected to organizational cultural change efforts.

### **3.2 Organizational cultural change**

In order to stipulate how to change organizational culture, we first have to establish what organizational culture is. The organizational culture could be described as the social context in organizations where organizational members are actively performing their designated tasks (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008). It could also as mentioned in the introduction be seen as “*the way we do things around here*”, but in fact there is no clear definition on what organizational culture is, or what variables form an organizational culture (Alvesson, in Lind, 2002). There exists however different possible definitions of what culture is; one explanation is that organizational culture could be divided up in three cognitive levels; artefacts, values,



and finally the tacit assumptions (Schein, 1990). Artefacts is what the researcher observes and feels when he /she enters the organization; things on the surface such as what we feel, smell and hear. It can also be products, manifestations and for example annual reports. We might for example see if a company is more formal than another, but it does not necessary tell us why it is so, or what meaning it has for the employees (Schein 1990). To fully understand the observed behaviours and artefacts in organizations, we need to grasp and understand the values that the employees express; as the way they feel and think, but more importantly we also need to understand the mysteries of unconscious underlying assumptions that may guide perception, thought processes, feeling and behaviours – or else our picture of the culture might be incorrect or preconceived (Schein 1990). Pettigrew (1979) describes organizational cultures as the interpretative framework from which individuals interpret themselves and their relation to others, by adding that organizational cultures are composed of symbols, ideology, myths, and language. Even though there are many different definitions on what organizational culture is, Hofstaede (1990) showed that there are seven specific variables that are visible in all organizational cultures:

- Holistic phenomena that involves more than one individual.
- Historic in the sense that it is emergent and based on traditions and customs.
- Inert, it is difficult to change when it is based on for example values.
- Socially constructed, shared by individuals belonging to different groups.
- Vague and hard to define.
- Rituals myths and the like.
- Values and ideas.

(Hofstaede, (1990) in, Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2009)

Even though these seven variables were found to be the common characteristics, organizational culture can be nuanced with Ashforth and Maels (1989) descriptions that organizations could be ideographic, as for example in sub-units where different organizational identities are dominant in different units. Ashforth and Mael (1989) also describe that organizational members not necessarily have to identify with the dominant culture in order for organizational culture to exist. When then connecting this to organizational change it becomes a question of whether such ambiguous phenomena could be influenced. When considering the different images of managing change we could divide them into three different categories as noted by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008):

- Controllable, this view of cultural change believes that having the right resources and skills might make it possible to change the organizational culture.
- Partly controllable, views organizational cultural change as being very complex and hard, going back on what culture is, it becomes possible to see that there are a many possible problems with efforts trying to influence the organizational culture.

- Uncontrollable, view organizational culture as being beyond control. (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2008)

The different ideas of what organizational culture is and whether changing the organizational culture is a realistic task, becomes a question of what purpose the organizational culture serves in an organization. Depending to what degree organizational members prescribe to the communicated organizational culture would become central if there is to be any positive effects connected to a change aimed at influencing the culture.

### **3.2.1 Organizational identities and identification**

Organizational members and their identification with organizational culture is then an important part of an organizations present culture. Identities then will for the purpose of this thesis be assumed as being connected to the organizational culture by cultural-ideological control; organizations can use this to target the values, beliefs, and identification of specific employees so it then becomes a question of where individuals feel they belong (Alvesson, 2001). The understanding of organizational identity can be nuanced via social identification, where individuals classify themselves as belonging to different social groups (Ashford & Mael, 1989). Furthermore organizational identities could be understood as the collective perception of what distinguish one organization from another (Gioia, et al., 2000). Individuals might belong to multiple categories depending on what perspective is used, phenomenology describes for instance that individuals differ from their perceptions in how they perceive reality and by that individuals will have different accounts of for instance a specific phenomenon (Mearleua-Ponty, 2002).

Identity as a term could be described as being the notion of self, who am I and by that, describing how I should act (Alvesson, 2004). Alvesson (2004) describes that identity not only have to be connected to an individual sense of self, but that identity also can be connected to the professional identity, meaning that some individuals tend to lean towards their educational background or their profession. This then is described as having an impact on the individual identity - making people identify with their profession and not necessary the organizational identity (Alvesson, 2004). It is mentioned by Collinson (2003) that identities as a phenomenon have evolved and become less focused on it being a fixed position composed by gender, race, or social status. Identities has become more of a fluid state that can have resulted in a greater freedom, and as a direct result from that it is argued that the subjectivity connected to social identification have become more complex (Collinson, 2003).

Individuals that try to answer the question of who one is, might try to become members of organizations - something that the individual might need to establish their own identity. Social identity theory states that identification with social categories are ways of increasing self esteem, connecting ones self to favourable categories might enhance the notion of whom one is (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This can also be noted in Goffmans (1949) argument that status might be ranked in prestige, and this then coupled to the previous argument can be used to state the importance of identification when it comes to what individuals look for when they contemplate whether or not they should approach a specific social category. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, different organizational identities might be salient in different parts of one organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), so in one organization different cultures might exist to which different individuals subscribe. The question of to what extent individuals identify themselves with an organizational identity is described in three different stages of organizational identification by Collinson (2003). Each stage states different degrees of identification. *Conformist selves* describe how individuals that identify with an organization will accept the variables making up the organizational identity. *Dramaturgical selves* is defined by that the organizational members identify with the organizational identity to a certain degree, but by becoming more aware of the structures affecting their identity they might manufacture behaviour coinciding with the surveillance-systems in the organization. *Resistant selves* are the third category, which would apply when organizational members no longer want to subscribe to a specific identity. Dissatisfaction or a view of the organizational identity as being incapable of reflecting ones own identity, will lead those organizational members to create new and more flattering identities. It should be mentioned that the phenomenon described by Collinson (2003) are stated as being more visible in surveillance-based organizations. One might stretch the argument by stating that all organizations are to varying degrees surveillance-based, and that organizations conducting some form of initiative aimed at influencing the cultural aspects to obtain some form of control mechanism in a organization are susceptible such phenomenon as described by Collinson (2003).

Organizational culture is then to varying degrees dependent on the organizational members, meaning that it is important that they identify strongly with the values that the organization communicate in order to create for example a sought after behaviour. When organizational members dislike the communicated identity sub-cultures might appear. It becomes clear with the above description that organizational identities are everything but unambiguous, and there

are a multitude of variables dictating the processes involved in crafting and maintaining organizational identities. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) state that there are nine different modes for organizations to contemplate when trying to achieve identity regulation in the organization.

- 1) Defining the person directly
- 2) Defining the person by defining others
- 3) Providing a vocabulary of motives
- 4) Explicating morals and values
- 5) Knowledge and skills
- 6) Group categorization and affiliation
- 7) Hierarchical location
- 8) Establishing and clarifying a distinct set of rules of the game
- 9) Clarifying the context

These nine modes that can be seen above could be used as a way of analyzing how these regulating processes interact and work, and by that reduce the level of uncertainty and infuse some clarity when it comes to organizational identity (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). It becomes important to note that there exist ideas that illuminate morals and values – in creating a common value system that the organizational members should identify with in order to not feel excluded from the organization. The feeling of being a member of a coherent organization with specific values then has a self managing effect where for example the feeling of being excluded is avoided by the organizational members (Alvesson & Willmott 2002) Organizational identity could then be described as being the identity portrayed by the organization; it encompasses the features that answer the question of, who we are, and how we should act. But for it to be possible to discern why organizational members ascribe to specific values or not is a complicated discussion, also it is a question of to what extent organizational members in fact identify with the organizational identity and with that embodies the organizational culture.

### **3.3 Organizational power**

Instigating organizational cultural changes could then be described as a complex task, and for this thesis it becomes important to consider the aspects relating to power in a way of understanding who dictates whether or what type of organizational change that is to take place. Seo and Creed (2002) points to the political aspects as being an important factor in organizational changes. Actors that are in powerful positions tend to entrench themselves by reinforce the organizational variables that benefits them the most (Seo & Creed, 2002). When then connecting back to the discussion about dialectical motors of change one might view this aspect as being important in that it illuminates the power variable in organizations. Even

though the power aspect might be considered as being important there are however many nuances of power that might influence organizational cultural change efforts. Hardy (1996) states that power could be seen as the force that affects outcomes. In order to understand what the word power means one have to ask the question of to what purpose it is used (Krackhardt, 1990). Power has also been described as to what extent one actor is more powerful than another (Kotter, 1978). Depending on, in what context power is used, it will appear differently. Our investigation was performed in a politicized organization, so trying to ascertain in what way power is used, becomes central. Krackhardt (1990) describes that the political structure can be used to shine a light on the power aspects in organizations; it is possible to see interactions and relationships as power outlets where actions are converted into results. Hardy (1996) defines power in four possible variations. The first is the power over resources and this encompass the aspect of having the control over the rewards and punishments in the organization. Secondly she mentions processes were the focus becomes that of the decision-making and control over the agenda. The third category is the power of meaning where the organizational language, rituals, and symbols are the variables controlled. The fourth power becomes a compilation of the three mentioned earlier, and by controlling these three simultaneously actors might be considered as having power over the system (Hardy, 1996). But as was stated earlier power come in many forms, and organizational culture could be stated as becoming an important category of power when considering that this dimension dictates and promotes one specific world view (Alvesson, 2002). This could also imply that the promoted culture paradigm cancel out competing cultural paradigms by not acknowledging them. In organizations there are to different extent struggles between cultural paradigms (Alvesson, 2002). So by combining Hardys (1996) third dimension of power over meaning, with Alvessons (2002) description of culture as one possible power, we have one form of power that dictates what behaviours and actions that are acceptable, also called normative power. Normative power then is in a sense to influence and dictate how the organizational member should understand and interpret specific phenomenon, and by that influencing their actions. Considering that organizational changes could be viewed as the use of power, and adding to this that the change is in fact aimed at influencing the organizational culture it might be possible to see how organizational cultural changes might be perceived differently depending on how this initiative would affects different actors in the organization. It is also possible to state that greater power also affect to what extent changes have an effect.

### **3.4 Organizational cultural change efforts as a dialectical process**

As have been described above there are numerous variables that become important to illuminate when describing an organizational cultural change effort. The studied organization could be described as having a dialectical motor of change considering that there are two sets of common values active at the same time. The dialectical process will be used as an analytical model, which will illuminate and depict the different complexities involved and how they are interconnected to each other. A dialectical perspective will therefore enable the researchers to not just look at organizational cultural change efforts as something that are perpetrated by management, rather this will take into account how organizational members differ in their perception and understanding of the studied cultural change effort.

## **4 The Friendly Municipality in the South**

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*In this section the empirical material will be presented in the form of a case. Background information and a detailed description of what we believe is the most important information extracted from the interviews will be presented in summarized format and in direct quotes.*

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The municipality investigated in this thesis holds approximately 21000 inhabitants. It has become renowned in Sweden for its exemplary schools and its devotion to create qualitative services for its citizens. This being a public sector organization, power structures becomes a focal point, therefore it serves a purpose for this thesis to describe how the governance is structured. The highest deciding function is *the municipality council*, this organizational body focuses on decisions with great significance for the municipality, and it also states the overall guidelines for the work being done. Below resides *the local government board* which functions as the government. There are eleven members of the local government board, they are politically appointed; the distribution of power is directly connected to the number of mandates by respective political party represented in the board. Their task is to direct and guide *the departments* that serve the municipality in its concerns. *The departments'* answers to the local government board in their operations, there are six departments which all govern their own area of operations. They also execute the decisions taken by the municipality council. Below the six boards there are *administrations* connected to the different departments, which enacts and carry out the political decisions. Employees connected to the administrations are not politically appointed so there is a distinct difference imbued in the organizational structure. It could be described as being two separate parts of one organization, the political side dictates *what* and *when* and the executive side enacts this by stating *how it shall be done* and by *whom*. Worth mentioning is also KSAU which is a working group developing specific work task given from the local government board.

History can also become quite significant when describing this municipality, there are some situational factors that distinguishes this municipality from others, one important factor were described by the local government commissioner as being connected to the mandate. Spanning 30 years the same political bloc have governed this municipality by intermediate majority, this have made them more prone to plan in longer periods than the usual focus on the mandate period of four years. In the end of the 1990s the municipality initiated a

reorganization of the department of education and they were to start working more as one common entity, and it was identified as important to get the schools to strive towards the same goals. This reorganization set in motion events that were to influence the municipality significantly. Following this reorganization the schools were awarded for being the best in Sweden. The municipality have been recognized and awarded for their outstanding work on increasing the quality for their citizens. In 2007 the municipality became awarded the best quality municipality in Sweden.

Even though they have been successful there have also been organizational challenges. This thesis will present the empirical material as a general case study focusing on one organizational cultural change effort which aimed to create a common set of values. This effort was called “*The Culture Journey*”. This effort will be presented in the order seen below:

Creating a culture	The administrative side of the municipality starts a process of designing a cultural change effort aimed at influencing the organizational culture through a common set of values. The initiative is implemented in the organization, after the implementation this effort is considered as being successful.
A new culture?	The political side of the municipality creates a Brand Initiative that inadvertently launches a competing set of common values in the organization. This initiative is launched approximately one year after “ <i>The Culture Journey</i> ”.
The situation today	What have happened in the organization in regards to the managers perception of the two common sets of values?

(Table 4.1 Presentation of empirical material, Andersson & Östberg, 2010)

#### 4.1 Creating a culture

In 2004 the awareness of a diversified organizational culture in this municipality is perceived as a disadvantage and is fast becoming the most discussed problem within the top management team. There are opinions stating that the strong sub-cultures existing in the different department are getting to strong so that the notion of being one integrated organization that works for the same goal is possibly nonexistent. The Achilles heel expressed by the top management team is said to be the absence of a common way of thinking, as well as the lack of a shared value system to make up an attitude or approach of how to do things in the organization. Since the beginning of the 1980s, some interviewed managers have been central to the strategic development of the organization. They highlight



the importance of the common thread in their work to develop the organization. According to *Respondent A* who has worked with *Respondent B* in the organization for more than 30 years, there has certainly been a quest to change the fragmented view amongst the managers in the organization. Looking back at two major change efforts done in the organization *Respondent A* comes back to the lack of something common in public sector organizations, that almost by nature are diversified due to the diverse tasks performed by the different departments. This lack of something common can be stated as being a problem and something that has characterized this municipality. It is also something that they have constantly tried to improve. In the end of the 1980s the feeling of a heterogenic organization made up by strong sub-cultures among the, at that time twelve department strong organization, was territorial.

“We had an organization that was unable to understand and take into account each others differences. Basically we had an organization consisting of twelve “municipalities”, and the need to do something to create a common view in our leadership was one of the first things that we started to wonder about” (Respondent A)

The result of the discussion at the time became apparent in a couple of leadership education programmes made by the Swedish Management Group in the 1980:s (Internal document 6). This work led to the introduction of a project that focused on; cooperation, experience, service, work joy and motivation among managers and employees. The project is mentioned as the foundation for the first ever understanding among their employees that a common view amongst managers might create more value.

“We were dead serious about our vision of creating a new way of looking at our leadership and how we all should work together between the departments. It was about opening the eyes of the employees. We need more culture, and work more like a company.” (Respondent A)

The conclusions and experience of this project, led to yet another attempt to create coherence in 1995. This time the focus was set on the psychosocial work environment and it was stated that a learning municipality is a living municipality, which becomes a leading municipality. One focus in this project was on the values and identity and to discuss these aspects in relation to their work environment (internal document 7). One of the interesting things that were shown in this project was that they did a summary in the end of the project where the employees were asked to reflect on their identities and values and how to move further with these types of questions in the organization.

By showing the historical aspect of how this municipality has operated when it comes to organizational changes, it might show that the organization has seen the need for change and also reflected around the importance of organizational culture before. This is also emphasized

in some of the interviews. The initiative in 2004, to start a journey towards a common organizational culture among managers and employees was this time a quest to create a shared value system.

The very nature of this organization reveals a couple of factors unique in relation to the task of articulating something about the former organizational culture. First, and most noticeably, there was a high awareness of the power that politicians have over the organization. It is difficult to ignore the effect this power has for the operative side of the organization. The operative side has the mandate of deciding how things are going to be done and who are responsible for it, but the political mandate of *when and what to do* dictate what strategies the operative side can develop (internal document 8). Even though there have been consistency in the political arrangement regarding which party that has the majority in the municipality, this somewhat political stability does not take away the awareness of the importance of the different ideologies in power. The top management clearly expresses that this is a politicized arena.

“One can prepare a decision and spend practically an endless amount of time and then when it is up for approval in the town council, they can say no. They have politically found something different to prioritize [...] it is important that there is a space to be open-minded so that no one feels that the politicians have portrayed them negatively. Consequently it is pretty hard to be a department manager in a municipality; you have the political side of the organization hanging over you.”  
(Respondent A)

Secondly, another phenomenon that can be said to be ambiguous and viewed as one possible internal force effecting the initiation of the change effort in 2004 is the perception of the former organizational culture - which is described as a belief that there is a lack of a coherent organizational culture.

“We wanted to do something that could create some kind of culture in the organization.”  
(Respondent A)

This could also be described as the catalyst for the implementations of the proposed shared value system. However when investigated the “lack” of an organizational culture could be questioned. Three separate parameters stating a rather typical interpretation of the inconsistencies that existed in the former organizational culture emerges. These are described as a) a lack, or a claim, to not have a *coherent* organizational culture b) a presence of sub-cultures in the different departments and c) the importance of the different professional identities and their imprint on the overall organizational culture, the arguments below indicates these nuances.

“We had a picture and I believe that only the contours are left, from being used so often. But it was about a boat were all the oars pointed in different directions. It was an entrance to The Culture

Journey; this is how it's looks in our municipality, a picture that most of us could understand. We would not head in the same direction if all the oars points in different directions.” (Respondent B)

“There are working people in the public work and maintenance administration and that should be compared with those that are responsible for dementia care. It is totally different things [...] we had totally different ways of doing things in the different department and that became a burden; people did not understand each other.” (Respondent A)

“Of course the people at the social work and services administration have a totally different background. Totally different education and other viewpoints then us. We have a very practical way of looking at things and connect everything to money, hours and so. We don't see things the same way. Among other departments there are other things that controls such as different needs. [...]When people visit us and we have that builder mentality, it is probably intimidating to many people but the attitude and the jargon here, that is how we work [...] [W]e must be that way.” (Respondent F)

Both the interviews and the secondary material have indicated that the initiative of turning the attention to organizational culture was not only connected to the pursuit of a shared value system and a common approach. One belief were that the results from the changes would bring with it positive effects such as attracting competent future employees. It was also the belief that a cultural change could enhance some “controllability” which was needed in order to achieve the future goals.

“We wanted to create some kind of coherence of what is important. In other words an approach, and that is only possible to understand if one has followed the organization.” (Respondent A)

“In our leadership development programs we had parts about of how an organization with a shared value-system has advantages over one that doesn't.” (Respondent B)

The focus of targeting values, attitudes and behaviour suddenly became natural. Respondent *B* also shows this correlation between strategic choice and trends in organizational theories, when answering the question regarding if they had done some research of what to do. The respondent states:

“There was some buzz in magazines and such, and when we assembled this (referring to “*The Culture Journey*”) management program, at least I felt that we had to be in the forefront with this [...] and this was an attempt to look at the differences. What happens with management and control if we have a common platform compared to if everybody pulls in opposite directions?” (Respondent B)

#### **4.1.1 Strategies**

When it was decided that the values in the organization needed to be renewed and then integrated as a new shared value system in order to create coherence, respondent *A* and *B* turns to a colleague, and consultant, that they have been working with before. It was the same consultant that helped out with the change effort in 1989 that was called in to help out with the development of this change effort. Respondent *A* and *B* met up with him to discuss the structure of the cultural change effort, an ad-hoc decision in order to get a first idea of what to do.

“We decided it ourselves. I decided to call in (The consultant) that we were in contact with before.”  
(Respondent A)

The plan was to work out a method of how to change the culture. The buzz about the importance of a common platform referred to organizational culture and a shared value system were ideas that was reinforced by the consultant. It is also shown in the instruction material for “*The Culture Journey*” that external research claimed that working with values could contribute to organizations:

“Research has also shown that organizations that have a strong focus on values as a control system can accomplish their tasks in a better way”. (Internal document 11)

The strategy was to give power to the ideas of a shared value system by introducing it from the top management level, and then give the managers below in the hierarchy a possibility, and responsibility to participate in the implementation. The decision of a top-down implementation is explained as a planned strategy in order to save time. Respondent B is commenting the top-down strategy:

“Lets say that it took one year, A guess is that it had taken 3-4 years if we where to start from the bottom. Because everything that is to be processed takes a lot of time. We did it like this (snaps her fingers) because we felt that we want a common set of values, now.”(Respondent B)

The strategy of how to legitimize the change effort of creating a common set of values was to develop and implement the idea within the operative side of the organization, without the interference of the politicians. The complexity of mixing political ideologies and the creation of a common set of values did not make sense. That being said; the initiative was assigned to the operative part of the organization. But - conformation of the change initiative was still important in order for the project to be launched - a strategic choice that was acknowledged both by the operative and political side:

What it is that we take responsibility for, and what are they taking responsibility for, and what do I take responsibility for in my role at the different levels [...] there are so many discussions that are both political and operative [...] I said to the politicians that this is not a political question but we seek a political support for what we are doing.” (Respondent A)

“We wanted the work with the shared value system to have its origin in that our personnel formulated it by themselves. We agreed that the politicians should not formulate it. They came to us when they were done and said: Now we have discussed, and we want to capture this in the following four words, we believe it will work [...] Then we gave our blessing.” (Respondent I)

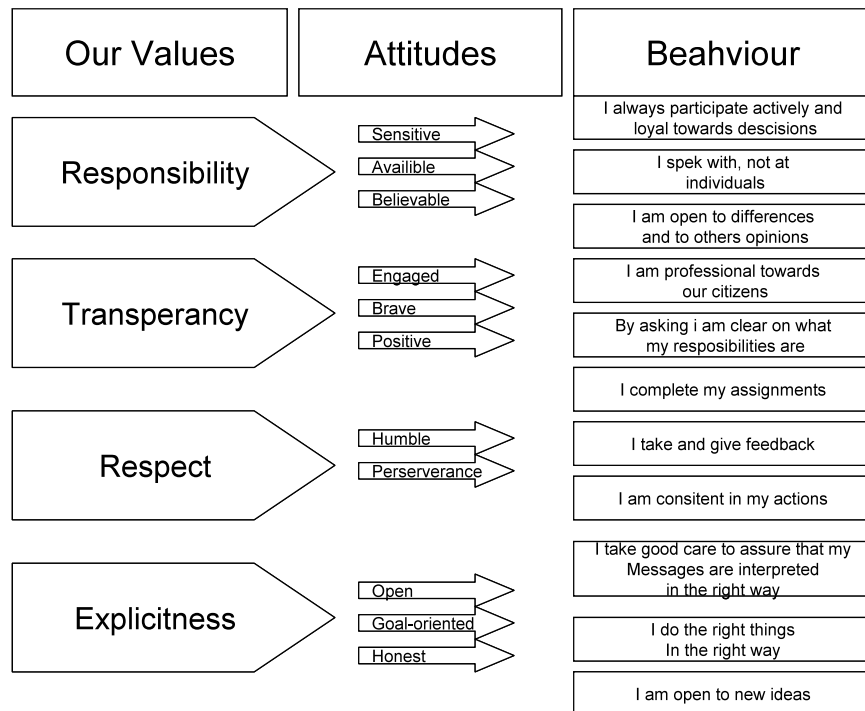
#### **4.1.2 The Design and Process of the change effort**

It should be stated that only Respondent A, B, H and I, was present during the design of the change project, and that this design was planned, but involved parts such as a feedback loop in order to detect possible divergences about values in the organization. The design of the change effort can be viewed as five steps, structured by the top management team together with the consultant mentioned earlier.

The cultural change effort started with in a smaller group of people including Respondent A, B, and the consultant, that met up to discuss ideas regarding the change initiative. The idea of doing a change effort focused on a shared value system for the organization emerged, and ideas of what to do was inspired by the fact that the consultant involved had in an earlier leadership education program, pointed to the importance of working with values. A first structure of the change effort is sketched out, and it is decided that the organization should implement a couple of values that can be understood by everyone and work as the kit, creating the common approach/attitude that they believe this organization needs.

The change initiative was then presented to the management group at a seminar and they were asked to form groups and discuss about what values they thought would “sum up” the organization. Their task were to state how they as an organization wanted to be perceived, and what the most important things were in this municipality - and then capture this in values. The material of all the proposed values and ideas was then collected in order to be summarized by the top management team.

Based on this list of values the top management team formulated *four* distinct *values* and created a framework for the cultural change. Added to this was the work material shown in the picture below. This material consists of a framework for how to work with, and realize the cultural change effort, and it is explained that working with values, attitudes and behaviours are central to the momentum of the change. The most important thing is thought to be the discussions that will originate from the introduction of the framework shown below, and by this create understanding and knowledge about the shared basic values of the municipality, so that order specific attitudes and behaviours connected to those values could be established. A framework and definitions of; the four values, the preferred attitudes, and the expected behaviours connected to these values are then described and put into different working materials (Internal document 11).



(Table 4.2 The “common set of values”, Andersson & Östberg, 2010)

The framework was then presented at a meeting held for the management group, where the ideas and essence of the work conducted was presented. The top management encouraged discussions about the four chosen values as a way of proving the validity of their work, and the reaction from the management group is that the values corresponded well with their understanding of the most important values. At the same meeting a compendium consisting of information about the framework was distributed. The compendium included questions regarding the shared values and how the employee interprets them. The questions were the same under each chapter (one for each value); categories as stated below.

- What do the values mean to you and on your department?
- What are important attitudes connected to the values?
- How do you experience a person that lives by the values?
- What apprehension does your workgroup have about the values?

The working material and compendium with the chosen values and definition done by the management were then distributed in the management group and the managers were given the responsibility to spread the initiative as well as discuss the questions stated above in order to detect possible differences regarding the interpretation of the shared values - between the departments.

” That is why we sent the investigation down into the organization in order to get it back; otherwise it had been a disaster. If we only had sent it down! – In that case we wouldn’t have any idea of what happened among the 70 managers and their different hierarchical levels. I believe that it was clever to make it come back to us and back to their managers with the content they had given it in relation to their department”  
(Respondent B)

At this time in the change process the working material (brochures, flyers) have beforehand been produced and was given to the 70 managers in the management group as hand-outs and working material within their different departments before comments was gathered by the rest of the employees. The interviews show that there are gaps in the process where the possibilities are considered to be somewhat impaired when it comes to influencing this stage of the process. Reflecting on the statements in the interviews, that they already had printed them before the comments had been returned, also points to the fact that planned parts of the change programs may rule out the possibility for managers below to influence certain stages in the change effort.

After approximately a year all employees have had meetings with their managers and they had discussed “*The Culture Journey*”. All the documents were sent back to the top management to be studied. The result from this investigation was that there seemed to be no need to change the four values or other aspects of the proposed content in the framework of attitudes and behaviours, since the employees had a shared understanding of the values.

“The knowledge we gained led to a discussion amongst the department managers. And I believe that it was a bit spectacular; there were not any differences that large that a discussion about the message had to be reviewed. The main point to us, sitting on the bench of spectators, was that they had stated that it worked and what has been processed in the organization is within our framework.” (Respondent B)

After this knowledge was given to the top management team there were no more activities with “*The Culture Journey*” initiative. “*The Culture Journey*” was said to be implemented when the 3-year period that was given from the politicians for implementation has come to an end. There are however accounts that describe how changing parts of the organizational culture will take time, and that three years might not have been enough.

“I see it like this - something like this is not done in two months, something like this is done during 25 years, it is to create an approach that just should exist”. (Respondent A)

The design and the process of working out the four values is said to be the major part of the implementation. When asked, one respondent described that the initiative might have lacked in the sense of not giving the managers any support in developing the initiative.

“We have transferred the responsibility to the managers...in different contexts we promote an expectation that this is to be kept alive and that this is being done at workplace meetings. It is fair to say that we have not let go of it completely but we have not done enough, we have not supported the managers enough. They (*the managers*) should have gotten more support.”(Respondent B)

Basically the only implementation efforts that have been conducted are that the shared value system has been included in numerous work policies.

- *Salary policy*: Where it is stated that the employee should be evaluated with the shared value system as a part of his/her competence. (Internal document 2)
- *Employee mission statement*: Where the shared value system is mentioned as a basic prerequisite for being eligible for employment. (Internal document 3)
- *Manager mission statement*: Where it is stated that the manager should be a role model and act ethical and morally in accordance with the four values. (Internal document 4)
- *Personnel policy*: Where it is stated that if the organization is characterized by the shared value system, the municipality will become an attractive employer. (Internal document 5)

The values are also shown in the quality and control system, it is to be discussed at workplace meeting groups. There are guidelines in the document to lead “*The Culture Journey*” that states the content of “*the cultural journey*” and a method of how to work with it. The common values are also a parameter in the work environment review, the questions are reoccurring in each work environment review in the sense:

- Are you familiar with the values in the shared value system; Transparency, Respect, Explicitness and Responsibility?
- Do you believe that the shared value system has created a common ground in the organization?
- Do you discuss the shared values in your daily work?

The *common set of values* is also depicted in instructions and directives from the political departments (internal document 10) where the values are described as a vital part of the vision statements in the plans for the departments. Apart from these documents the shared value system has been brought up in the annual financial statement from its initiation until 2008 when it is excluded. The belief is that “*The Culture Journey*” has been completed, so there are no real efforts to follow up the implementation, it is left to its own devices in the organization.

## **4.2 A new culture?**

One day in 2009 all the employees in the municipality simultaneously receive a letter with information stating that the municipality is going to enhance its image and that there has been improvements in the brand of the municipality. The message comes as a total surprise, and reveals the fact that a profile for the municipality has been worked out without anyone’s knowledge. The old logotype has been changed and apart from the new graphical appearance revealing a new design of the traditional symbolical shield - a new slogan is also introduced. The slogan is made up by three values written in the new logotype: Consideration, Care and More-Consideration (refers to the Swedish word “*mertanke*”, which is a word without a



formal meaning, but refers to the fact that the people should give their considerations a little more consideration). The new slogan with its “new” core values was said to capture the soul of the municipality and was now presented as the new mantra that is going to represent the organization. Maybe it is the lack of repetition and lost efforts concerning the implementation of the shared value system in “*The Culture Journey*” that creates space for this change initiative to be introduced in 2009, but it is hard to understand whether this is a separate change effort or if it is a continuation of “*The Culture Journey*”. It becomes apparent that the initiative of trying to construct a new brand for the municipality has created a lot of confusion, and shines through in the empirical material with a competing set of values calling for the attention of the organizational members.

When taking this initiative, started by the political side in 2008, into consideration it becomes clear how ambiguous the situation regarding the interpretation of a shared value system has become in this investigated municipality. The idea of creating a brand and all of a sudden start a marketing initiative is said to be a result of reflections from the political side. In the last seven to eight years the politicians have reflected on the importance of becoming more like an organization in the private sector.

“We are a corporate group and we have customers, we want to attract new customers it is incredibly important for us because we want to create one, you have an idea about how the company, in other words the municipality should look. We decided quite early that we know where we want to go and which customers we want, after that we can say that we decided that we were going to be the best, we are going to compete against other municipalities just as the corporations do”(Respondent G)

According to the politicians the municipality has since the end of 1999 had a strategy to focus on different administrations that they wanted to develop. First it was decided that creating a first class school system was an important quest, a change effort that was successfully confirmed in an ongoing winning streak of awards (winner of best school 2003-2009). This created a major immigration of parents with dependent children stimulating new thoughts of how to develop the municipality. A creation of a new quality and control system aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness in the organization was rewarded with the “best quality municipality in 2007”. The winning streak leads to a feeling of success feeding new ideas of how to further the development of the municipality, explained by the local government commissioner below:

“When the municipality is mentioned [...] the reaction should be, I have heard that you have good schools. Then we have won, and we must have a brand that we can sell now, we need to get it down on print.” (Respondent G)

To work consistently towards new goals is explained by *Respondent I* as a natural part of the political mission. He explains that a behaviour often referred to among new politicians is that, in order to be seen as active and having the will to change and by that signalling a positive force they have to implement noticeable changes in the organization.

“When politicians arrive as a new in the KSAU you usually notice flaws and try to correct them with corrections to the structure, to exaggerate, it gives a noticeable impression of determination” (Respondent I)

“We have the values and the approach, it is finished so to speak, in order to give it a external costume, and that external costume shall be suited according to our way of being, our way of looking at ourselves, and the way others are looking at us. We fulfilled very much of our work with the shared values, quality improvement systems, management systems, development of the school and our communication with the citizens and so on, without any changes in the organization either on the political or operative side [...] But then a couple a years ago we decided that now it is time to take on then outer shell of the organization.”(Respondent I)

The intentions to focus on the creation of the brand were based not only on the creation of an external image, but according to us, surprisingly on a new quest to create behavioural changes in the organizational members, so once again they introduce values. The strategic decisions made regarding how to create the brand, consisting of this external and internal part is based on, a) the decision to develop the brand within KSAU, b) The decision to hire a consultant c) to not involve any other part or people in the organization d) to make *Respondent H* a vital role in the process, e) to launch the finished process/product as a refreshing surprise. The decision to develop the ideas exclusively within KSAU had a well-argued purpose based on the assumption that added participants will only consume time and delay the process.

There was an alternative to have it like a democratic process like it was in the work with the common set of values (referring to the work done in 2004), there was a value to have discussions about how one wanted it [...] we would have a lot of interests and opinions and it would have taken to much time [...] there had been a lot of friction. (Respondent I)

During this period the ideas of how to develop a brand for the municipality is discussed in the KSAU. Present is the leading politicians, Respondent A, and sporadically a few top executives from the operative management that has positions in KSAU. Respondent A is one of the people that new about the initiative, but was told not to talk about the work being conducted. The decision to hire a consultant is motivated by two separate arguments the first being that it creates validity to the work accomplished and secondly that there is a value in the fact that an external part have to extract and put words on “the soul” of the municipality. As shown by the argument below.

“And I believe that we are quite unique in the way that we design the brand strategy [...] a professional way with a consultant, we have not created this by ourselves “in the basement” [...] instead we used a consultant with a lot of experience with things like this.”(Respondent H)

“The brand, logotype, the value words that mirrors our approach/attitude...we said, lets not do what everyone does, that they state this is what we want to be and hope that as time goes by we will live up to it, instead our will should mirror our ability.”(Respondent I)

During this phase the consultancy firm was having a close connection to the work and the ideas being developed. The consultancy firm was constructing a proposal of what to do and after approval from KSAU, they started an investigation that tried to capture the essence or “soul” of the municipality, as it is sometimes described. The method used to achieve this was to interview people on the street, in the organization, and also to study the organization and central documents.

“They walked around and interviewed people. They talked with people in the city, on the beach and so on, they just grabbed different people and asked them what they thought about the municipality and what the “soul” of the municipality stood for. How should one describe the municipality? They went on with this for three months...maybe”. (Respondent G)

This strategy involves that people are now being excluded and there are just a handful of people from the head executive office that did know about the initiative. One of the more important people from the operative side is *Respondent H* that has the responsibility to work with the consultant and the political board in order to create the new brand.

“If one goes out and invites people into a dialogue it is expected that we respond to it and give people influence. We took a shortcut through the consultants that went out and asked questions. It was non-scientific but we thought that they were on target. We believed that this discussion becomes more complex the more people that is involved, and where do we draw the line [...] either you choose, as we said with the “Culture Journey” a process that includes everybody, that takes time, and you find some kind of common denominator or agreement [...] Maybe we took the wrong decision but it dose not feel like that.”(Respondent I)

After the consulting firm did the research, a document called the strategic brand platform was composed and presented to the politicians. The purpose of this proposal was stated to be that:

“From a brand perspective we believe that if we push the work with change and development of the organizational identity and the concepts that creates “a common value ship” and a strong brand, it can possibly result in a ongoing process of development for the citizens and employees in our municipality” (Internal document 1)

The creation of the brand is at this phase honing in on the importance of working beyond the simple creation of a logotype with the purpose of filling this “picture” with values, and states that a common understanding of values and a identification to these values are important. The initiative is then explicitly stated as highly connected to the shared value system of the cultural journey. In the section describing the foundation of the brand it is stated that this is dependent on three variables.

- 1) The instructions given by the 1§ in the laws of municipalities stating the ideas of the organization.
- 2) The view of quality and how it should be to live in the municipality.

- 3) The shared values developed during the cultural journey and that creates the platform for the organizations employees; Transparency, Responsibility, Explicitness and Respect. (Internal document 1)

According to the authors this statement holds the important connection that intertwines the first phase (*Cultural Journey*) and the second phase (*Brand Initiative*) into a common change effort with a focus on an organizational culture change - targeting the values as a central part of both initiatives. Although the work with the brand is stated as a external work meaning that it is meant to focus on an external image the strategic document clearly states that the core values of the brand is a regulation that needs to be followed by all the employees in the municipality.

Today there is no follow up on this initiative more then the symbolic effort of changing all logotypes and introduce a manual for how to use the new logo in all material that is being sent from the organization, such as emails, letters, presentations and internal documents. Two seminars (one for management, one for the employees presented by the managers) explaining the purpose and the meaning of the new three values supporting the logotype and the new image of the municipality is the only thing that can be said to be framed as implementation efforts. The rather explicit strategy of launching the initiative as a form of a surprise is discussed a lot on the political side, and put forward as an important factor. No one should feel that they get any information after someone else.

“It was [...] the former local government commissioner, he wanted to make it cool and fun, wow, I think it is a little bit like companies changing brand, it is done with a lot of “hush-hush” and then suddenly it is revealed.” (Respondent L)

### **4.3 The situation today**

The relation between or meaning of the cultural journey and the interfering brand work from the political side is by no means simple to get a grip on. The symbolic values of the two initiatives are seen as important and are in general protected by the fact that people separate them from each other. This separation of the two initiatives is in the organization seen as more or less natural. There are opinions stating that this is a natural thing to do since they are targeting different arenas, “*The Culture Journey*” as an internal change effort and “*The Brand Initiative*” as an external effort. But, there are also opinions stating that they have to be separated in order to have some kind of validity at all.

“At some point, you start to feel like there are to many loose ends [...] and we have not done so much about it, but in some situations one has been forced to some way entitle them by identify them as a political expression of will and the other as a work conducted within and for the operational, in order to save the survival of these projects”. (Respondent B)

All interviewed managers engage in this separation but with more or less hesitation. Some managers see the shared value system and “*The Brand Initiative*” as complements to each other invented for two different arenas, but still pointing out the problem of having these two initiatives in the organization at the same time, since it is creating confusion of how they should act. The political side on the other hand is very clear about the message and purpose of the different initiatives. This is stated by the current Local government Commissioner.

“The work internally in the organization that is what the operative side is working with (*value ground*). This (*meaning “The Brand Initiative”*) is a political initiative, and we want to sell our product (*the municipality*) and it is our voters that are our buyers”. (Respondent G)

A source of confusion is the fact that both initiatives state values as an important part of the change effort, and that it is important that all employees live by or relate to these values making up a common ground for each initiative meaning an approach in “*The Culture Journey*” and brand equity in the “*Brand Initiative*”. The expression below indicates the friction between the two conflicting value systems.

“When it comes to the brand in any organization the main thing is that the image you want to send out feels right for those people that confirm the image every day otherwise it will not work. The recipients of “*The Brand Initiative*” are everybody; the citizens, the companies, the employees, the politicians [...] and if the employees had not felt that way, then our purpose had not been fulfilled, namely that “the costume should fit the body” [...] we are then saying that we are something, that we aren’t. And this is not what I alone as chairman of the local municipality board said and thought, but rather what they, all the thousand people that through there actions, what they say or not say to confirm or not confirm the image. The answer to your question: everyone must live by it”. (Respondent I)

This expression shows the ambiguity around the values connected to “*The Brand Initiative*” and is confirmed in the strategic brand platform (internal document 1) where the four values from the cultural journey is said to be an important building block of the foundation of the brand, but on the next page three core values are stated as a slogan that is to be “lived” by all employees in order to realize the soul of the brand. This parallel existence of shared value systems has created severe problems in the organizations of both how to understand where the initiatives originates from and why they are constructed differently.

“That they originate from a political or operative part of the organization? [...] No, I have never presented it that way, but rather I have thought: What is the reason for them being different. But I have never said it to anyone”. (Respondent K)

“If I have understood it correctly then this is a tool (Cultural Journey) for the operative side in some way...but sometimes shared value systems are referred to in political documents as well and I believe that in order to permeate the whole process then it should be applied to the political side as well and I don’t now if it is that way”. (Respondent F)

“I believe that the next step should be that we agree that this is not two separate things but a common view that should permeate the operative and political side of the organization. It is not logical that the operative side treats things in one way and then when people call the politicians they get another treatment, and then we have to step back. There should be stringency in how we treat each other and our business”. (Respondent F)

The identification with the two sets of values is important for how the managers have interpreted them, considering that they are to enact specific behaviours this would then also be influenced. The reception of the four values that was the end product of “*The Culture Journey*” could be explained as fairly positive, meaning that all the interviewed managers has heard about it, works with it in one way or another and thinks that it is of high importance to work with these values. It is also expressed that they see it as natural to work with values in their daily work. Even though there is a fairly positive reception and adoption of the values stemming from “*The Culture Journey*” there are comments that describe a perception that there is a lack of repetition of *the common set of values*, it is also mentioned that there is to little time and energy in following up this initiative. When viewing the results from an internal survey one can distinguish a difference in where the values are best known and understood (appendix 3) According to us there are three ways of interpreting how they work with values are:

- As a part of regulations and work ethic and therefore seen a fundamental to their professional identity. (Education and Social administration)
- As very important, but secondary to their professional identity. (Environment and Technical administration)
- Because they are new to the organization and are use to work with values in previous organizations. Stating that it is a natural part of organizations today.

The reception of the values in “*The Brand Initiative*” is different from the reception connected to “*The Culture Journey*”. Basically the managers that can relate to the essence of the core values in the logotype identifies with them to a certain extent, as for example in the Social and School administration. The School administration has since 1994 worked extensively with values as they are an integral part of the laws that regulates their activities (LPO 94). More common is the description that the core values are used as they are told to be used namely as a profile picture in documents and mails. One way this is explained is related to the lack of participation in this initiative. The exclusion that the managers has either experienced or heard from their predecessor, related to the development of the brand has had major influence on the interpretation of how the managers should receive the initiative. It seems that not being able to participate leads to a lack of interest to embrace the values in “*The Brand Initiative*”. Another problem could be related to what extent the organizational members identify themselves with the values and by that whether the individuals will “live by” these values. Also the confusion mentioned when it comes to where “*The Brand Initiative*” originates from, are affecting the organizational members when they are to choose which initiative that becomes primary. A vital part regarding the identification with the core values in “*The Brand*

*Initiative*” are the reactions given from the public. Often it is mentioned that citizens are using the slogan with its core values as a reason for sarcasm for example citizens communicate their disappointment with decisions the departments have made. This behaviour is referred to as being connected to the nature of this type of public sector organization and connects to the use of public authority. Inhabitants in the municipality use the over-communication of the word care in the municipality slogan to express their anger when authority decisions are made against them. Within the municipality these negative aspects have led to a change in how the values from “*The Brand Initiative*” are used, the values are sometimes removed from letters that employees send that are connected to dismissals from the municipality. The *core values* are simply not appropriate when negative messages are being sent out to the public. The feedback the employees typically refer to is “is this really a sign of care”, when inhabitants are disappointed with decisions taken by the municipality.

The empirical material gathered in this study was mainly focused on the managers in this organization but one administration was singled out where respondents represented a deeper selection. This was the Education and Social Administration where the Education became the focus for the interviews. This administration seemed to have adopted “*The Culture Journey*” best in this organization, and the reasons that were given by the respondents were that they had worked with common values since 1994 when it became a part of the legislation that guides their work. In the administration there were also signs of a deeper understanding and acceptance of the idea of common values, this was expressed in that they had initiated their own initiative that aimed to develop the knowledge surrounding the common set of values. Their own initiative was in the form of a theatre act performed by an amateur theatre group where the common values were the main theme and put in work life context. This is the only sign of serious attempts to create deeper understanding and the “Brand Initiative” seemed to come in second place.

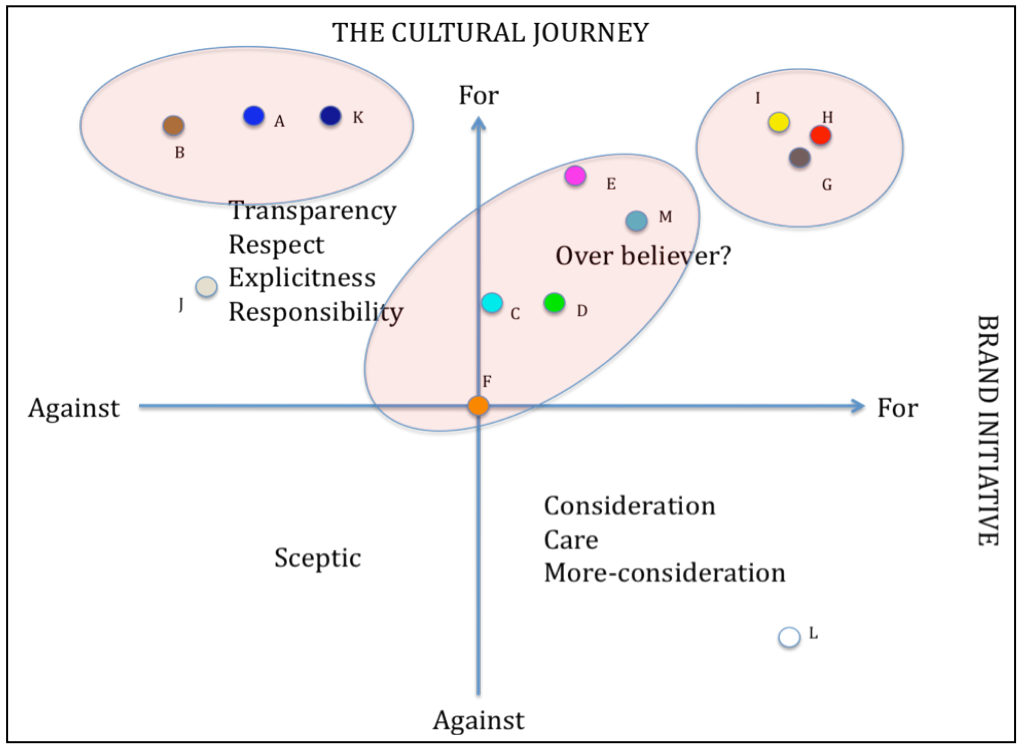
“It is one of those things that comes from above, someone said, where is the gasoline, there is a lot of tanking (Swedish word meaning filling up a tank, and refers to thinking) going on. I do not believe that we mention the words here, but I implemented them as I was ordered to do.”  
Respondent K.

Other signs of protection against the values in the new Brand Initiative was the fact that managers started to negotiate with managers above if the current value system (The cultural Journey) should be challenged.

“I drove a specific line, that if we [the schools] were to implement this, we were to have our own graphical profile.” Respondent K.

Even though there was some initial resistance this administration focused some energy to combine the two initiatives. They launched a fifth value, into the pre-existing four values connected to “*The Culture Journey*”, which was believed to create an external variable to the internal common set of values (*The Cultural Journey*). This administration then has come further when it comes to the understanding than the other administrations, considering that they have created their own way of relating to the two initiatives. There are definitely differences in this organization in how the two different initiatives were interpreted, understood and to some extent preferred or received. The diagram below shows how we describe the interpretations of the two initiatives. We have located three major groups based on the empirical material (appendix 4). They can be described as individuals that relates to the values in the Cultural Journey (upper left corner), or the values in The Brand Initiative (upper right corner). The rest of the respondents exist in a span where they are basically identifying with; both value systems, not for or against any of the initiatives. What determines if they are interpreting the values in the respective change efforts seems to correlate well with how they a) feel about the values possibility to create a common organizational culture (can all departments live by it) b) how the values correlates with their own professional identity (authority or public service/care) c) the notion that these value system correlates better or worse with the different subcultures in the different departments (the way we do thing at our department is or is not in line with the values proposed). This is illustrated by the span in the middle of the graph. An interesting thing might be that the group in the upper left corner mainly consist of top management in the operative part of the organization, the upper right corner consist of top management on the political side, and the span in the middle of the graph consist of managers lower in the hierarchy.





(Table 4.3 "Illustration of interpretations and identification of the values in the Cultural Journey and The Brand Initiative" Andersson & Östberg 2010)

## 5 Analysis

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*In the previous chapter the empirical material described two different cultural change initiatives. A quick overview can discern that the two initiatives targets the values, the same values, the same values reframed, this melting-pot of values could be seen as two ambiguous parts of a dialectical process. This chapter aims to discuss our empirical findings in relation to the theoretical framework.*

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### 5.1 Two or One Initiative

Although the focus of this thesis initially was to investigate the interpretation among managers of a cultural change effort that was called “*The Culture Journey*”, it became evident that there was a second change initiative that often was mentioned by the respondents in relation to “*The Cultural Journey*”. Connecting back to the discussion regarding the hermeneutic circle (see, chapter, 2.1.2) it was here the methodological considerations became central, and enabled us to grow our understanding regarding the investigated phenomenon. The understanding was a process, which began with us asking questions regarding a specific topic (see, chapter, 2.1.1), namely “*The Culture Journey*”. When respondents mentioned a second initiative this led us to revise the questions so they encompassed both initiatives in order to ascertain the studied phenomenon (how managers interpret “*The Culture Journey*”). This approach was salient during the whole study. Surprisingly a change initiative that focused on the creation of a brand for the municipality seemed to inadvertently influence the organizational culture. That the two initiatives were connected were certainly not clear in the beginning, but a possible and somewhat hidden correlation gradually evolved during the investigation. It came to show that the common denominator was that both initiatives had a focus on values as an important factor for success.

#### 5.1.1 Image of change

“*The Culture Journey*” was according to the empirical material described as an internal initiative meant for the operative part of the organization – approved by the political side of the organization, making the politicians by some means excluded from actively participate in this initiative. “*The Brand Initiative*” was a change effort that originated from the political

side of the organization, where the operative side of the organization was excluded from the process with the exception of top managers whom were informed. An observation was that the respondents have a firm belief that the two initiatives are separate changes; the respondents voice this belief when they describe the two initiatives. Firstly as being aimed at a political versus an operative arena – interpreted as the change initiative are active in specific organizational situations or constellations. Secondly there is the notion of internal versus external, where “*The Culture Journey*” internally aims to influence the organizational culture, and “*The Brand Initiative*” is described as only being connected to an external image of the organization.

When analyzing the two change efforts a vital starting point in gaining understanding of how the managers understood or accentuated their change efforts, is to reflect upon, and try to create an *image of the changes* and *the image of managing the changes*. Following Weick and Quinn's (1999) description of episodic and continuous change, it becomes possible to see how “*The Cultural Journey*” and “*The Brand Initiative*” are to varying degrees similar in terms of their respective characteristics regarding the nature of change. Both initiatives were thought to have a clear and defined beginning and end. “*The Culture Journey*” was given three years to become fully implemented, starting in the beginning of 2004 and considered as being completed by the year of 2007, even though two respondents expressed an understanding that these types of changes takes time, and that they probably never fully can take hold in organizations (see p. 24, respondent A, B). However, the fact do remain that The Culture Journey as a change initiative was stated as ended after three years with out any follow up except that the initiatives was mentioned and seen in artefacts such as brochures and documents (Schein 1990). The “*Brand Initiative*” was clearly stated as being a stand-alone initiative that had a distinct beginning and end. It can be described as an episodic change, which has a clear end state, and are considered to be organizational responses to perceived shortcomings (Weick & Quinn, 1999), related to how the managers and politicians interpreted the need for change and how they constructed “*The Cultural Journey*” as well as “*The Brand Initiative*”. One shortcoming that could be connected to “*The Culture Journey*” is the feeling of a lack of a coherent organizational culture (see p. 29, respondent A, B), that also signals a rather pragmatic assumption that as long as the right tools are used, it is manageable to create this new culture (Alvesson & Sveningsson 2008). On the other hand “*The Brand Initiative*” could be viewed as a way of cultivating current successes, and becoming more like the private sector were the customer is in focus and the image of the municipality is becoming an

important selling factor (see p. 38, respondent G). Even though the purpose of the initiatives were different their characteristics are clearly related to what Weick and Quinn (1999) describes as episodic in that they are implemented during a short time span, and described as reactions to perceived areas of improvements. The episodic character of the two change initiatives could possibly be explained by the fact that the organization is a political entity, which lives and acts during mandate periods. Even though this specific municipality have had the same majority for 30 years it was still expressed by respondents that these types of organizations act and plan during four-year periods (see p. 37 respondent I, first quote). According to Marshak (2002) change does not necessary mean the same thing to everyone and might limit how one acts and think about the dynamics of organizational change. The empirical material states that there were hesitations of how the change initiatives were introduced, managed and implemented but the logic of episodic change prevailed over the effort of approaching the upcoming change as continuous, meaning to make incremental improvements over a longer period of time (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

By applying the three categories proposed by Ackerman (1997), developmental, transitional, and transformational it becomes possible to view the change initiatives in a different way, meaning that we explore deeper nuances. “*The Culture Journey*” initiative was formulated and focused on creating a common set of values, which was thought to influence the behaviour of the organizational members and were a process that was *planned* rather than *emergent* (Mintzberg, 1985). As it is mentioned above this initiative could be described as trying to change existing organizational culture. According to Ackermans (1997) categorization of change, the most suited approach in that case would be to create transformational change – a change in the basic assumptions. As can be seen in the empirical material “*The Culture Journey*” only resulted in a developmental change when the values only where manifested in documents, are seen as secondary in relation to professional roles, or being to generic. Ackerman (1997) describes certain changes as developmental when they only influence the existing culture in an incremental way. The developmental character of “*The Culture Journey*” might be perceived as a possible flaw. As described earlier the best solution is to have a transformational image of change that deals with radical shifts in the assumptions made in the organization. The decisions made by the managers regarding “*The Culture Journey*” only scratches the surface of their organizational culture meaning that they did too small changes too fast, when the more suitable approach would be to follow transformational assumptions where the changes would be radical but slow.

In “*The Brand Initiative*”, it becomes easier to describe what image of change that was dominant among leading managers. During the formulation of this initiative a consultant that was hired produced a strategic brand platform. In this document a clear description of what were to be done in order for this initiative to become fully implemented was proposed (Internal document 1). One of the main variables described in this document was that in order for The Brand Initiative to become successful the brand equity should be built on certain variables (see p. 39) of which one were that it should be founded on the already existent shared values in “*The Culture Journey*”. This initiative could then also be categorized as only improving the existing organizational culture or mirroring the best of the external and internal environment and by that becoming developmental when it merely improves the existing culture (Ackerman, 1997). The way it was done could be described as being episodic, meaning that it was done quickly without any unnecessary involvement in order to as quickly as possible launch a new “external costume” capturing the soul of this municipality. We can then conclude this by stating that the image of change could in this case be considered as both being episodic and developmental. The authors are somewhat confused about what image of change that really is present in the minds of the studied managers. It seems that both change initiatives were portrayed with the need to be episodic, but an understanding of the need for a developmental change was often present. This is shown best on the operative side by the statement that they wanted to have the common set of values immediately, but at the same time they realize that these types of changes takes time (see p. 31 respondent B, p. 34 respondent A). The political side on the other hand understands that there is a need of time in order for all organizational members to live by the new values (see p. 40 respondent I). But there was a need for expediency in that they did not have time to involve everyone and therefore chose to implement the change without involvement at all. (see p. 37 respondent I). There seems to be a slight conflict in that the image of change is both episodic, radical and with the feeling that there is a quick replacement of one strategy or programme with another (Weick & Quinn, 1999), at the same time as it is portrayed as being in a need of being reframed as developmental, where the change would have needed to be focused on correcting existing aspects of an organisation (Ackerman, 1997). In the case they are focusing on the improvement of the culture as a specific area of improvement.

### 5.1.2 Image of managing change

There are then differences in the image of the investigated changes, but what can then be said about the image of managing change? When studying the processes and assumptions that managers have regarding the launch and implementation of the initiatives it is possible to detect two images of managing change that are more salient than others among the *top managers* and *politicians*. These images become apparent in the way that the managers and politicians talk about the two initiatives as well as their interpretation of how the efforts should be carried out and managed. According to the descriptions of the characteristics that are embodied within these images (Palmer et al. 2009, Palmer & Dunford, 2008) *the operative* side has done interpretations, taken decisions and acted out behaviours that could be said to characterize a *Navigator* image. Firstly, they were well aware of the importance of taking different interest into consideration and were keen on getting confirmation from the political side before enacting the “Cultural Journey” to full extent. They involved “negotiations” in terms of feedback loops and to some extent a “selling” of the initiative up and down the organizational hierarchies. Even though the initiative was launched from the top down rather than from the bottom-up, they were well aware of the importance of considering different stakeholders. This was probably best shown in the initiative to let the four values be interpreted by the members of the organization. By taking this step they gave stakeholders a chance to add their opinions to the upcoming change before the final (shared value system) was implemented. *The operative* side also showed evidence of the possibility to understand that the individuals in the organization had different interests that could undermine the change effort and therefore create a possible resistance in the organization (Marshak 2002). This was to some extent dealt with in the attempt to gather feedback. According to the authors the risk that the operative side took was to believe that this “feedback” meant that total understanding of the shared value system was created, and that by distributing mostly artefact – document and papers. It is highly questionable whether an understanding of the values really was supported by the episodic/developmental assumptions and the navigating image of managing the change. The feedback activity made by the managers and the insecurities around if this exercise in “paperwork” really captures the discussions in lower management levels regarding the understanding of values and culture, is too ambiguous and does not support the idea that top managers will get the true picture of the values and assumptions hidden in the organization (Schein, 1990). Also supported and reinforced by the arguments from respondents that the need of repetition and support is now crucial in some departments.

*The political side* has on the other hand done interpretations, taken decisions and behaved in ways that could be said to characterize a *Director* image. It is obvious that *the political side* has a rather pragmatic view of resistance, and they are excluding people to participate in the change effort in order to avoid opinions that contradict what *the political side* and the consulted interpreted as the right way to go in order to proceed with The Brand Initiative. Furthermore, they promoted the importance that the messages were sent simultaneously to all employees. These messages were to state what was going to happen during the upcoming change, as well as communicating the importance of what actions people were required to take, namely to start live by the core values of the municipalities new slogan. This image of managing change as controlled with intended outcomes, could be argued as being in line with a *Director* image of managing change.

Palmer and Dunford (2008) describes that “Change managers may assess some types of change as being more amenable to one image of change than another” (Palmer & Dunford 2008, p 29), where transformational change requires the mindset of a *Navigator*. So in this municipality the image that would have been most suited could then be argued as being the *Navigator*. But that does not however change the fact that the images of change were of the developmental kind. Since both the operational and political side promotes a set of values to guide the organization it can be said that the political and operational side of the organization are in a “battle of interpretations” regarding which image of change that will support their respective change initiative. The *Director* image and the *developmental* aspects in the political initiative are on a colliding course. The operative side could be argued as being closer to an alignment in that they use the *Navigator* image. The preferred image of change would according to the authors be the transformational image of change that enlightens the organizational members of the importance of changes in hidden assumptions (Ackerman, 1997) and promotes the idea that culture has to be understood in many cognitive levels in order to create understanding (Schein, 1990).

<b>Arena</b>	<b>Political side</b>	<b>Operational side</b>
<b>Image of change</b>	Episodic Developmental	Episodic Developmental
<b>Image of managing change</b>	Director	Navigator
<b>Purpose of change</b>	External brand Based on new logotype and slogan	Create a coherent culture based on a shared value system
<b>Strategy (Planned/Emergent)</b>	Planned	Planned
<b>Timespan</b>	2009 -	2004 - 2007
<b>Participation</b>	KSAU	Whole organization

(Table 5.1.2 Change efforts, Andersson & Östberg, 2010)

When framing the change initiatives we have so far shown a pattern where managers and politicians in this municipality chose to separate the initiatives, even though there are some similarities in the change initiatives. This phenomenon of separation has by our research and interpretation of the empirical material been proven false. Our research shows that it is not possible to get a correct understanding of the interpretations regarding the “common set of values” connected to “*The Culture Journey*” if not “*The Brand Initiative*” is taken into account. Aspects of the empirical material show a mix-up in the understanding amongst the organizational members regarding the purpose, and meaning of the “values”. On the one hand a change of the organizational culture is promoted where transparency, responsibility, explicitness, and respect are characteristic values that should be lived by. On the other hand a slogan has snuck its way into a revised Brand Initiative; this has created confusion in the organization when the values in the strategic brand platform are called “core value” as the organizational members should live by. It could be argued that it is understandable that the consulting firm created a more marketing friendly word combination of values, that was built on the old, and by that time existing shared value system. When taking Hofstede’s (1990 in, Alvesson & Sveningsson 2009) common characteristic of organizational culture into consideration and especially the fact that organizational culture is inert, difficult to change when it is based on values, vague and hard to define and are socially constructed it becomes possible to assume that having two separate shared value system can not possibly enhance the understanding of the organizational culture. And how could these shared value systems possibly be separated and understood in a way that they can be used to control the organization since it is basically doing the opposite of explicating one set of common values



and morals for the organization to live by, in order to create a strong consensus about values, so the organization becomes self-managing or characterized as culturally controlled (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). It has been proven in the empirical material that the respondents can be categorized into at least three major groups based on different interpretations of the change initiatives framed as they are either for or against them.

The two change initiatives are in a way competing against each other; they are initiatives that aim to create preferred values that can support the separate initiatives. These separate value systems are created to function as instruments and guiding direction, but are trapped in the point made by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2008) that meaning and understanding needs to be rethought and clarified in order for values to make sense. Behaviour is not guided by prescription per se, but rather behaviour is guided by the understanding of these prescriptions (Sandberg & Targama, 2007). The understanding in this municipality regarding “values” is shown in the empirical material as being eroded, and there is confusion related to both initiatives. Sandberg and Targama (2007) describes that the understanding of a certain phenomena dictates what actions individuals take, and this correlates with the perspective of social-constructionism which describes that social phenomena are constructed by individuals (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005). The fact that we see and understand for example change initiatives in different ways as posited out by Marshak (2002). Assumptions about what organizational changes are, is not the same for all individuals in organizations and therefore managers need to reflect upon how these assumptions limits ones way, of conceptualizing the dynamics of organizational change (Marshak, 2002).

## **5.2 Changing organizational culture, a dialectical process?**

The outcome of the analysis so far has shown that by applying another type of theoretical lens would help us to understand and describe the complicated situation that have occurred in “The Cultural Journey”. One way of describing the confusion in the organization could be to frame the analytical discussion by dialectical theory in order to describe the initiatives and their relation to each other. The relationship between two competing initiatives would then become a relation between a thesis and an anti-thesis (Benson, 1977; van de Ven & Poole, 1995). These theses can exist at the same time, and in the analytical discussion above it is also shown that this might be the case in this municipality. There are however a need to reframe the two initiatives in a perspective of organizational culture.

Initiatives Attributes	The brand initiative	The culture journey
<b>Timeline</b>	2009 -	2003 - 2007
<b>Aim of initiative</b>	Create an external image through values	Influence the organizational culture through values
<b>Goal of initiative</b>	Influence the behaviour of the whole organization	Influence the behaviour of the organizational members of the operative side
<b>Result of initiative</b>	Three values to guide the whole organization	Four values to guide the operative side

(Table 5.2, Reframing initiatives, Andersson & Östberg, 2010)

The table above shows that if the change initiatives are reframed there are distinct aspects in the two change initiatives that coincide by the fact that they both are connected to the organizational culture. This can be seen in both the goal and result of the initiatives. When viewing the change efforts as two distinctly different efforts that aim to influence the organizational culture in that they focus on the values it becomes apparent that they can be described through the lens of dialectical change (cf, Benson, 1977; van de Ven & Poole, 1995). The dialectical motor of change is a result of two opposing forces jockeying for position in a conflict (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995) . The investigated municipality can then be argued as having a conflict related to their organizational culture in that there are two sets of values communicated in the organization. On the one hand there is the thesis connected to the four values inherent in “*The Culture Journey*”, and on the other hand there is the anti-thesis of the three values connected “*to The Brand Initiative*”. The conflict in this municipality manifests itself in a complex web of reactions connected to the organizational culture where the problems creates confusion for organizational members to different degrees and for different reasons they fail to see the changes as they originally were intended. The changes are now competing about what values the organizational culture should be built on, and not on the fact that different values should be followed to fulfil the goals in two separate initiatives.

### 5.2.1 Coexistence as a solution?

Both initiatives aims to, albeit in different ways, influence the behavioural aspects of the organizational members. The target for the two initiatives was to promote different sets of values that are to become the foundation from which actions are to be taken by the

organizational members (Alvesson & Willmott 2002). Considering that Pettigrew (1979) describes organizational culture as being the interpretative framework from which organizational members interpret themselves and others – makes the construction of having two initiatives, as stated before, somewhat problematic. Adding the notion that organizational culture is “*the way we do things around here*” further complicates the situation in the investigated municipality. If organizational culture influences the way organizational members act, having two sets of values dictating the behaviour would most certainly add a layer of confusion for the organizational members – now portrayed as a possible dialectical motor. Organizational culture has been described as being dependent on the organizational members in that the culture is only effective if organizational members subscribe to it. Therefore it becomes central to focus on the identification as a way of describing the effectiveness of the organizational cultural change efforts.

On the administrative side there are different ways in which the organizational members identify themselves according to the common values offered by “*The Culture Journey*” as shown above. That there are different degrees of identification could possibly then be related to the professional identities (see chapter, 3.2.1) salient in the different administrations. In the Educational administration the respondents showed an interest and kinship towards the values, and this could possibly be explained by for example that the teachers are also subjected to the laws and regulations decided by the Swedish National Agency for Education in the state curriculum (see p. 42, LPO 94). In the Social Care and Services administration one respondent expressed that they found the values to be self-evident and intuitive in relation to their work. These two administrations are the ones that view the common values as being a primary tool in their work. The other two administrations expresses that the values are more of a secondary tool, they are subjected to more regulatory structures in their work which relates to their exercise of public authority there is also mentioned that there are strong professional identities such as engineers and lawyers, who follows their professional identities and identifies less with the organization. This could possibly be explained by using the social identity theory described by Ashforth and Mael (1989) which states that individuals identify themselves as belonging to the most favourable categories. This should in this case be understood, as that organizational member’s would prefer to be identified with their respective professional identity, that there are in fact subcultures in the municipality, and that the subcultures are related to the different administrations. We also have the Political side of the organization, where there are different views on the values connected to “*The Culture*

*Journey*". The former local government commissioner states that the values are an important foundation for the municipality. The acting local government commissioner sees it as only being a tool for the executive side of the organization. The Commissioner of the opposition views the common values as being less important and also believes that the values are a non-functioning part of the organization. This fits well with how Ashforth and Mael (1989) describe how subcultures work and organizational members might identify with different social categories in one and the same organization. The reason for why some individuals identify themselves more than others could be described via Collinsons (2003) three stages of identification. The respondents from the Educational administration and Social Care and services administration could be categorized as *conformist selves*, where they align themselves to the proposed values, and also accept them as being a natural part of the organization. When contemplating which category the respondents from the administration of Environment and Construction, and also the Technical administration should belong to, the fact that they only view the common values as being secondary would possibly point towards the *dramaturgical selves category*, where individuals only tend to identify themselves to a degree that not are in conflict with their more salient identities, in this case their professional identities. From the political side of the organization the acting local government commissioner would fall in the conformist selves' category, and the acting commissioner of the opposition would be categorized as being a resistant self.

If we now shift focus to how the respondents relate and identify themselves in relation to "The Brand Initiative". Even though there are some discrepancies in how the politicians relate to The Brand Initiative, there is a common perception that it works, and that they actively use the values stated in the strategic brand platform as a way of conveying the brand, so the respondents on the political side could be understood as being *conformist selves* as described by Collinson (2003). The different administrations on the operative side are to different degrees identifying with The Brand Initiative. The Educational administration sees the brand as only being a graphical profile, and that the values are to be considered as being an understanding of how to act towards the citizens, but there are also a question here regarding their own initiative in developing the common values from The Culture Journey to involve an external perspective so they would fit together. This administration could be considered as belonging to the *dramaturgical selves'* category when they seem to adapt the initiatives so that they will fit. But the Educational administration also showed some tendencies in being *resistant selves*. When first confronted with The Brand Initiative, they demanded that they

themselves were to change their own logotype, but in this thesis we are more concerned with the cultural aspects so that they are *dramaturgical selves* still remains the stance. The Social Care and Services administration could be regarded as being *conformist selves*, this is then an interpretation of the statement given by the respondent expressing that they see it as a natural part of their everyday work, which is interpreted as natural by the authors since the slogan promotes a caring narrative. The Technological administration expresses a more critical view about the branding initiative, there are according to the empirical material (see p. 40) a problem of having two initiatives that are trying to induce behavioural changes, it could then be a way of categorizing this respondent as being a *resistant self*, regarding the belief of this Brand Initiative being a problem when it comes to their use of public authority. When trying to understand how the administration of Environment and Construction relate to The Brand Initiative one could view them as being connected to the *resistant self* category, this then is explained by the fact that the professional identities are more connected to the laws, rules, and regulations structuring their actions, and there is also the problem of them exercising public authority which sends signals not in line with these values. This problem could be regarded as saturating the whole organization but not all respondents acknowledge that it is a prominent problem. But the fact remains that even the politicians mention this issue. So when applying Ashforth and Maels (1989) description of identification it becomes possible to state that the organizational members are identifying the values from The Brand Initiative in accordance with the administrations respective cultures, as long as it is believed as not to interfere with their everyday work. In other words the subcultures mainly built on professional identities could be stated as being the primary cause for identification. This becomes especially explicit considering that all part of the organization tends to identify with the values that fit their respective organizational sub-culture best. That the organizational members identify themselves to different degrees could be explained by the discussion presented in the previous chapter that illuminates that there is a conflict between the two value systems. This might also be one explanation to why the respondents that were interviewed identify to different degrees with the two initiatives. It could be that the fact that both initiatives are composed by values that makes it difficult for the organizational members to identify with both of them. The understanding and interpretations of the two initiatives certainly can be seen as a problematic consequence related to a dialectical motor of change, in that there seems to be a conflict of interpretation that partly can be contributed to the sub-cultures in this municipality. Given these problems it certainly serves a purpose to question why these two sets of values have

been allowed to exist at the same time. According to Van de Ven and Poole (1995) two competing theses will end up in a synthesis, which will take the form of a new acting thesis. The diagram (p. 48 or appendix 4) that shows the spread identification that is made by the interviewed managers creating three groups; The top managers (upper left corner), The politicians (upper right corner) and the other managers that is interpreted as spread in a dialectic segment in the middle of the graph. Our analysis is showing that the respondents have not created a unified understanding of the two initiatives; rather that they are a diversified group when it comes to the understanding and interpretation of the values in both initiatives. By then contemplating about the resources that will be spent in maintaining this conflict it should be a logic step for this municipality to evolve the conflict so the confusion can disappear.

### **5.3 Why does a synthesis fail to materialize?**

There are however different reason to why a synthesis fail to appear, as stated by Van de Ven and Poole (1995) some organizations might in fact maintain a status quo instead of having a manifested conflict. This can partly be explained by identification and sub-cultures, but there is also the notion of what power structures that is salient in the organization. According to Krackhardt (1990) the hierarchical structure and political relations could show how the internal power structure works. Depending then on how the power structures influence the organization could be a valid point for discussion when considering Kotters (1978) statement that power could be understood as to what extent one individual have power over another. One possible statement would be that the initiative from the political side should be considered as having a greater effect than the one from the operative side by the fact that the political side can use power to a greater extent then the operative side – in that they have the mandate to decide what and when things shall be done. There is also Hardys (1996), definitions of power and in this case the two categories that become interesting are the processual power and the power over meaning. When then combining these definitions of power it could be possible to see how the hierarchical position can influence the perception of what initiative that is to be considered as being the primary. There is one the one hand “*The Culture Journey*” that were solely an initiative aimed at and developed in the executive part of the organization, on the other hand there is “*The Brand Initiative*” that was developed exclusively in the political part of the organization but that were to become implemented in the whole municipality. We can describe that they vary in how well the initiatives have

succeeded in reaching their goals described above in relation to identification. When regarding the inherent power structures we could argue that the political side has the power over processes, one phenomenon that Hardy (1996) describes is the non-decision making where more powerful actors exclude subordinates from the process, and this was shown in their decision of not including other organizational members in the process. The executive side could be argued as using the power category of meaning; they reframe the pre-existing values and use participation in order to involve more individuals in the processes. Hardy (1996) describes however that this form of power would not necessarily create any behavioural changes. So the initiative related to the political side did use one form of power to decide the agenda, by not involving other organizational members in the process and also to launch the initiative with out any signals leading up to the implementation. The actors involved in the initiatives were then using different forms of power, but there is one difference, the political side of the organization has the highest formal deciding power. According to Krackhardt (1990) this form of power supersedes the other categories, and in the light of this it becomes possible to state that the political initiative is the one that should be regarded as the primary in the organization. That the common values connected to “*The Culture Journey*” only should be considered as being a part of the executive side of the organization becomes problematic when at the same time another initiative state that different values should encompass the whole organization. The organizational members then might have problems understanding which set of values that should be the primary. The formal power seems to dictate and rule out the attempts from the different managers in charge to use power in the form of processes and meaning (Hardy, 1996). A phenomenon that possibly can be described by that it is a public organization where the political power is the primary guide for action.

#### **5.4 Explaining confusion**

Some respondents commented on the problem that not all organizational members are aware of the origin of the different initiatives, so there is certainly reason to contemplate if this then could explain some of the confusion related to the two initiatives. But the fact that they both should exist at the same time is something that all respondents in leadership position state. Another thing that could be important is if we consider to what extent the different initiatives were introduced in relation to any sensemaking activities. The cultural journey that took place used participation as one key ingredient and by that the employees were able to affect the

outcomes, and were present during the process and by that could create their own understanding and also influence the process. The political initiatives only activity related to sensemaking could be contributed to the presentation done during the implementation. According to Weick and Quinn (1999; Weick et al. 2005) organizational members will create their own understanding of the change, and by sensemaking the interpretative space would be less in that the organizational members gradually learns to understand the change. Then it could be argued that the lack of sensemaking is one aspect that could contribute to the overall confusion that is related to the two sets of values in this organization. There are no actual follow ups of the initiatives in the organization that could relate to any sensemaking activities. The only follow up that exists consists of a working environment survey which depicts the diffusion of the cultural journey values. The purpose of the two initiatives was to influence the organizational culture by creating new values that were believed to change the behaviour of the organizational members. By combining Hardys (1996) definition of meaning with Alvessons (2002) explanation that organizational culture could be used as a source of power if considering that the dominant culture dictates one specific worldview, it becomes increasingly clear that the inherent power structure might have considering effects on the organization by normative control. The initiatives were believed to change the behaviour of the organizational members, but when the second initiative ("*The Brand Initiative*") was introduced a confusing situation emerged.



## 6 Conclusion and final remarks

With an interpretative view building on the methodological considerations stated in chapter 2 we have studied a public organization that has gone through a major cultural change initiative. What initially seemed as a stand-alone cultural change effort was soon to be discovered as a change initiative in a possible conflict with other organizational thoughts about how the organizational culture should be arranged. Research has pointed to the importance of alignment between organizational identity, organizational culture, and organizational image. It is put forward that a misalignment between the organizational culture, organizational identity and the organizational image can result in unwanted effects. A too narrow focus on the relation between the organizational culture and the organizational identity is argued to create *Narcissism* – meaning an over belief in the internal features (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In this municipality this could mean that a too narrow focus on an internal value system is shadowing the ability to listen to external shareholders and their view of the municipalities organizational culture. On the other hand a too narrow focus on the relation on the organizational image in relation to the organizational identity is argued to create *Hyper Adaption* – meaning a too narrow focus on what external stakeholders view as a preferred image is ruling out internal voices (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). In this municipality this could be characterized by the over belief that an external consultant can “find” the soul of the organization and construct values that everyone should live by, and identify with. In the field of public organizational research there are at the same time views promoting that the idiosyncratic features of municipalities and public organization do not create value when adapting common values in attempts to create a coherent image towards its citizens. The nature of a public organization is that different departments shall face different problem and have different resources, culture and identities making up a differentiated organizational culture (Wæraas, 2008). It is said that the organization should promote the differences between departments in order to make it easy for the citizens to relate to an organization that is a controlling authority at the same time as it is a caring social safety net (Wæraas, 2008). It is said that a coherent image confuses the citizens or customers, and if so, is there any space for a common set of values at all?

It is self-evident that this thesis not has focused on the alignment between organizational culture, and organizational image, but nevertheless has found organizational values on a colliding course that could be likened to the logic stemming from Hatch and Schultz (2002),

where the two initiatives have different origins, competing for the attention of the employees. By applying a dialectic perspective we have found a specific conflict regarding what value system an organizational culture should be built upon without necessarily focusing on the terminology of narcissism and hyper-adaptation. As it is stated by Van de Ven and Poole (1995) the situation now present in the investigated organization could be compared to the notion of status quo. The organization could be argued as being reluctant to let the competing initiatives upset the perceived stability. This is shown by that even though there are many instances of confusion, the organization still let these two initiatives work alongside each other. What then is the meaning of this? The probable resources that go into this latent conflict could possibly be used in better ways. So in order for this precarious equilibrium to be resolved the two competing initiatives need to engage in a conflict so that a synthesis can be crafted. According to Van de Ven and Poole (1995), there are three different outcomes from a confrontation; the first is that in this case the prevailing set of values would be the ones connected to the thesis (*The Cultural journey*). This would nullify the values proposed by the anti-thesis (*The Brand Initiative*); if we regard the power structures it could be problematic to induce this type of synthesis. This would probably not be a feasible change when the individuals responsible for those values are also the organizational members with the highest formal position and by that powerful in the sense that they control the decision making process. The second synthesis would be the opposite, meaning that the values would change into becoming the one found in the anti-thesis (*The Brand Initiative*). To subtract the values connected to the thesis (*The Cultural Journey*) would probably meet resistance from the organizational members that already, to some extent, have internalized these values. The third outcome is then a completely new initiative, which is to be considered as being an episodic change where a radical reframing of the situation will take place (Van de Ven & Poole 1995). Even though this type of change may bring with it numerous problematic consequences it is still what would be needed in order to resolve this deadlock. We would like to send a warning to the organization that they are in a situation where they need to critically reflect on their organizational culture in a wider perspective. The municipality have focused too much attention on maintaining the operative and political structures during the cultural change (common set of values) instead of critically reflect upon, and create an understanding of why they are different (Sandberg & Targama, 2008). With out engaging in a dialectical change process the present situation of having three groups of organizational members identifying to different degrees with different value systems, will probably continue to exist and by that failing to create a deeper understanding for the conflict in the organizational culture. Apart

from the above discussion and recommendations we would like to put forward three main conclusions and also our contributions of our study.

*Firstly* we have shown that it is not possible to answer the question of how an introduction of a common set of values (*The Culture Journey*) is interpreted by the managers in this organization without taking a change effort called *The Brand Initiative* into consideration. The correlation between the two initiatives was proven to exist when a dialectical perspective was applied. This then shows that to analyze something as complex as organizational culture and initiations of common value systems is better understood with dialectical change theory in public sector organizations. The line of reasoning being that changing parts of an organizational culture should be viewed as a thesis and an anti-thesis competing for the attention of the organizational members, rather than separate change initiatives handling goals from the operative and political side of the organization.

*Secondly*, without going into detail of investigating every part of *The Cultural Journey* and *The Brand Initiative*, we have detected differences in the interpretation of and how the organizational members identify themselves in relation to the two separate value system inherent in the change initiatives. Three groups have been characterized as seen in the diagram (p.48 or appendix 4). The thesis is here hold by the managers on the operative side and the antithesis hold by the political side, leaving the majority of the other organizational members stuck in the middle - and none the wiser. This battle of interpretation of the different value systems characterizes the dialectical motor of change that we have discovered in our study by showing that organizational members align themselves in different ways. This then shows that instigating two separate value systems will result in a confusing situation for the organizational members.

*Thirdly* our study poses one possible way of understanding cultural change processes in public sector organizations. This is to use the inherent power structures to view different change initiatives. Even though the different managers and politician used clear signs of power to support their initiatives, the formal power still have the greatest influence on why the two initiatives are present in the organization. The power of having the mandate to decide when and what to do are critical in all organizations but even more so in public sector organizations. This study showed two cultural change processes that aimed to influence the behaviour of the organizational members, when then two initiatives became active at the same time the end

result was shown to be confusion in how to relate to these separate initiatives. This could be seen as a reaction to the hardships of knowing from where the different initiatives originated.

The three conclusions above show unsurprisingly that organizational cultural change efforts are complex and brings with them unwanted and unexpected effects. In our study these effects are related to the organizational members and their understanding and interpretation of the cultural change efforts. We can conclude that the professional identities (professions), sub cultures in the different departments and the questions surrounding the possibility of having one coherent culture was present even in this latest attempt to change the organizational culture in the municipality. The interpretations of the two change initiatives was to a large extent built on these parameters that seem to be extremely hard to effect in public sector organizations.

Finally we want to point out that we are well aware of the fact that we have probably only scratched the surface of the complexities that surrounds the implementation regarding the cultural journey being conducted in this municipality. Even if we have tried to stick closely to our methodological considerations we want to point out that there are possibly more information that can explain the situation of the organization today than we have mentioned. We have gained an understanding for how complex the situation can become when theories from NPM takes ground in public organizations. We have found proof of the fact that structures and systems that pops up in organizations still tend to be left alone without being explained and thoroughly criticized by managers and employees for them to be completely implemented. Our findings can't be extrapolated to public sector organizations in Sweden in general but certainly contributes in creating a foundation for future research into the field of organizational culture in public sector organizations. Future research of cultural change efforts in public organizations will be needed in order to develop a broader and deeper understanding. Our suggestion would be to closely examine how cultural change efforts are received and generally conducted in public organizations in a broader study encompassing more municipalities. We hope that our findings can lead to reflection among decision-makers and process owners in public organizations before they buy in to the promises made by studies like *“Enhance the controllability with a common value system – results from a study among some municipalities and county councils”* (SKL, 2008) [Internet] and thereby minimizing the risks connected to managerialism.

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# Appendix 1 Respondents

**RESPONDENT A)** Interview conducted  
(Head of executive office)

**RESPONDENT B)** Interview conducted  
(HR manager, executive office)

**RESPONDENT C)** Interview conducted  
(Manager, Building and Environment Administration)

**RESPONDENT D)** Interview conducted  
(Manager, Education, Culture and Leisure Administration)

**RESPONDENT E)** Interview conducted  
(Manager, Social Work and Services Administration)

**RESPONDENT F)** Interview conducted  
(Manager Public works and maintenance)

**RESPONDENT G)** Interview conducted  
(Local government commissioner)

**RESPONDENT H)** Interview conducted  
(Chief Secretary)

**RESPONDENT I)** Interview conducted  
(Former Local government commissioner)

**RESPONDENT J)** Interview conducted  
(Development Manager, executive office)

**RESPONDENT K)** Interview conducted  
(Principal, Alfredhällsskolan)

**RESPONDENT L)** Interview conducted  
(Commissioner of the opposition)

**RESPONDENT M)** Interview conducted  
(Head of Education)

Ulf Ramberg (sakkunnig Kommunal forskning) Ass. Professor:Lund University (public sector focus) Interview conducted

## Appendix 2 Interview guide

(Translated from swedish)

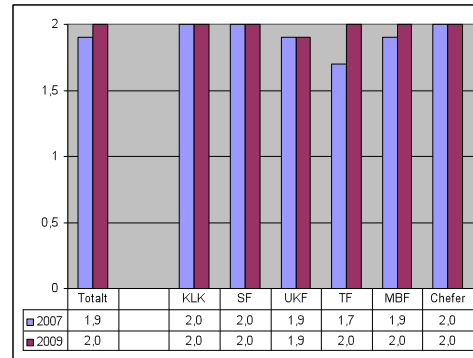
We have chosen to interview you regarding the two initiatives that were implemented in this municipality, the Common set of values and also The Brand Initiative.

1. How has the two initiatives transcribed in the municipality?
2. In what way have you perceived these changes?
3. How have your department reacted to these initiatives?
4. What activities were connected to the two initiatives?
5. How do you in your department use these initiatives?
  - i. Can you explain the process more detailed?
6. Describe the initiative that were focused on the Values?
7. Describe the initiative that was focused on the Brand?
8. What documents can you show that describes the different initiatives?
9. Is there a clear understanding of who initiated the two initiatives?
10. How reacted your department on the initiatives?
11. Have either of the initiative worked as some form of inspiration for your department?
12. Have the common set of values influenced the organizational culture?
  - i. In what way?
13. What other changes have your department been subjected to?
14. Do you have any examples of how these initiatives affect your everyday work?
15. Can you differentiate between the two initiatives?
  - i. Which of the two initiatives would you rate as the primary?
16. Are the common values used in any explicit way?
  - i. If one were to neglect the values what would happen?
  - ii. How would you act?

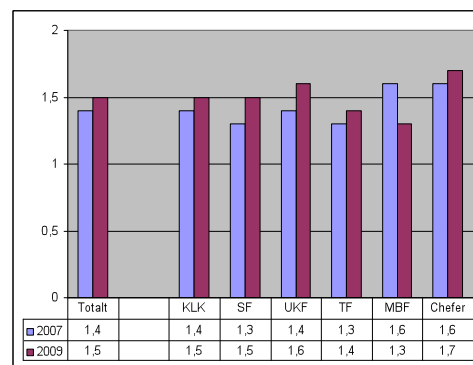
## Appendix 3 Work environment survey

Work environment survey, results connected to the common set of values

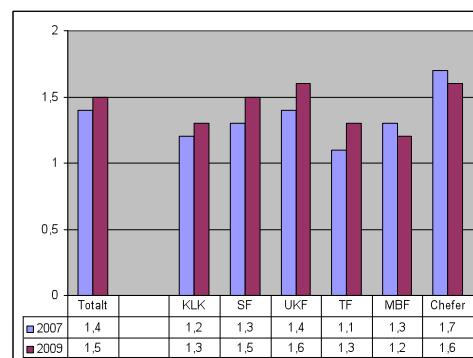
**Do you know about the values?**



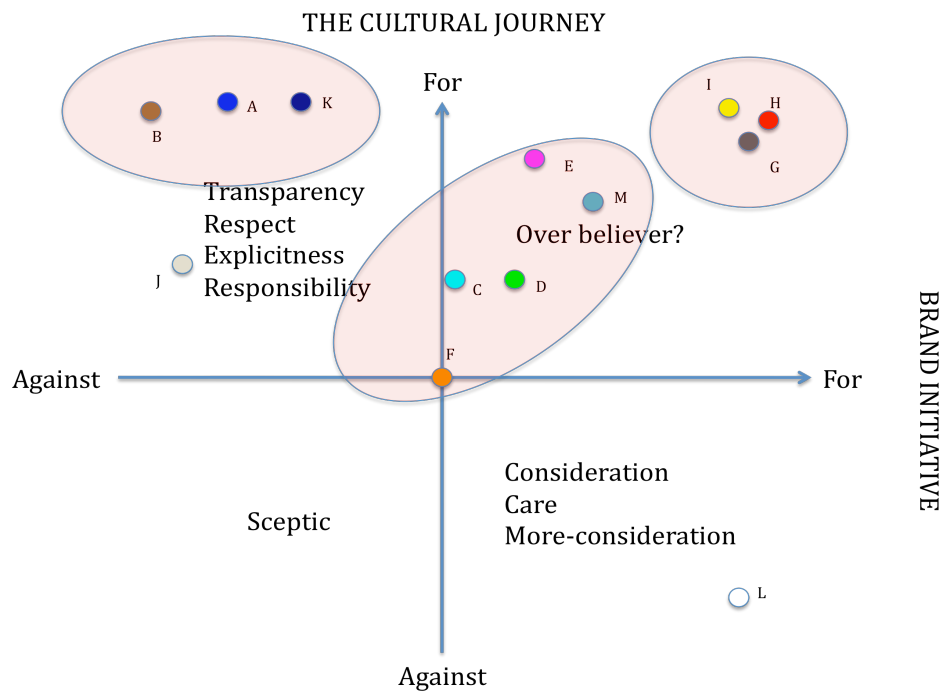
**Has it created a common ground?**



**Are the values being discussed?**



# Appendix 4 Model with explanations



**RESPONDENT A)** Interview conducted (Head of executive office)

**RESPONDENT B)** Interview conducted (HR manager, executive office)

**RESPONDENT C)** Interview conducted (Manager, Building and Environment Administration)

**RESPONDENT D)** Interview conducted (Manager, Education, Culture and Leisure Administration)

**RESPONDENT E)** Interview conducted (Manager, Social Work and Services Administration)

**RESPONDENT F)** Interview conducted (Manager Public works and maintenance)

**RESPONDENT G)** Interview conducted (Local government commissioner)

**RESPONDENT H)** Interview conducted (Chief Secretary)

**RESPONDENT I)** Interview conducted (Former Local government commissioner)

**RESPONDENT J)** Interview conducted (Development Manager, executive office)

**RESPONDENT K)** Interview conducted (Principal, Alfredhällsskolan)

**RESPONDENT L)** Interview conducted (Commissioner of the opposition)

**RESPONDENT M)** Interview conducted (Head of Education)