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School of Economics and Management

# Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes: Turn and face the strange

*Struggles of identity work in organisational change*

By

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## Abstract

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*In today's fast moving business environment, organisational change is considered a key requisite to remain competitive, however, organisational change can be a double-edged sword as it can create difficulties for individuals in their identity work carried out in the organisation. Moreover, how individuals conduct their identity work in an organisation can amongst other factors be affected by discourse. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of organisational identification in order for individuals to make sense of organisational change, and several researchers have explored the challenges that can arise when there is an established organisational identity in place when seeking to change, as well as moving from one organisational identity to another. However, there is a need for more empirical studies as no previous studies have explored what occurs when moving from an established organisational identity to an unestablished one. Therefore, our purpose is to explore how a specific organisational change unfolds when there is no established and no envisioned, organisational identity. To investigate this, we chose an interpretative research paradigm and a qualitative research design, whilst taking a reflexive perspective throughout our research. Based within the borders of existing studies on organisational change, organisational discourse, identity and identity work we explore a specific research context, under the pseudonym of Jewellery Co, a leading Swedish retail chain. We followed the organisation for six months during a substantial change process and collected our material through semi-structured interviews, observations, auto-ethnography and by analysing audiovisual materials. We found that within this context, the organisational subcultures became highly dominant, to the degree that the organisational identity was not allowed to emerge, and the individual identity became submerged within the subcultural one. Moreover, we found three dominant discourses which were competing with each other, further enforcing the subcultural dominance. As the organisation under investigation does not have an established organisational identity, or an envisioned one, it creates further challenges in terms of organisational identification, again leading the individuals to identify with the subcultures. Our main finding from this research is that when seeking organisational change, it is important to not underestimate the value of values. If there are no values to identify with, it creates a substantial challenge, if not an impossible one, to manage to change anything at all. Values constitute the organisations very core and what organisational identity is. Organisational members need something persuasive to rally behind, otherwise, it is likely that the change will fail before it even completely begins.*

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**Keywords:** Organisational Change, Organisational Discourse, Identity Work, Organisational Identification, Organisational Subcultures, Identity, Planned Organisational Change, Values, Subcultural Dominance, Identity loop, Culture and Identity, Discourse, Self-doubters, Soldiers, Surfers

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## 1. Introduction

Organisational change is considered to be a top most priority to remain competitive and survive in today's fast moving business environment (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), however, organisational change can be a double-edged sword as it can make identification with the organisation itself more difficult (Gioia et al. 2013). Organisational change has many implications, and can be viewed from numerous perspectives. Moreover, change can be seen as planned (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015) or process (Weick & Quinn, 1999), episodic (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009) or continuous (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) and contains as many diverging definitions as there are stars in the sky. Regardless of what perspective one takes towards organisational change, it is commonly known that as many as seventy percent of all change projects fail (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Therefore, understanding and making sense of the change (Weick, 1995), as well as identifying oneself with what the organisation aims to become (Gioia et al. 2013) is of utmost importance and will affect the outcome of the change process itself (Weick, 1995).

According to Gioia et al. (2013), organisational identification relies on how well organisational members can make sense of their situation, and in a change process, it is dependent on how well they can identify themselves with the change and its context. Furthermore, Ashforth and Mael (1989) argue that if organisational members can identify themselves with the organisation, it will become easier to identify with the change itself. Organisational identification can be understood as a form of collective social identity where organisational members define their '*selves*' in terms of their membership in a specific organisation, and relies on the degree to which organisational members can identify with the same characteristics as they believe the organisation holds (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). Moreover, organisational identification is important, as it emphasises the relationship between organisational commitment and identity (Pratt, 1998). Previous research in this field has highlighted the importance of organisational identification in order to make sense of organisational change (Empson, 2004; Gioia et al. 2013; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), and if individuals can identify with the organisation and the change, they are more likely to adapt to organisational incentives that may demand more dedication from them than usual tasks (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985).

How individuals conduct their identity work in an organisation can amongst other factors be affected by discourse (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2012; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), and according to Hardy (2001), discourse affects the sense-making and identity work that occurs in organisational change. Identity work has a central role in working life today (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006), and consists of the continuous work individuals undertake when trying to shape and construct a '*self*' that

is distinct, coherent and positive (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008). As identity work is a continuous process, it is also affected by organisational change, and this can in turn affect how individuals identify with the organisation. Several studies depict that both organisational identity, and how well individuals identify with this identity, has a profound impact on both the process and outcome of the organisational change (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000; Reger et al. 1994). Moreover, many researchers highlight the pitfalls that may hinder change if there already exists an established organisational identity, such as; resistance to change if the envisioned identity threatens the core components of the current identity (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991); cognitive inertia (Reger et al. 1994); or discrepancy between current and envisioned organisational identity (Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000). Furthermore, Whetten and Godfrey (1998), argue that if the identity of an organisation is unclear or unestablished, it can potentially accommodate numerous interpretations and actions, and initiate several complex challenges, such as planned or unplanned change. However, they also state that this unclarity presents a great challenge for creating or maintaining any organisational identity.

We have seen that there are several studies that explore the pitfalls of having an established organisational identity when seeking to change, and how to move from one organisational identity to another (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000); Pratt, 1998; Reger et al. 1994; Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). However, Gioia et al. (2013), highlight the need for further empirical studies on both organisational identity formation and change. Moreover, we have found that despite all the previous research in this field, there are few qualitative in-depth studies which capture the struggles in identity work within substantial organisational change that seeks to establish a new organisational identity. In addition, no previous studies have examined what occurs when moving from an established organisational identity to an unestablished one.

Therefore, our interest lies in exploring this field as insight into this can further contribute to understanding how change unfolds in this context. Furthermore, this can assist both academics and practitioners when embarking on organisational change, as it can shed light on new aspects that should not be overlooked.

## **1.1 Research context**

Our research project takes place in a single organisation, known under the pseudonym of Jewellery Co. The organisation operates in the retail sector and is currently the largest actor on the Nordic market for jewellery and watches. Originally founded the 1940's as a specialist retail outlet by a Swedish entrepreneur, they have through organic growth and international imports become what they are today,



an organisation consisting of four hundred employees and one hundred stores. Currently, the organisation is going through a substantial change process which seeks to increase engagement and collaboration across all departments, as well as boost organisational performance. For this, they need to go back to the basics and establish a new organisational identity, which will be done through the use of a change framework and is championed by the CEO, Mike Hannigan. The current organisational identity is highly eviscerated, and we have followed the organisation through their change process for six months, being able to observe how it unfolds in real time. This change process encounters several internal challenges relating to numerous aspects within the organisation. In order to illustrate the hierarchical structure of Jewellery Co, we have designed an organisational chart (see fig. 1.1).

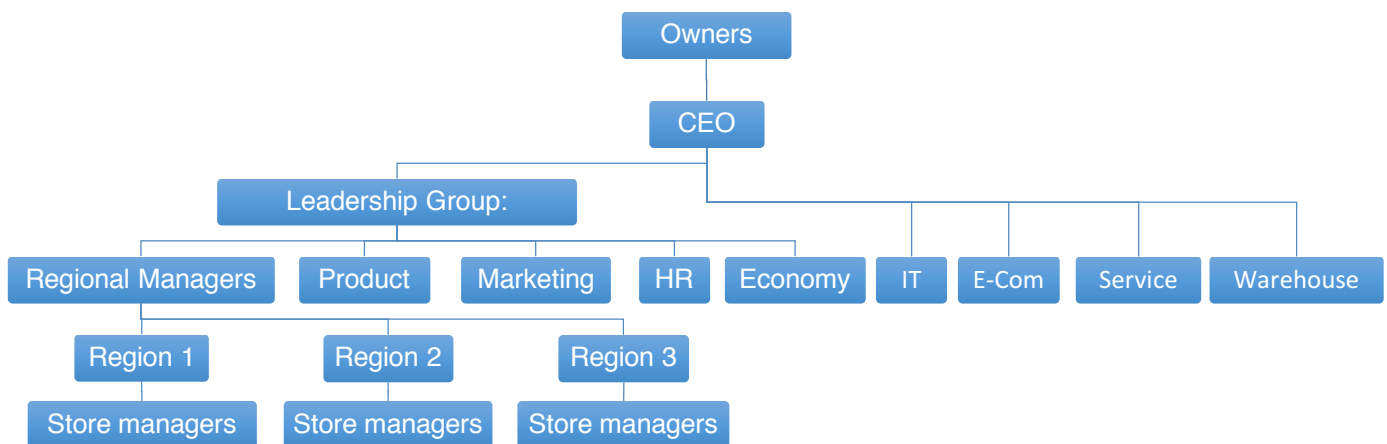


Fig. 1.1 Organisational chart of Jewellery Co

## 1.2 Research purpose and questions

The purpose of our research is to explore how a specific organisational change unfolds when there is no established, and no envisioned, organisational identity. In order to investigate this, we formulated our research questions:

- *What challenges does an organisation encounter in a substantial change process when there is no established or envisioned organisational identity?*
- *How does this affect organisational members identity work on multiple levels?*

We hope that by answering these questions we will be able to contribute to organisational change and identity literature by shedding a light on this rather unexplored field. Moreover, we hope that we will be able to contribute to a further understanding of how organisational identity and individual identity work is important, especially within the field of organisational change.

### 1.3 Structure and organisation of this thesis



## 2. Methodology

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*The objective of this chapter is to outline the methodological underpinnings that our research is based on. We introduce our ontological and epistemological considerations as well as our reasoning for choosing an interpretative research paradigm. As our research is qualitative, we discuss why we believe it is important to be reflexive in our process. We also present our research context and design, how we selected our data collection techniques, anonymisation of participants and the acknowledgement of issues regarding credibility and trustworthiness. We conclude by explaining how we analysed and made sense of our empirical material, as well as list the key takeaways from this chapter.*

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### 2.1 Ontological and epistemological considerations

Ontological and epistemological considerations can be determinants of social science and serve to define specific research (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009) and therefore, our research paradigm affects how we explore our research questions. The central point in ontology questions whether social entities should be considered as objective, with reality being external to social actors, or viewed as social constructions, produced by the actions of individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2011; Duberley, Johnson & Cassell, 2012). Therefore, ontology shapes worldviews and questions the nature and form of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

There are two governing worldviews, that of *'the realist'* and *'the subjectivist'* (Duberley, Johnson & Cassell, 2012). Realists believe that there is an objective truth *'out there'* which is separate from the individual actor and can be discovered. In contrast, the subjectivist asserts that there is no *'reality'* outside of human interaction (Bryman & Bell, 2011). What is considered to be real is continually accomplished by individuals in interaction with the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Duberley, Johnson & Cassell, 2012) and therefore, reality is in a constant state of revision (Bryman & Bell, 2011). We believe that individuals construct their realities in their interactions with their environment, and agree with Bushe and Marshak (2009) and Campbell (2000) who all view organisations as socially constructed. Therefore, our research and worldview is intersubjective. This ontological consideration composes one part of the paradigm where our research belongs, and according to Haynes (2012) there is a complex relationship between the lens the researcher views the world through (ontology), the belief the researcher holds to how knowledge is produced (epistemology), and the actual process of knowledge production (methodology).

Epistemological considerations are derived from ontological views about the nature of being, which affects how individuals construct meaning and knowledge in relation to their reality (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Our approach to this study is derived from social constructionism, where interaction between social actors is seen as the catalyst for creating reality, where meaning is deduced from shared experiences to make sense of the world (Hibberd, 2005; Merriam, 2002). We acknowledge that social constructions do not occur in a void as they are context dependent and will vary with time and place.

## 2.2 Our research paradigm

We have chosen to mainly view our research through an interpretative perspective while acknowledging that our lens as researchers will also include elements of functionalism and postmodernism. As we depart from an interpretive perspective, we hold a hermeneutical knowledge interest, which according to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) is based on the fundamental interest of understanding meaning. Our aim is to seek insight in how individuals conceptualise and explain their 'selves' in organisational life, and as Whetten and Godfrey (1998) state, the main goal of an interpretivist approach is to understand the meaning systems used by members in the organisation through descriptive and insightful accounts. As this approach questions whether "organisations exist in any real sense beyond the conceptions of social actors" (Bryman & Bell, 2011, p.24), we believe that this interpretative approach to our research is appropriate. The interpretative standpoint subscribes to the idea that each individual has their own unique perspective regarding the social world (Prasad, 2005) where the notion of '*verstehen*' (understanding) is fundamental (Crotty, 1998). Moreover, how individuals engage with their social world will depend on their understanding of it, and therefore, intersubjective interpretations are important to study in order to comprehend how individuals construct their realities (Haynes, 2012). As compared to the positivist approach, the interpretivist perspective allows for a more in-depth understanding of the social world and takes into account that reality is always in a constant state of revision (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Merriam, 2002).

However, we acknowledge an element of postmodernism in our research as this perspective accommodates the notion that an organisation often exists of multiple, and contradictory identities (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). We are by no means truly functionalist. However, we believe that identity is something that an individual or organisation has, although it will change over time. Therefore, we can not disregard a small functionalist element in our research perspective, and as Whetten and Godfrey (1998) outline, the functionalist perspective allows us to identify what is '*central*', '*distinctive*' and '*continuous*'.

Given the complexities surrounding the organisational change in our study, as well as our epistemological and ontological considerations, we found a qualitative research approach to be appropriate. Throughout this qualitative research we will mix induction and deduction (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), which will enable us to collect rich and substantial material, uncovering aspects in terms of people's feelings and understandings, allowing us to arrive in a rich and descriptive account of our findings, as proposed by Merriam (2002).

### **2.3 Reflexivity**

As we are qualitative researchers, we acknowledge and appreciate the need for reflexivity in our research process. According to Merriam (2002), it is the specific context and background of the researcher that allows for new perceptions and insights of a topic to be unearthed and discussed. We still aim to be as objective as possible, and take this into account, letting our experiences take their place in our research. Moreover, as research is always affected by the involvement of the researchers themselves (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), this creates a loop relationship between us and our subject, both affecting each other (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Reflexivity in a qualitative setting includes a mix of reflection of our own pre-understanding, what we are doing, and how we engage with our research subjects (Haynes, 2012). This implies that we, as researchers, are never truly objective (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Therefore, we need to engage in critical thinking around our ideological, cultural and theoretical assumptions that affect our own interpretations of events, observations and interviews which lead to the realisations and outcomes of our research (Haynes, 2012). As researchers, we are tools carrying out a particular research (Merriam, 2002; Rossman & Rallis, 2012), and due to this intimate relationship with the material, our understandings, interpretations, reflections and deductions need to be recognised as a central part of this study. An integral part of our research process is our pre-understanding and knowledge of organisational change that stem from academia. We take great care not to project our knowledge onto our research participants and to not assume that they lack any prior understanding of the topic, as organisational change has for many years been part of pop-managerial and organisational literature, as well as being discussed in other media outlets.

We acknowledge reflexivity in our research process and therefore, we have incorporated a number of measures to utilise our pre-understanding and experiences in our study. We both interacted with our research material individually and as a team, taking notes on how we were progressing in our study to gauge our own individual engagement with the research material. Furthermore, we discussed each interview and observation session when it was finished to understand each other's impressions of the event and the insights gained from it. This allowed us to stay reflexive during the entire research process as we questioned our own and each other's interpretations.

## 2.4 Research context

Our research takes place at a market leading Swedish watch and jewellery retail company, in this study referred to under the pseudonym of Jewellery Co. The organisation has approximately four hundred employees and one hundred stores throughout Sweden and has its headquarters in Stockholm. We were able to gain access to the CEO, Mike Hannigan, who enabled us access to the entire organisation where we gathered our empirical material. Due to the access granted by the CEO, we were able to open up the scope of our research to all hierarchical levels, both vertical and horizontal, which gave us the advantage of being able to include more levels and locations into our research (see fig 2.1). Jewellery Co was going through a substantial organisational change during the time of our research, which enabled us to collect rich and extensive material for our thesis.

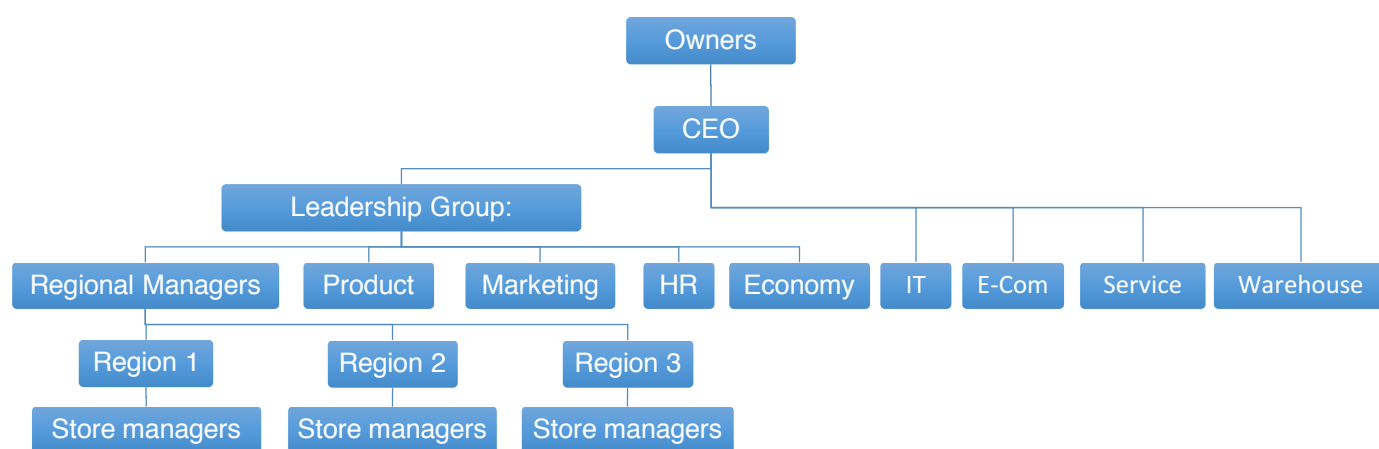


Fig. 2.1 Organisational chart of Jewellery Co

## 2.5 Research design

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), the choice of research approach depends on the aim of the research. As our research seeks to explore how a specific organisational change unfolds when there is no established and no envisioned, organisational identity, we believe that suitable methods to uncover these aspects are those who allow proximity to the construction site of the phenomena under investigation, as proposed by Morgan and Smircich (1980). Therefore, the methods we applied in this study are semi-structured interviews, observations, auto-ethnography, and analysis of both online and offline organisational documents and audiovisual materials. The semi-structured interviews allowed us to gain an understanding of the organisational change at Jewellery Co whilst our observations and auto-ethnography allowed us to examine the change on a first-hand basis as it occurred. Online and offline documents, as well as audiovisual materials, allowed us to gain further understanding of the organisations current situation, as well as the desired future state.

### 2.5.1 Semi-structured interviews

We chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as our main source of collection for our empirical material, considering that our research question seeks to explore what occurs in an organisational change where the current organisational identity is eviscerated, and the future one unestablished. We selected this method as, according to Creswell (2008), it would allow us to guide the interview process and simultaneously provide the interviewees with flexibility to emphasise what was important to them. Due to the semi-structured composition of our interviews, they exposed us to unexpected and new views (Alvesson, 2011). According to Alvesson (2011), length and context of the interview is significant, and as stated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the number of interview participants should range between five to twenty-five for a research-based study to be adequate. We acknowledged this and conducted nineteen interviews in total, with fifteen different participants, lasting between thirty to forty-five minutes each. For the interviews, we utilised a list of open-ended questions which covered a number of topics we wanted to discuss. We also conducted a specific, preliminary, interview with the CEO, to gain a better understanding of the framework utilised in the change process. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, either at the headquarters in Stockholm or select stores. Through these face-to-face meetings we were able to gain an understanding of each of the participants context. With the exception of one interview, all were conducted by both researchers as this would ensure that we both got first-hand experience of the interviews to be able to reflect back on these during our analysis of the transcripts. During the interviews we both noted down key responses, as these, together with our initial interpretations and thoughts, were discussed after each interview.

### 2.5.2 Observations and auto-ethnography

We chose to conduct observations and auto-ethnographic field work as a compliment to the semi-structured interviews. This allowed us to gain insights to the organisation that would have been arduous to gather in the interviews. During the observations and auto-ethnographic work we were able to observe behaviours that might be overlooked in the interviews (Patton, 2002), such as rhetoric, body language, and imagery used during social interactions and solitary actions. Observations and auto-ethnographic work at Jewellery Co was conducted once during a half-day workshop at the head office, as well as during the second round of interviews where we stayed at the head office lunchroom between and after the interviews had taken place. The auto-ethnographic work was carried out during different shifts at select stores in the south of Sweden where field notes were kept of these days. For the work carried out, we chose an approach of '*observer as participant*' (Cresswell, 2008), as we had been introduced to the different organisational members by the CEO in order to conduct the study, and interacted with employees throughout the course of the study.

### 2.5.3 Documents and audiovisual material

We also analysed organisational documents, both online and offline, as well as audiovisual sources such as videos and livestreamed meetings, for our research. These added background and context as well as provided insight into the organisation. We used this insight to both structure and analyse the semi-structured interviews. According to Lee (2010), organisational documents can potentially be rich sources that can inform researchers about the organisational life. These documents and recordings gave us a more thorough understanding of the language and terminology used throughout the organisation (Creswell, 2008) relating to both general day-to-day activities, as well as the ongoing organisational change. For this we were provided with a copy of a promotional video, live streams of meetings, and access to the newly developed intranet used by the organisation, where information about the change, the framework used, and other information was posted and reacted to by employees.

## 2.6 Sampling strategy

In qualitative research, the sample selection is linked to the aims of the research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). An *'appropriate'* sample may be selected by employing our own judgment, as long as we perceive the sample to be sufficient to gather insights of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002). According to Alvesson (2011), it is beneficial to use a sample which has a broad representation, as it minimises the possibility of selecting interviewees that may hold similar opinions and prejudices. As we seek to explore what happens when an organisation with an eviscerated organisational identity attempts to change into an unestablished one, we felt that it was important to gather views from different hierarchical levels in the organisation. Therefore, we applied critical choice as our sampling strategy, and selected employees from different hierarchal levels and departments in the organisation.

## 2.7 Anonymity and confidentiality

To ensure anonymity, we provided each participant with a document outlining our goals for the collection of data. The document also ensured the participants that the information they provided during the interviews is confidential and untraceable so that none of the information provided will be traceable to a specific individual outside of the interview. As noted by Alvesson (2011), a specific response in an interview does not have to serve as any indication of the participants feelings, thoughts, values or experience. By guaranteeing the participants anonymity, our hope is to be provided with honest answers, as the anonymity may remove concerns individuals may have towards discussing the organisational change process at Jewellery Co. Moreover, we have signed a Non-Disclosure Agreement (NDA) with the organisation, which was a requirement set forth in order to be granted access. Therefore, we are obligated to conform with the stipulations set forth in this contract.



## 2.8 Credibility and trustworthiness

We took a reflexive standpoint and aimed to remain critical to our material in order for our thesis to be trustworthy. Therefore, we tried to dig deeper into our material, and everything we observed, read, and wrote was critically evaluated by asking ourselves what the interviewees were actually saying, and seeking to comprehend the different meanings behind employees' feelings and thoughts. As we depart from a social constructionist perspective, we acknowledge that in an interpretative research paradigm, there is no objective truth, as it is intersubjective. As argued by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), research is always based on interpretations by different actors. With this in mind, we have made several evaluations of our material to create a credible and trustworthy thesis.

According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009), one way to ensure credibility in research is source criticism. By evaluating issues such as: '*authenticity*', '*bias*', '*distance*' and '*dependence*', we have aimed to confirm the credibility of our study. This hermeneutical method has served as a guide to interpret and evaluate both what was said in the interviews, the texts, and the audiovisual materials used. Authenticity evaluates if a source is genuine and can be viewed as a source, whilst bias questions if the interviewee may be distorting information. When we suspected that bias was in play, we took the advice of Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) and put less emphasis on the information from that source as it provided us with less value. The two final criteria, distance and dependence, concerns the actuality of comprehension. As all of our research participants are employed in the same organisation, we did not have to consider the criteria of distance. Neither did we feel the need to evaluate dependence, as this criterion refers to how many intermediaries the material has passed through to reach us. All of our interviews were conducted face-to-face on a first-hand basis, and the topic of discussion was top-of-mind in the organisation since we followed the change process as it unfolded at Jewellery Co.

## 2.9 Analysis

We analysed our material continuously throughout the research process, which according to Merriam (2002) makes it easier to find credible and trustworthy findings. The first part of our analysis involved transcribing our initial interview session with the CEO. Our aim here was to get an understanding of the change process at Jewellery Co. In this stage, we also reviewed organisational documents posted on the intranet and researched the organisations background to gain a thorough understanding of the organisation and how it functions.

The second part of our analysis entailed the transcription, coding and thematisation of our five initial interviews and field notes taken during our observation of a workshop at the head office. Following the transcription, we closely read our material to map out initial patterns and themes. In this first round

of analysis, the uncovered themes were broad and general, as to not read too much into the material at this early stage. Thereafter, we continued our analysis by scrutinising our findings and thereby reducing our themes into more specific ones. This was done by looking for similarities, differences and transitions between content, metaphors, analogies, narratives and repetitions within the material, following the recommendations by Ryan and Bernard (2003). We applied various processing techniques in this stage, such as the use of cutting and sorting described by Ryan and Bernard (2003). We recognise that the themes we discovered are derived from both the material itself and from our own understandings of the theory involved. Therefore, we mixed separate work with close interaction, allowing us to remain reflexive as we questioned our interpretations and related them to our pre-understandings. Moreover, we discussed our material in great depth and constantly questioned where our interpretations of it stemmed from. We also aimed to manage our assumptions, preconceptions and biases by attempting to be as open and honest about these as possible towards each other and our research.

Some analysis of the material was already conducted at the observation stage where we took notes and discussed each interview with each other upon completion. This was our initial point of analysis, and we took notes of topics that were deemed significant (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). By taking this approach, we were able to adapt and learn from each interview, and Alvesson (2011, p.46) argues that interviews become more powerful “if practical work is guided by on-going considerations of interpretation”. Our process took the approach of ‘*open coding*’, which involves the identification of overarching concepts related to the aim of the research (Babbie, 2013; Bryman & Bell, 2011). This was done by individually listening to the interviews with our notes whilst simultaneously noting specific points. Thereafter, we conducted axial coding by grouping similar themes together manually (Babbie, 2013). As proposed by Ryan and Bernard (2003) the uncovered themes were further processed through the use of theoretical questioning and the context of the interviews. We tried to consciously view the material and our interpretations from different perspectives to continuously question it and stay as reflexive as possible.

During our second review of the material, we conducted a more focused reading of the interviews and highlighted keywords and metaphors. In the third round, we transcribed quotes and placed them into themes. This resulted in discussions regarding the dominant themes and the overall direction of the second and third round interviews, where we delved deeper into the main themes uncovered. These interviews were more focused than the first ones, as we had found dominant themes that we wanted to explore further. When analysing this material, we transcribed it and then used coloured markers to group different quotes into themes. Following this grouping, we had found salient themes which then

became the basis for our final analysis. The first round of interviews guided our direction, whilst the second and third round provided us with the depth needed for our analysis

## **2.10 Summary**

This chapter has reviewed the philosophical underpinnings of our study. We have elaborated upon our reasoning behind selecting a qualitative approach to our research, as well as the benefits it brings to our research. Furthermore, we have elaborated upon the specific methods we have chosen to use and why. We have also addressed questions regarding anonymity, credibility and trustworthiness. Finally, we end this chapter with a description of our process for analysing the empirical material, and explain how we have made sense out of it. As we have found that no previous studies have examined how organisational change unfolds when there is no established and no envisioned, organisational identity, our aim is to explore this gap and contribute to understanding how change unfolds in this context.

The key aspects we takeaway from this chapter are:

- Our research and worldview is intersubjective and derived from social constructionism
- We depart from an interpretive perspective and hold a hermeneutical knowledge interest, whilst acknowledging elements of postmodernism and functionalism
- We mix induction and deduction in this qualitative study to collect rich and substantial material
- We also acknowledge and appreciate the need for reflexivity in our research process.
- For our research design, we have chosen semi-structured interviews, observations and auto-ethnography as well as audiovisual documentation
- We applied critical choice as our sampling strategy
- In order to gain honest answers from research participants, we provided anonymity
- We have made several evaluations of our material to create a credible and trustworthy thesis
- Our analysis has been an iterative and ongoing process where we have aimed for transparency and acknowledged our biases

### 3. Literature review

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*This chapter outlines the theoretical framework of our study, and frames the aim of this thesis within the borders of existing studies on organisational change, organisational discourse, identity and identity work. The chapter begins by positioning our understanding of organisational change, outlining the differing causes that elicit change, and the different views of how organisational change should come about. Thereafter, we discuss organisational discourse, identity and identity work at different levels and finish off the chapter with a summary and our main takeaways from this chapter.*

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#### 3.1. Organisational change

Organisational change is viewed as a key requisite for organisational survival in today's competitive business environment (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009). Although this need for change is often viewed as essential, change can be volatile (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009), and as many as seventy percent of all change projects fail (Beer & Nohria, 2000). This leads to organisational change being an increasingly important and common field of study (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009; Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015) as well as an important factor for practitioners to take account for in working life today.

There can be several causes for change, both internal and external (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). Research into organisational change highlights that external factors for change include: political, technological, cultural, demographical, economical, increased or new knowledge, and a changed competitive environment (Child, 2005; Patton & McCalman, 2000). Likewise, previous research has found that internal factors for change include: a desire to expand, enhance organisational integration, identity issues, collaboration issues, to alter power or political relations, or as a signal towards both the external and internal environment as a fresh start (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009). This might also come about as a response to an already ongoing organisational expansion (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). The focal point for our study lies in both external and internal pressures for change as our specific research context at Jewellery Co is affected by both.

In organisational change there are two dominant arguments on how to view change: the planned and the process approach, where the planned approach sees change as predictable and controllable (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015; Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009), whereas the process approach views change as something emerging and evolving (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

The planned approach to change is partly based on Lewin's (1951) classic n-step model: 'unfreeze', 'change' and 'refreeze'. His research has inspired many other n-step models, such as Kotter's eight-

step model, where uncertainties surrounding implementation and sustainability of change are managed by following pre-determined steps (Kotter, 1995; Palmer, Dunford & Akin 2009). Within the planned approach, there are numerous models portraying a fairly simple view of organisations (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015), which can lead the practitioner to disregard the context and situation of the organisation, which is the epitome of the process approach to change (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009; Weick & Quinn, 1999).

According to Weick and Quinn (1999), the process approach, contrary to the planned approach, takes multiple factors into consideration and views change as continually emerging, processual and local. Furthermore, the process view on change recognises that there is no *'one size fits all'* of how to manage organisational change, as the change itself will be dependent on context (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that the change can be unpredictable and emerge in an unplanned way (Boje et al. 2012), further enhancing the disarrayed shape organisational change can take. The particular change researched in our study takes a planned approach to change, whilst simultaneously viewing it as an iterative process, making it hold elements of a process approach as well.

There are differing and clashing thoughts of organisational change, some researchers see change as episodic or discontinuous (Newman, 2000; Nadler & Tushman, 1995 in Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009; Weick, 2000), whilst others argue that change never really starts as it is a continuous, ongoing and an incremental process (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Whether change can become implemented and sustainable, is still a cause for discussion, as failure can depend on numerous factors (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009; Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Regardless of the type of change or the perspective, be it a process or a planned view, if the change is to become implemented it has to, at a minimum level, become the new norm in the organisation and for this to occur it needs to be accepted by the people affected by it (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009). However, if the change is to become fully sustainable, it can be argued that it needs to become not only something that individuals accept and tolerate, but also have the will and belief to carry out. Furthermore, in organisational change, it is not uncommon to encounter resistance from the people affected by it, which can lead to failure if not acknowledged and understood at the right time, (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009).

Heracleous (2003) argues that to lessen resistance, focus also needs to lie on *'softer'* conditions, such as cultural and human aspects. He also stresses the importance of comprehending organisational

discourse and, according to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2012), dominating discourses and sense-making are significant factors to acknowledge when investigating a change process.

### 3.2. Organisational discourse

Discourse refers to a way of reasoning, anchored in specific vocabularies that reflect versions of the social world (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000a) and is often mentioned as a powerful source to elicit change (Dunford & Jones, 2000). Discourse encompasses both verbal and textual communication, centred around specific structural characteristics (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). Therefore, discourse can be seen as an influence for how individuals construct their 'selves', thoughts and actions (Sherzer, 1987). However, there are also more personal sources for identity construction, such as roles, social identities and ideologies (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003), and as such, discourse is just one of many forces that shape individuals.

Research points out the importance of communication in the management of organisational change (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001), and scholars such as Ford and Ford (1995) and Sackmann (1989) identified metaphors as facilitators in organisational change. As such, discourse is often expressed through storytelling, rhetoric, humour and irony (Grant et al. 2004). Sveningsson and Sörgärde (2015) argue that discourse is a phenomenon that through text and verbal expressions in part creates and shapes the phenomena itself. Moreover, Grant et al. (2004) found that organisational discourses can be a key element in constructing a variety of phenomena. For example, discourse in organisational change that expresses an orientation by the leader (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006), contributes to shaping the understanding, or sense-making, of the organisational change (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). Although there may exist a dominant discourse within an organisation on how to work and how to realise goals, it is common that organisations have multiple, differing and competing discourses that may at times clash or contradict each other (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). This was of particular interest for us when we conducted our study as we observed all hierarchical echelons within the organisation.

Discourse can exist on multiple levels in an organisation (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000b) and be described as: '*micro-discourse*' on the individual level; '*meso-discourse*' on a group level; '*macro-discourse*' on an organisational level; and '*meta-discourse*' on a societal level (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015).

In our research we focus on the three levels within an organisation: micro-, meso- and macro-discourse, as these link best with the research context and topic.

On an organisational level, discourse revolves around specific opinions on how to view change, for example that the organisation is flexible and willing to change. Organisational discourses constitute a more local interpretation of more overarching societal meta-discourse (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). As previously mentioned, there can be a dominant discourse on the organisational level, however, on a group level, there may exist different discourses, and as stated by Heracleous and Barrett (2001), discourses amongst different stakeholders in an organisation often differ.

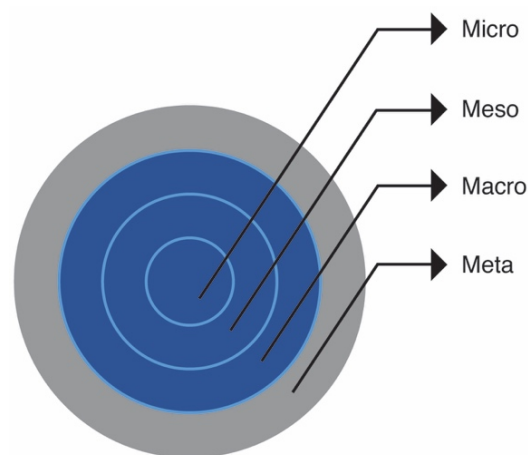


Fig. 3.1- Discursive levels

The complexity of organisations is often visible in how departmental structures emerge and differ from each other (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). As discourse on an individual (micro) level is constantly constructed and re-constructed through social interaction on a group (meso) level (Meyerson & Martin, 1987), it frequently generates different discourses inside the organisational (macro) level discourse (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). Furthermore, individuals have their own favourite discourses based on their interests, goals, and beliefs regarding what needs to be done in order to achieve organisational aims (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). For example, some individuals value cost efficiency and productivity, whilst others focus more on quality and differentiation (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). However, the starting point lies in the strength and popularity of the discourse, and individuals try to relate to all the discursive pressures in their surroundings (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). This is something which is especially interesting for our study, as there are differing discourses on different levels at Jewellery Co.

Dominating discourses always run the risk of being challenged by differing ones, and at the same time they shape individuals through the insight of how events and situations are made sense of, whilst also shaping how the discourse itself is used (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that discourse affects identity and sense-making in organisational change (Hardy, 2001). Furthermore, multiple and competing discourses can lead struggles for individuals as it can influence how they construct their identities (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

### 3.3 Identity

Identity is present on varying levels in management and organisation theory (Alvesson, 2004) and is concerned with how to outline the concept of 'I' and 'We' (Dunning, 2007). This defining assists

individuals in categorising ‘*other*’ actors, as well as finding social categories in their environment (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Identity has been credited to function as a path between individuals and society, constructed by being continuously formulated and re-formulated through discourses and social processes (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Therefore, it can be argued that identity is a “negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside, between past and present” (Ybema et al. 2009, p.303). Through constructing an identity, one seeks to “create a coherent and relatively stable idea of who we are” (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016, p.15). However, any claim that there exists a true core in a self-identity should be regarded as a ‘*calm section on a stormy sea*’ as the process of identity formation and negotiation is continuous and ever changing (Ybema et al. 2009). Therefore, something that is perceived as an image of the ‘*true self*’, is more like a snap shot of a moment in time, and we mainly view identity as something which is in a constant state of revision.

However, taking an extreme stance in the debate of ‘*stable*’ or ‘*fluid*’ identity is not compulsory, and as identity is in a constant state of revision, individuals frequently engage in identity work (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) argue that continual identity work can occur, especially in an environment that lacks a dominant discourse, and is relatively unstable. This is of interest in our specific research context, where the change process creates instability. Moreover, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) acknowledge that individuals might experience diverging levels of instability in their daily lives, leading to differing levels of instability in their self-identity. Although a fixed identity might be perceived as a desired state, this is next to unattainable as the ‘*self*’ consists of a complicated weave of threads, and by limiting oneself to a fixed point can be harmful as one’s ‘*self*’ holds multiple ‘*selves*’ (Collinson, 2003). This can also lead to identity clashes (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016) which in turn can cause individuals to experience cognitive dissonance.

### 3.3.1 Culture and identity

Culture in organisations and society as a whole can influence identity on multiple levels as identity is constantly affected by these surrounding systems (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). An organisations, or subgroups, culture then serves as a way for individuals to make sense of their own and others actions (Golden, 1992), through a historically developed and maintained plan (Geertz, 1973). Organisational culture is therefore defined by the individual organisational members and their understanding of this social system which they belong to (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). Furthermore, organisational culture has been studied as something an organisation either ‘*is*’ or ‘*has*’, viewing it either as a root metaphor for an organisation, or a variable therein (Smirch, 1983). We are of the belief that organisational culture is both something an organisation ‘*has*’ and ‘*is*’, as they both inform each other. Culture includes the



practices, values and beliefs of everyday life, defining what is considered a norm for a particular group of individuals (Hatch, 1993). Within an organisation, there can exist an overarching culture as well as multiple diverging cultures in different groups throughout the organisation (Heracleous, 2003). According to Whetten and Godfrey (1998), the difference between culture and identity is that culture defines peoples understanding of the social system to which they belong, whilst individuals identity in relation to the organisation is the aspect of culturally embedded sense-making, defining who we are in relation to the larger social system to which we belong. Moreover, they argue that culture influences identity and identity enforces cultural norms throughout multiple levels where both of these exist. This is also where identity work is carried out.

### 3.4 Individuals identity work

Individuals identity work is central in working life today (Sveningsson & Larsson, 2006) and reflects the continual work undertaken by individuals when seeking to construct and shape a '*self*' that is "coherent, distinct, and positively valued" (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas, 2008, p.15). Likewise, individuals aim to create a tenacious notion of identity, in order to mould the numerous social identities emerging in interaction with others (Watson, 2009). According to Berger and Luckmann (1966), the socialisation of an individual occurs through the internalisation of something from the external world, which leads to social actions. This process then produces a new social order which causes the individual to re-internalise and produce a new understanding of the '*self*', creating a sequential loop where individuals produce and reproduce their identities within their social environment.

As in organisational change, when seeking to alter one's own, another person's, or a group's identity, it is important to understand how this can be done. Lewin's (1951) model of '*unfreeze*', '*change*' and '*refreeze*' can be used, but this only presents one way which is formulated and static, as opposed to fluid and contextual (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998), which identity can often be. This is a complex challenge, which is important to acknowledge, and one which we view as an issue for all organisations, including the organisation that we have studied on in our research.

According to Alvesson (2010), there are seven images for viewing different theoretical ideas of identity work and construction. We believe these are important to outline for our study as they can be used to more easily categorise and explain the identity work carried out. These are the: self-doubter, struggler, surfer, storyteller, strategist, stencil, and soldier. The aim of these labels is to highlight multiple sources to navigate the field of identity research. Within these images, self-doubters refer to individuals that are working on coping with an overarching sense of insecurity and anxiety (Alvesson, 2010). These insecurities can arise from not being able to control the circumstances that reinforce one's sense of

identity (Knights & Willmott, 1999). Furthermore, this also seems to be the case with multiple identities in one's *'self'*, which can reinforce this insecurity and ambiguity (Collinson, 2003).

Strugglers refer to individuals who are slightly more optimistic or hopeful when creating a view of their *'selves'*. This view of identity creation deals with more active efforts when pursuing a sense of the *'self'*, battling through a "jungle of contradictions and messiness" (Alvesson, 2010, p.200). Furthermore, both anxiety and insecurity might be a part of this, but they are not necessarily the aspects that will remain at the end, as dealing with insecurities is not always an uphill battle according to this view (Alvesson, 2010).

The surfer image is viewed as an individual who is similar to the self-doubter, but is more concerned with the hope for a core *'self'*, to maintain stability in an unstable environment (Alvesson, 2010). As previously mentioned, organisational change can be disarrayed and a cause for instability in the surrounding environment, often lacking an anchor or focal point to hold on to (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015; Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009). The surfer image is viewed as constructed by discourse, and therefore individuals who conduct identity work within this image are constantly responding to a complex world, which can create fragmentation and fluidity (Alvesson, 2010), or as Sampson (1989, p.15) describes it: "a subject who is multidimensional and without centre or hierarchical integration". However, the surfer image has been found to exaggerate the flexibility of individuals (Cohen, 1994), neglecting that life history might make smooth adaptations arduous (Handley et al. 2006).

The storyteller image refers to a self-identity that circles round narrative, personal history and orientations that occur outside of the work context (Alvesson, 2010). This image goes beyond representations of the *'self'* and points towards a more meaningful and integrated identity, having stories and myths assimilated into, and as a central dimension of their identity (McAdams, 1996). The strategist image refers to individuals who in an active, strategic and conscious way seek to craft or produce a functional identity, which can be done through qualification acts, impression management and role seeking (Alvesson, 2010). This is done in order to develop and evaluate their own identities by comparing to role-models and internal or external standards (Ibarra, 1999).

The stencil image is a slightly different interpretation of identity, stating that there exists some kind of standard or outline to fill in, which in turn suggests some guidance as to how identity can be constructed (Alvesson, 2010). For this to be fully functional, the individual is expected to be submissive to this stencil as to fully utilise it and is copied by or have copied this template during their

individual identity construction (Alvesson, 2010). Finally, the soldier image highlights how self-definition centres around social categories and that belonging to a particular social-grouping or an organisation will aid with this (Alvesson, 2010). This image demands compliance and as such, means refraining from one's own strong sense of individuality, making it somewhat similar to the stencil image in this sense (Alvesson, 2010). This image of a soldier sees the overlap of the organisation and the 'self' as well as depersonalisation as important (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994).

Acknowledging that there exists no 'best way' to look at how identity work and constructions are carried out, we realise the importance of defining our stance in this study. Our interpretation of identity work and construction, in the specific research context of change at Jewellery Co, is viewed through a mix of images leading to a patchwork image of self-doubters and soldiers being pushed to surf. This meaning that the individuals are being pushed through the change process to shift the ways they construct their identities, enforcing uniform identities from a soldier's perspective, whilst still being open to an ever changing and more fluid organisational circumstance, utilising the surfer image. These images can be utilised for identity work on multiple levels.

#### **3.4.1. Identity work relating to the 'self'**

At the individual level, identity is concerned with the response to the question of 'Who am I?' (Alvesson, 2004) which according to Gioia (1998) is a lifelong process of figuring out how one relates to other individuals and their surrounding environment. From the perspective of social constructionism, identity is fragmented and unstable, making the individual identity continuously evolving and transforming (Collinson, 2003; Ford, 2006). Therefore, individual identity is highly context dependent and in a constant state of re-negotiation (Alvesson et al. 2008). Essentially, individual identity is what makes a person into a 'person', as it constitutes the very core of the being (Gioia, 1998).

The idea of individual identity implies specific forms of positive subjectivity and encompasses feelings, values and behaviour that point individuals in specific directions (Alvesson et al. 2008). According to Gioia (1998), it is what differentiates and distinguishes one individual from a countless number of other individuals. Moreover, he argues that to achieve this, individuals construct themselves as encompassing some sort of unique characteristics to define their self-concept. This is social identity theory applied to individual beings, who in their identity construction tend to focus on their distinctiveness as compared to others (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Here, they not only see themselves as distinct, but they also conduct themselves as they are distinctive and special (Gioia, 1998), which is important for us to be aware of in our study.

Although individual identity is fluid and ever changing, the individual identity is just one way to approach identity themes (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). According to Whetten and Godfrey (1998) individuals often hold multiple identities which are each tailored for a specific role or context. Therefore, individuals have several 'social selves' which are created to suit the intended audience (Gioia, 1998). As individuals construct their identities to suit their social environments, individual identity work is often conducted in relation to other social groups (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998), and in our research context at Jewellery Co, this is a central aspect.

### **3.4.2. Identity work relating to organisational subcultures**

Identities are largely formed through social groups (Alvesson, 2004) and it is not uncommon within organisational research to assume that individuals in the same organisation all share a specific type of similar values (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). However, this is rarely the case, and different departments in organisations often express diverging values. According to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015) organisations inhabit a range of occupational teams that generate and sustain cultural variety rather than overall organisational unity and coherence. These groups are commonly labelled as subcultures (Trice & Beyer, 1993).

Subcultures are groups within an organisation that develop their own values, assumptions and beliefs regarding the organisation's purpose (Jernier et al. 1991) and allow for individuals to identify with a certain group in the organisation (Gelder & Thornton, 1997). Subcultures can be formed in numerous ways such as differentiation of work tasks, departments, divisions and hierarchical positions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015) and these differences can in turn foster significant divergences in terms of meaning, values, symbols and interpretations (Martin, 2002). This level of identity that exists in subcultures can be referred to as a form of social identity that influences the individual regarding desired norms and characteristics of specific social groups that they may want to identify with (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Group identity is constructed through similarities in characteristics that define their self-views (Steele, 1988) and these subcultural groups tend to focus on their distinctiveness as compared to other groups (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This group identity is strengthened through intergroup comparisons, where the individuals involved search for positive differences between themselves and other groups (Tajfel, 1982). This aspect is something that we need to be aware of in our research context, as there are several groupings at Jewellery Co. This comparison is undertaken by subcultural members as a way of enhancing their own self-esteem. Here we can see how individuals work on their identity on multiple levels, and according to Erickson (1964) identity is not only focused on being distinct as compared to other individuals, but also a way of searching for similarities between

the 'self' and a specific group of people to which the individual wishes to belong or wants to be associated with.

These subcultural groups more than often exist in organisations, and as organisational environments today tend to shift rapidly, a constant process of adaption is always ongoing (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), there are five types of identity work that can occur when frictions and conflicts emerge. These are identity: adjustment, expression, juggling, wrestling and crashing. The first two suggests a degree of coherence, where identity adjustment requires small amounts of adaption, whilst in identity expression, the environment adapts to the individual identity, instead of the other way around (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). The third one, identity juggling, is a slight form of identity struggle which implies a minor friction between the 'self' and the demands of the environment. This form of identity work can lead to identity wrestling and crashing, where identity wrestling means that the identity can be undermined because their 'self' is only somewhat confirmed by others. This in turn forces individuals to repair and revise their 'selves' in a situation that is seen as socially unfavourable (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). This identity work can lead to identity crashing, which can occur when there is a strong conflict between the 'self' and the current environment, and no positive link between the work and the 'self', threatening a collapse of the identity, at least temporarily (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016). However, this is not extremely common (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2016), but is something that we believe that one should be aware of. We find this to be relevant in our research context at Jewellery Co, as we seek to explore how organisational members identity work is affected on multiple levels in this change process.

According to Morgan and Ogbonna (2008), subcultures influence the behaviour of employees, which can result in resistance from subcultures during organisational changes if they feel that it goes against their established values and beliefs (Wines & Hamilton, 2009). As organisational identity can change more rapidly than individuals can reinvent their 'selves', it often becomes a battle between the search for a stable core, and a fluid environment (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998).

### **3.4.3 Identity work relating to the organisation**

Organisational identity aims to answers the questions of '*Who are we as an organisation?*', and '*How do I relate to you?*' (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). Essentially, it seeks to explain how an organisation is different from the groups and members that comprise it. Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994), argue that organisational identity and identification with an organisation relies on the degree to which an individual defines themselves with the same traits or characteristics they believe define the organisation. According to Albert and Whetten (1985), organisational identity is compromised by three

central dimensions: what is taken by organisational members to be ‘*central*’ to the organisation; what makes the organisation ‘*distinctive*’ from other organisations; and what is seen by organisational members as being a ‘*continuous*’ feature which links the organisation to the past and the future. As we seek to explore how a specific change unfolds when there is no established and no envisioned, organisational identity, these three aspects are of particular importance for our study.

Organisational identification is important as it can aid with sense-making (Cheney, 1983), enhance the individual’s self-esteem and create a feeling of belonging (Pratt, 1998). For members of an organisation to identify with it, there must exist clear targets to identify with (Cheney, 1983), such as good organisational leaders, great products, strong symbols or robust values (Pratt, 1998). If these exist, then the members of the organisation can identify with them and establish positive mind-sets, which in turn can affect: motivation, job performance, pride, individual decision making, and loyalty to the organisation itself (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Cheney, 1983; Pratt, 1998). Likewise, if individual members of the organisation identify with it, they are more likely going to adhere to organisational needs that might demand more from them than their usual tasks (Empson, 2004; Tompkins & Cheney 1985). As such, it stands to reason that organisations could benefit immensely from their members identifying with them, especially in times of substantial organisational change, such as the one that we studied at Jewellery Co.

However, individuals may encounter obstacles when seeking an organisational identity, as organisational identity is much more fluid than the individual one (Gioia & Schultz, 1995) and in an organisational change, this is generally the case. Identity exists on several echelons within organisations: on an individual, subcultural and organisational level (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). According to Alvesson and Willmott (2002), there is a constant negotiation between the identity-regulation from the organisation, the subcultural groups to which the individual belongs and that of the individual. These multiple identities can create cognitive dissonance between staying true to one’s individual or subcultural ‘*self*’, or to become immersed in the organisational one. Moreover, Whetten and Godfrey (1998) argue that an organisation can present a complex and multifaceted identity without appearing schizophrenic as an individual might do. They also state that if the identity of the organisation is not clear, it has the potential to accommodate various interpretations and actions, and pursue several complex challenges such as planned or unplanned change without disregarding core values. However, they also highlight that this unclarity presents the greatest challenge for maintaining an organisational identity. We acknowledge this as an important factor to consider, specifically in this organisational change and research context at Jewellery Co, as the organisation does not have an

established or an envisioned organisational identity. Therefore, this is of particular interest to explore in real time in order to see how it unfolds.

### 3.5 Summary

In this literature review, we have presented the concepts of: organisational change, organisational discourse, identity and identity work. Within this, we have made a distinction between culture and identity, as well as elaborated upon the different ways in which identity work is constructed and on what levels individuals conduct their identity work. This chapter has also explored the relationships between these concepts and how they relate to our specific research context at Jewellery Co. Through this, we have positioned our research and its context within the field of organisational change and identity, with the aim of contributing to a further understanding of how change unfolds in this specific context, where an organisation moves from an eviscerated organisational identity to an unestablished one.

We takeaway the following key concepts from this review:

- Organisational change is viewed as a key requisite for organisational survival in today's competitive business environment
- There can be several causes for organisational change, both internal and external
- Discourse is a powerful tool to elicit change, and can be seen as an influence for how individuals construct their 'selves'
- Discourse can exist on multiple levels in organisations
- Culture influences identity and identity enforces cultural norms
- Individual identity can exist on many different levels, and identity work is carried out in relation to the same levels; individual, subcultural and organisational
- Identity work is complex and can create cognitive dissonance and in rare cases, it can lead to identity crashes
- Subcultural groups tend to focus on their distinctiveness compared to other groups, and focus on positive differences
- Organisational identification is important, and in order for individuals to identify with the organisation, there need to be clear targets or values to identify with

## 4. Empirical material - The expedition of change at Jewellery Co

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*This chapter presents our empirical material collected at Jewellery Co during their ongoing organisational change. The material is presented as a narrative, explored through the framework that is applied by Jewellery Co throughout the change process.*

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### 4.1 Background

We collected our empirical material at Jewellery Co, a Swedish retail chain that is the largest actor on the Nordic market for jewellery and watches. Jewellery Co has an approximate of four hundred employees, one hundred stores, and was founded in the 1940's by a Swedish entrepreneur. The company started small and during the first years of operations, the main revenue came from a Christmas ornament. The founder felt that there was more to gain and started a specialist store for office supplies and academia. At the beginning of the 1950's the product range expanded further into jewellery. Most early stores were built in what was once gateways and storage areas for horse carts, explaining the small spaces but great locations of these stores. The founder later signed an agreement with another organisation, resulting in lucrative imports of watches from Asia. The first batch of watches sold out within a week which lead to greater orders in this segment and a new business model, where service was included. Through organic growth and early international imports, the organisation grew to become what it is today, an organisation with a rich history of efficiency and tradition, opening stores all over Sweden and even branching out to neighbouring countries under a globalisation banner. As one of the top managers put it: *"Jewellery Co has a lovely history"* - Carol, Top management.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the organisation was acquired by the current owner, sharing a similar entrepreneurial spirit as the founder, but with a slightly different background. In 2014, the CEO position was taken over by the son of the owner, Mike Hannigan, who has worked at Jewellery Co in different positions for over ten years. When Mike took over as CEO, he initiated an investigation of the organisation in order to clarify the state of Jewellery Co, whilst also deciding on a future path and goal for the organisation. He found that although the organisation was continuously growing, the market was increasing at a more rapid pace. This told Mike that things needed to change, and due to this he launched a change program to lead the organisation to new heights. As Mike reflected upon when he was explaining the change to us:

*"There is a gap between Jewellery Co's growth and the markets total increase. The gap is due to one thing, and one thing only: We became less relevant for the customer than other players on the market. The market grew quicker than Jewellery Co did."*



Some of the other top managers also commented on the need for change at Jewellery Co: *“I think it's a must to remain on the market, we have to take the next step”*. - Chandler, Top management. Another top manager also mentioned this, stating: *“We don't need to change everything [...] but today's society is rapidly expanding and in our industry everything needs to be seamless”*. - Carol, Top management. This was also mentioned by one of the middle managers during our interviews: *“I think this is the way to go, if you don't walk down this road, I think that you can quite quickly and easily be forgotten”*. - Julie, Middle management. The need for change can therefore be seen to be right on time.

Whilst initiating this change project, it became apparent for Mike that there were internal challenges relating to how the change was going to be implemented. When Mike became CEO, he felt that there was no trust towards the leadership within the organisation, and in order for the change to be realised he needed *“a common drive to create change”*. Specifically, he felt that *“you need the right people”*, referring to the need for a united front to drive the change project. To establish this drive, he created a new leadership team and: *“it took a year to appoint everybody, a completely new leadership group”*, resulting in the termination of some contracts and the creation of some new ones. The new leadership team was a mix of internal and external hires, intending to give a breath of fresh air into the organisation by providing new ideas and input. Aside from the creation of a new leadership team, there were also multiple re-organisations of roles at the head office, resulting in further termination of contracts and merging of job roles. This has in turn created questions in the organisation on multiple levels, as changes prior to Mike's time had not been fully implemented. Moreover, the current re-organisation has never been transparent or explained: *“We need to become more inclusive as we want to facilitate more employee engagement [...] I feel positive about this change. This time, we will drive it through, what we decide to do, it will be done”*. - Phoebe, Top management.

However, organisational members perceive that there are differing views in the leadership of the organisation: *“We are very much leader controlled, and we have two leaders, the owner and Mike, and they are not always on the same page”*. - Carol, Top management. This perception of a non-coherent leadership was also voiced by another top manager: *“I think there is a resistance in the owners versus the establishment”*. - Ross, Top management. A possible reason behind this perceived split was elaborated upon by an employee: *“For us that have worked here longer, we were recruited by the owners, and if Mike wants to change something, the owners need to be on board [...] and I don't always feel that is the case”*- Rachel, Employee. One of the middle managers expressed her frustration regarding the leadership of Jewellery Co:

*“I really wished it was clearer, that at the top it was decided and then pushed down. Instead, you can be working on something that one part wants, but then when it’s time for a decision it changes into something completely different, as the decisions are not anchored all the way up”. - Monica, Middle management.*

This split within the leadership of the organisation was aptly articulated by a top manager: *“It’s a little bit like kids with divorced parents”*. - Janice, Top management. Here, she explicitly refers to the issue of non coherent leadership.

Another issue that Mike found to why Jewellery Co has not grown as quickly as the market, is that the organisation looks at the past when taking future decisions, instead of looking at the perceived ideal: *“Everybody has a good attitude. But I can also feel that some people are a bit tied down and retrogressive”*. - Carol, Top management. This reflects what Mike stated: *“Today’s culture can not be what decides tomorrow’s”*. Moreover, Jewellery Co has tried to appeal to a wide audience, and in the process the organisation has become unclear, to both customers and employees, as further elaborated on by Mike: *“If Jewellery Co is to be for exactly everybody, it won’t be interesting, it has to be limited”*.

## **4.2 The change - Conquering the mountain**

The organisational change at Jewellery Co seeks to increase engagement and collaboration across all departments, dealing with both the trust and the transparency issues that Mike identified. The main aim of the change is to boost organisational performance: *“The goal is to become better, to be the best”*. - Megan, Top management, and institutionalise a new vision for the organisation, which will lead to less uncertainty regarding the purpose of Jewellery Co, answering the questions of: *“How do we perceive ourselves? How do others perceive us? And how do we want to be perceived?”* - Mike, CEO. This new vision seeks to make the organisation top-of-mind for both consumers and employees: *“We need to go back to the basics, why does Jewellery Co exist?”* - Janice, Top management. Moreover, one middle manager expressed a wish for change with the statement: *“I would like to get back to the feeling of belonging to a big organisation, and the feeling of belonging to something”*. - Cathy, Middle management.

As a lens for visualising the change, a framework is used. The framework was developed and recommended to Mike by a friend within the retail industry, and builds upon five questions:



Fig 4.1. The ‘Change Framework’ applied at Jewellery Co.

Mike illustrates the framework by using the metaphor of a mountain climbing expedition and states: *“We want to climb Mount Everest. We want to be on top of the world”*. This metaphor of an expedition seeks to encapsulate all five questions of the framework and make it more tangible. As highlighted by Mike: *“Everyone that works at Jewellery Co has to understand the framework”*. Which is why the metaphor of a mountain expedition is used, as a lens for making sense of the framework.

### 4.3 Planning the route - Where are we going?



Fig 4.2 – Framework step one

The first question of the framework asks ‘*where are we going?*’ and entails both inspirational and strategic goals for the organisation to strive for until the year 2020. This is further divided into goals for 2016, 2017 and so forth. As highlighted by two top managers: *“We need to change, to set a structure and make it clear where the organisation is going [...] if we can simplify everything then the organisation is much more easily manoeuvred”*. - Megan, Top management, and *“My perception is that things here are done without any thought behind them”*. - Carol, Top management.

When visualising the goals for 2020, this is equalled to: *“Standing on top of Mount Everest”* - Mike, CEO. The inspirational goals were decided upon in a first workshop at the head office, consisting of the leadership team, where they conducted simple exercises not relating to Jewellery Co, in order to first get in the right state-of-mind. Thereafter they broke off into pairs, where the task was to brainstorm around a vision for Jewellery Co. Here they came to the agreement that watches, like jewellery, are a fashion accessory and that the typical customer of Jewellery Co seeks to express their personality with fashionable accessories. This resulted in a vision, expressing the desired future state of Jewellery Co, and their level of ambition: *“Our vision is to be the best, number one for customers on the markets where we exist.”* - Mike, CEO.

The second workshop, addressing the strategic goals, was also carried out on a leadership level. Here they identified and ranked different stakeholders in level of importance for Jewellery Co, deciding on customers as number one, employees as number two, and finally shareholders as number three. This workshop boiled down to the use of Specific, Measurable, Assignable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) goals, based on key performance indicators (KPI's) such as, revenues, profit margin, conversion rates, as well as the creation of a Net Promoter Score (NPS) and a Team Engagement Score (TES). Specifically, the TES measures the level of engagement employees at different positions in the organisation feel towards their work and surrounding environment. NPS measures how likely customers are to recommend Jewellery Co to their family or friends. These are both continually measured through surveys. At the end of the workshop, they had set targets for these, as well as decided on 2020 goals for the other KPI's.

#### 4.4 Establishing the status quo - Where are we today?



**Fig 4.3 – Framework step two**

The second question asks ‘*where are we today?*’ and seeks to evaluate the current state of Jewellery Co. In this current state, the lack of strategy and structure was highlighted by management: “*There is no strategic plan, and I hope that this change will result in one. I hope that the owners will have patience in seeing this process through*”. - Carol, Top management, and: “*Everyone wants to have a well-structured work environment, and that is the purpose of the change, you should know your goals and understand the big plan*”. - Monica, Middle management. This was elaborated by another top manager, who stated that:

*“There is this thing with unclear signals, where you don't know what to prioritise and you don't know what's important. And no matter how hard you try, you don't know what your next step is, you only know you need to get there”.* – Joey, Top management

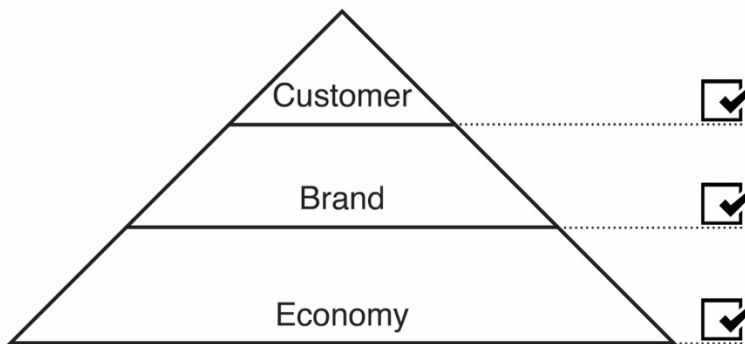
During our interviews, there were several references to the current culture and situation of Jewellery Co, as described by a top manager:

*“It’s one of these bipolar descriptions, don’t fuck it up, it’s better to do nothing than to do something wrong, at the same time it’s one of these ‘I can’t take it anymore, now I’m going to do something’”. - Ross, Top management.*

When describing the organisation, one employee said: *“It’s a bit of a schizophrenic person, quick to change and with some mood swings. A bit of a teenager, trying to find themselves”*. - Rachel, Employee. One of the middle managers described Jewellery Co as: *“A person who juggles a thousand balls in the air. Very driven, very forward but never really happy with what they have”*. - Julie, Middle management. This muddled view of the current situation continued, where another top manager described Jewellery Co as: *“Ambivalent, pretty scattered, happy and loyal. Not narrow-minded, but maybe a bit one sided. Pretty strict, and authoritarian”*. - Carol, Top management.

This first part of the framework was composed of two workshops and a kick-off. The first workshop addressed the question of *‘where are we today?’*. This workshop consisted of the leadership team who conducted mind-mapping exercises to define the status quo. Outlining this need for definition, one top manager said: *“There has been a structure but it has never been put on paper, now we need to put processes down on paper, but all of a sudden there is no structure”*. - Phoebe, Top management. These exercises included using a SWOT grid to analyse the current status of Jewellery Co, with up-to-date revenue and profits taken into account. Here the leadership team decided on the strategic themes and actions that would need to be undertaken in order to achieve their short-term and long-term goals. This resulted in approximately thirty suggestions which whittled down to three homogenous theme groupings; *‘To win the customer in the moment of truth’*, meaning mapping of the customers and creating an in-store environment to facilitate conversions into purchases; *‘Brand alignment - Building a strong brand’*, establishing clear values, and creating a red thread to permeate Jewellery Co in all of the organisation's activities; *‘Standing on a healthy and stable economic foundation’*, saving in order to later spend, this is based on return on investment thinking and cash flow analysis, so that Jewellery Co is standing on a safe and stable foundation.

This boiled down to a three level pyramid, with a stable economic foundation in the bottom, building the brand as a long-term strategy in the middle, and the tip of the pyramid consisting of winning the customer.



**Fig 4.4 – The pyramid checklist**

Thereafter, this was rolled out to the entire head office, functioning as a guideline or checklist, starting at the top, where all three levels need to be checked off in order for a decision to be made. The need for this exercise to take place was highlighted by one middle manager: *“There is no foundation, we are always re-inventing the wheel”*. - Susan, Middle management.

Following the formation of the new leadership team, establishing a new vision and SMART goals for Jewellery Co, the leadership group invited all of the head office departments as well as the middle managers for a two-day, offsite, kick-off. This was located at a four-star conference centre and hotel in the archipelago of Sweden's capital city, Stockholm, where all participants were flown in by Jewellery Co for the sole purpose of attending. The main goal was to introduce the new CEO, Mike Hannigan, as well as the future vision and goals for Jewellery Co, decided in the previous workshops, and present the framework that would be used in the change ahead.

The kick-off started by everyone taking their places and the entire leadership group walking in, humorously dressed up, with a map asking the questions *‘where are we going?’*, *‘where are we today?’* and *‘what is needed to get there?’*, making an early reference to the framework that would later be presented, as they made their way to the stage. Then the presentations started, beginning with a presentation from Mike, who began with a recap of what Jewellery Co had achieved over the past year, and continued by showcasing a new store concept, new products, an intranet, and new tools for in-store sales. It was also highlighted that Jewellery Co had managed to raise 6.3 million SEK for charity and that the next step was to create their own foundation where one percent of the revenue from the customer loyalty program would be donated to charity. Mike went on to explain: *“From this moment on, we will be able to view this as the period before and the period after. This is a new beginning”*. He then went on to present the framework and the goals for 2020. There was also a short inspirational movie played at full volume to further reinforce the new vision and *“to get people excited (about the change)”* - Mike, CEO. As one top manager said: *“The feeling (at the kick-off) was ‘yes, let’s go!’*.

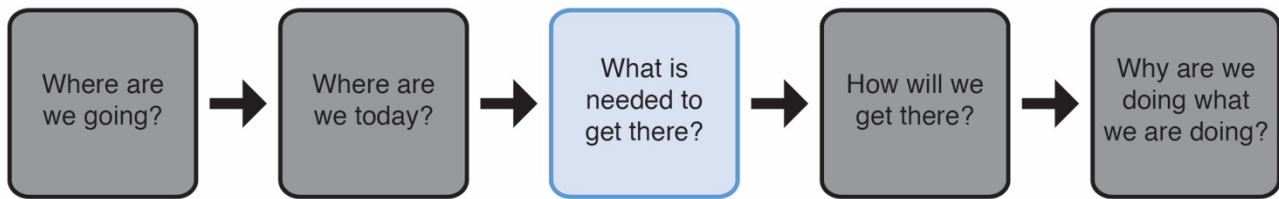
*Everyone wanted to move forward with the change*". - Megan, Top management. As Mike explains: *"Everything was launched with total openness and transparency"*. However, the complexity of understanding the change was outlined by one top manager: *"The format in itself is large [...] the first time I encountered the framework and its metaphor it was just a mountain"*. - Megan, Top management.

After the opening presentation, there was more practical information and education about new products and brands. Following this, there was a team building activity where employees got to do: *"everything between singing songs to jumping in the water"* - Mike, CEO. It was organised as an orienteering competition with different tasks, and if they succeeded in the tasks and photographed them they were awarded points. After this, there was a break before a formal dinner at the evening, followed by a presentation from the team who had been on a voluntary trip helping refugees in Greece and a ventriloquist stand up act, who was according to Mike: *"Outstanding! Everyone was laughing"*. When the dinner was over, everyone went to an after party which continued into the small hours of the morning.

The following day focused on education in two different areas. One in service and another one that addressed the new processes within IT. This day then ended with the participant travelling home.

Two months following the kick-off, there was a second workshop in this step of the framework, held at the head office. Here, the framework was repeated for the departments, showcasing the strategic goals that had been set by the leadership team. The need for this recap was explained by a top manager: *"The framework was presented during the kick-off, and then we didn't speak about it for a long time"*. - Phoebe, Top management. There was also a repetition of the current situation and the new vision for Jewellery Co. Thereafter, they divided themselves into their respective departments and conducted exercises on how they would align their goals to the overarching aim for Jewellery Co, and what they could contribute with to reach these goals. This was done to create SMART goals for the departments and be able to measure them. This also meant figuring out for whom the different departments exist, as not all of them contribute directly to KPI's in an easily followed linear path, for example the HR and Economy departments who are support functions for the entire organisation: *"These departments exist so that Jewellery Co can become as good as it possibly can"*. - Mike, CEO.

## 4.6 Defining the tools - what is needed to get there?



**Fig 4.5 – Framework step three**

The third question in the framework asks ‘*what is needed to get there?*’. As explained by Mike: “*For us to be successful in our mission, we need to do the right things. It doesn’t matter if we do good things if they are the wrong ones*”. The priority in this step was to determine and prepare what is needed to achieve the goal. This was done through a workshop including the entire leadership team, all departments and their members. As one of the middle managers said: “*Within this change there many question marks*”. - *Cathy, Middle management*. They started with a group exercise, recapping the framework, the goals, their vision and the ‘*status quo*’. Referring to the framework, one top manager stated that: “*Many of us has had to repeat it many times. Every word takes two times to understand*”. - *Janice, Top management*. Thereafter, they broke off into randomly assigned groups of four to five members and in these groups they discussed and wrote down, on post-its, actions that were needed in order to reach the goals for Jewellery Co. They had also been given a task to brainstorm around potential new revenue streams and how Jewellery Co can be more inclusive across all levels. Following this exercise, the larger group assembled again and then each group presented all their ideas by putting up their post-its on the whiteboard and quickly explaining their thoughts around these. When this was finished, there was a group discussion around these ideas, deciding on what was urgent and important, signifying what needed to be done in the short and long-term on an organisational wide level. Thereafter, each department were to set their own goals according to the framework. A part of this step was also to set up personal targets through a Performance Excellence Tool (PET) both at the head office and on a middle management level. This was perceived as a lengthy process, as stated by one middle manager: “*Before you see anything of the change, you almost forget about it*”. - *Cathy, Middle management*.

In this step of the framework, the importance of, and how much each member relates to, their team became apparent: “*We have a strong sense of team solidarity [...] we care for each other, we help each other, we are in this together*”. - *Julie, Middle management*. This was mirrored by a top manager: “*We are a loyal team, we believe in each other and we care about each other, and we also care about the company*”. - *Carol, Top management*. These explanations about the importance of the team were common, and at some points even surpassed the organisation in importance:



*“We have a high work moral in our team, with an extreme level of loyalty [...] it’s all about teamwork, if the team is happy, the organisation is happy, but the team is the most important”*. - Susan, Middle management.

This way of looking at the levels of importance were shared by other middle managers, and was further elaborated on by Cathy:

*“We see ourselves as a unit in a big organisation, where we take care of each other [...] but that we also distance ourselves a bit from the whole, and try to focus on our team [...] I work for my team, and of course for the organisation, but the dynamics in our team is more important for me”*. - Cathy, Middle management.

As one of the employees said: *“We have a strong sense of cohesion in our team”*. - Rachel, Employee. This cohesion was linked with how the teams understood each other by a middle manager: *“We have a high level of understanding within the team because we know our respective areas of responsibility. It is not as easy when you cross departments”*. - Monica, Middle management. What Monica mentions here is also the tensions of working across teams, something that was explained by another top manager:

*“Cooperation between the departments has not always functioned that well [...] it’s not everyone who can go to anyone and say exactly what they think because this will cause tension [...] if the wrong person asks something it can be perceived as they are stepping on someone else's territory”*. - Phoebe, Top management.

This tension is further highlighted by a top manager: *“I would say that I now choose my words more wisely than ever”*. - Joey, Top management. Moreover, we saw that in this tension there also lies a sense of competition between the teams: *“I think we compete with each other, at least unofficially. But on the surface, everything should be happy”*. - Julie, Middle management. This sense of unofficial competition can be seen to culminate in a pressure to deliver: *“My team has a lot of pressure to deliver, whilst other teams don't have the same mind-set [...] we need to share more responsibilities”*. - Susan, Middle management. This was expressed as being a greater issue now, during this change, where directions for teams and departments change as well: *“When the other departments change their focus, this can affect us as we get a higher workload and less support”*. - Janice, Top management.

One of the top managers spoke about the level of efficiency within Jewellery Co and especially between the different teams: *“There are a bit too many unnecessary questions in this company, and if you have a problem it gets discussed for three hours instead of just solving it”*. - Carol, Top management. This can also affect the own team, as further explained by a top manager: *“Sometimes when I help other departments, my team can question why I am helping them, when they should be solving that themselves [...] they can question where my loyalties lie”*. - Susan, Top management. We observed that this loyalty towards the team then becomes something that is perceived as highly important: *“If you ask my team they will tell you that I’m not supposed to do other things, I’m supposed to be with them at my desk”*. - Janice, Top management. As expressed by Susan: *“The biggest value is loyalty”* - Susan, Middle management.

Moreover, the importance of the team is apparent even when the organisational members at Jewellery Co describe themselves and their roles: *“I take a lot of responsibility in my team, and if they feel bad, I feel bad, if they feel good, I feel good”*. - Susan, Middle management. Another employee described herself by saying: *“I want to spread some joy, I am a team player overall”*. - Rachel, Employee. We also saw these shared explanations in the top management: *“I think I am kind, inspiring, I listen and I try to make the team feel safe”*. - Carol, Top management.

Simultaneously we observed that some organisational members described the job itself as very significant: *“There is an inherent feeling that the employment is important, it is sort of holy”*. - Ross, Top management. This was further explained by Susan: *“Jewellery Co is really, really important for who I am, it’s sad but true, that’s how it is [...] I eat, sleep and breathe Jewellery Co”*. - Susan, Middle management.

#### 4.7 Mind-set and attitudes - How will we get there?



Fig 4.6 – Framework step four

The fourth question within the framework focuses on ‘*how will we get there?*’ and relates to the mind-set needed from the people involved. Or as Mike said: *“living the brand”*. This step also serves to find common values, which will need to permeate the entire organisation. As one employee put it: *“This is something that we need to work on a lot, there are not really any (values) today”*. - Rachel, Employee.

This in turn will facilitate the creation of mechanisms for maintaining the new organisational culture, based on the values created. A commonly desired value was highlighted by one of the middle managers: *“We need to take better care of our employees [...] this is something that can be improved”*. - Julie, Middle management. Or as one employee put it: *“There is a need to start valuing the employees, they are the ones that drive the organisation”*. - Olivia, Employee. However, as one middle manager stated: *“Don’t see yourself as being better than anyone else, because at Jewellery Co, you are not”*. - Julie, Middle management.

This step in the framework will be carried out through four workshops where employees from all over the organisation will be flown in to participate and determine these values. As the CEO, Mike put it: *“We are looking for champions of the cause”*. However, as one top manager described it:

*“How people are today is not the optimal employee, but it’s what we need when there is no structure [...] pure loyalty, that’s what it’s all about [...] everybody agrees on the goals, but ‘how’ do we do it? In what order? What is ‘my’ role? That’s where the breaking point is”*. - Joey, Top management.

Finally, one middle manager explained that; *“We are trying to create a ‘we’ feeling.* - Cathy, Middle management.

#### 4.8 Defining the purpose - Why are we doing what we are doing?



Fig 4.7 – Framework step five

The fifth and final question of the framework seeks to answer ‘*why are we doing what we are doing?*’. This step involves the organisation’s mission: *“We need to have a reason for why we are doing what we are doing”*. - Mike, CEO, and therefore *“a common goal is needed”*. This will also be done through several workshops, determining *“what the ‘why’ will be”* and resulting in *“our cause - why we exist”* - Mike, CEO. The need for this part of the change was highlighted by a top manager: *“The higher purpose is missing, making it hard to connect to”* - Phoebe, Top management. We also observed further concerns for the lateness of this final step from other top managers: *“The ‘why’ should have been established earlier. If you don’t know why you are doing something, it is hard to motivate why*

*you should do it*". - Carol, Top management. Another top manager had a strong opinion regarding this as well: *"Always start with 'why'. Why the fuck are we doing this, and why are we not doing something else [...] It's only when I know this that I can understand"*. - Ross, Top management.

The last two steps in the framework is something that Mike sees as a process that will take a long time, at least two to three years before they are fully implemented and anchored. *"Sometimes we run a bit fast for our own good [...] it would have been nice to have a 'why' earlier in the process"*. - Julie, Middle management.

## 4.9 Summary

To summarise, this chapter presents the empirical material collected at Jewellery Co. It describes the organisations background and historical perspectives up until today. Thereafter, it guides the reader through the change as it has unfolded at Jewellery Co through the framework that has been used:



**Fig 4.8.** The 'Change Framework' applied at Jewellery Co.

The framework consists of five steps, outlined in the figure above, and up until today, Jewellery Co has moved through the first three of these. The chapter finishes with some views of the two future steps remaining, ideas about how Jewellery Co will carry these out, as well as thoughts around how important these steps are for the change at hand.

## 5. Analysis and Discussion

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*In this chapter, we analyse our empirical material in depth. Here we present our main themes and how they connect to organisational change, organisational discourse, identity and identity work. We reflect on our main findings of the subcultural identity being dominant and the implications and consequences of this. We see how this creates tensions and struggles within Jewellery Co when aiming to create and foster a new organisational culture and identity. Moreover, we discuss how the dominant discourses in Jewellery Co effect and enforce individuals identity work in relation to their subcultures.*

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### 5.1 A need for change

During our research, we observed several organisational discourses on both on the macro-, meso- and micro-level. We found that discourses mainly pointed towards the need for Jewellery Co to change. These discourses focused on different aspects at different levels. Several of the macro-level discourses emphasised the market perspective for change. We label this as *'market discourse'*. This market discourse is a common view in organisational change literature, which emphasises the need for change to stay competitive (Palmer, Dunford & Akin, 2009). One primary example of this is how the top management expressed a gap in the market growth and the importance of remaining relevant to stay on the market. This was repeated throughout the macro-discursive level, which denotes a view of change as driven by external factors. According to Child (2005), and Patton and MaCalman (2000), this is a common reason for many organisations to change. This signals that the top management view change as highly important to remain and keep up with the rapid business environment. We also observed this in a minor scale during our interviews on the meso-level, but it was predominantly found on the macro-level of Jewellery Co. This could be explained by how the CEO, Mike, talks about how crucial market share, growth and profits are for the survival of the company with the leadership team, influencing their understanding of the change. This gives an overarching message from top management that *'we need to change to survive!'*

We also found a commonly occurring organisational discourse, mainly on the macro- and meso-level, which emphasised the internal need for change by referring to structure. We label this as *'structure discourse'*. We saw this in how organisational members frequently spoke about the need to simplify processes to manoeuvre the organisation with more ease. This type of discourse expresses the wish for more internal structure indicating an emerging factor for change, based on internal needs. According to Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2009), internal factors for change can often include a need to enhance collaboration and organisational collaboration. This can then be linked to the need for internal structure at Jewellery Co. Organisational members spoke about how they perceived Jewellery Co to lack a plan

and direction, and that decisions were made without being fully thought through. We observed that when this discourse was used, it referred to a divided leadership at Jewellery Co. According to Sveningsson and Larsson (2006), organisational discourse that expresses an orientation by the leader contributes to sense-making and understanding in an organisational change. However, at Jewellery Co, we found that organisational members often referred to the challenge of having two leaders which are not always on the same page or in agreement with the direction of the change. This leads to contradictions in direction, creating insecurity and frustration. Although Dunford and Jones (2000) argue that discourse is a powerful tool to elicit change, in our research we found that if it is not coherent on the macro-level, it becomes less effective on the meso- and meta-level as well.

Another observation that we made during our interviews was how organisational members of Jewellery Co, mainly on a micro-level, expressed a desire for more employee valuation and recognition. We label this as *'motivational discourse'*. There was a clear and consistent message throughout this discursive level that employees should be valued for what they bring to the organisation. As Sveningsson and Sörgärde (2015) found, individuals choose their favourite discourses based on their interests, goals and beliefs, relating to what they think needs to be done in order to reach the organisational goals. At Jewellery Co, this was apparent in how organisational members spoke about the importance of acknowledging that it is the employees that are the driving force of the organisation. These discourses were also apparent at the meso-level but not at a macro-level, which infers that in different hierarchical echelons the importance lies on different aspects. Due to this, we perceive that the different levels have different foci. As Sveningsson and Sörgärde (2015) argue, organisations often have multiple discourses, and we found that this is evident at Jewellery Co. Through these discursive levels, existing at different hierarchical levels of the organisation, it is clear that the organisational members are in agreement that Jewellery Co should change. However, they are not in agreement as to why this change should take place. This reflects a division in understanding the need for the change, and with these observations, we were able to see that there is unclarity in where the organisation is coming from, and where it is heading. This boils down to *'who'* the organisation *'is'*, and what does it stand *'for'*.

## **5.2 Organisational identity is unestablished**

We found that organisational members at Jewellery Co were uncertain about the organisational identity. This was apparent throughout all hierarchical levels. The interviewees voiced questions around what Jewellery Co is, why it exists and for whom. According to Whetten and Godfrey (1998), organisational identity aims to answer exactly this, *'who'* an organisation is and *'how'* people relate to it. We interpret these findings as depicting that Jewellery Co has not been successful at establishing a

clear organisational identity for individuals to relate to. We observed that the main reason for this is that Jewellery Co does not have any official and established values for their employees to identify with, which was continually reoccurring as a concern throughout the interviews. Most interviewees expressed difficulty when asked to identify values, and where values were articulated, they were divergent and scattered. According to Cheney (1983), for individuals to identify with an organisation, there must exist targets to identify with, such as robust values (Pratt, 1998). This lack of values has resulted in organisational members expressing anxiety as to what is expected from them within the organisation, and this has become even more apparent in the current organisational change. This has led to individuals engaging in particular forms of identity work, in order to make sense of their surrounding environment. We found that the identity work employees at Jewellery Co were engaging in, with regards to the organisational identity, had a strong resemblance to the image of self-doubters, as according to Alvesson (2010), is a way of viewing identity work as a coping mechanism to deal with insecurity and anxiety. Because the leaders of Jewellery Co adhere to the idea that organisational identity is something that is created and that you can *'have'*, it means that the employees cannot control the organisational identity. This is in line with the findings of Knights and Willmott (1999), who state that such insecurities can stem from a lack of controlling their circumstances that reinforce the individual sense of identity. Due to this, the employees at Jewellery Co are driven to conduct this type of identity work in order to continue functioning within the organisation, especially in this time of instability that the change has brought.

Other than the lack of clear organisational values, we observed that there are contradictions within the leadership of Jewellery Co. This was apparent in how the organisational members spoke about the leadership and the existing a split between the owner and the CEO. We saw how this led to insecurities and feelings of frustration. Employees said that it was hard to know who you should listen to, and what directives to follow. This was made very clear in how Janice describes the current situation: *"It's a little bit like kids with divorced parents"*. According to Pratt (1998), it is essential to have strong symbols and good leaders to foster organisational identification. What we saw here was that the leadership was contradictory, resulting in individuals having trouble with both their sense-making and creating a feeling of belonging, which is also highlighted by Cheney (1983) and Pratt (1998).

Organisational identity is composed of three dimensions: *'central'*, *'distinctive'*, and *'continuous'* (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). We observed that within Jewellery Co, all three of these aspects are missing. As their leadership is split they lack centrality, there is not a coherent focal point to follow. Moreover, because their values are non-existent, they do not know who the organisation exists for, and therefore it is not distinctive from other organisations. Finally, Jewellery Co has had a long span of

changes, prior to the current one, ranging over several years with many leadership changes and re-organisations, meaning that they have lost their continuity linking them to their past and future. We observed that Jewellery Co was on more than one occasion described as schizophrenic, inferring that the employees view the organisation as holding multiple personalities and being quick to change its mind. According to Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994) identification with an organisation relies on the degree to which an individual can define themselves with the same characteristics as the organisation. We found that when individuals described themselves, they were far from naming the same traits as when describing the organisation, which further means that they do not fully identify with Jewellery Co. This is interesting as Whetten and Godfrey (1998) argue that an organisation can present a complex and multifaceted identity, changing more often than an individual, without appearing to be schizophrenic. This is clearly not the case at Jewellery Co, and we observed how individuals struggled with their identity work as a result of this. Because the organisational members at Jewellery Co have challenges identifying with the organisation as a whole, they seek out other outlets to identify with, which has become even more prevalent as a result of the ongoing change process. One of these are the dominant subcultures within Jewellery Co.

### **5.3 Subcultures are dominant**

We observed that the subcultures in Jewellery Co were very dominant. These subcultures are formed through social groupings (Alvesson, 2010) and at Jewellery Co, they consist of the different teams and departments. These departments and teams are formed only through differentiation of work tasks, which is one way in which subcultures can be formed (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). We found that when the individual team members spoke about their work, they lifted the importance of the team, or subculture, and downplayed the importance of the organisation. As the organisational identity is currently unestablished in this change process, we observed that the employees identified more strongly with their teams, and the organisation became secondary in their individual identity work relating to the organisation. This identity work that employees carried out in relation to their teams, carries similarities to the image of a soldier, described by Alvesson (2010) as having a strong self-definition centred around a social group. This image also demands compliance, and in the case of Jewellery Co, we saw that this was apparent in their sense of loyalty towards their teams.

The organisational members within Jewellery Co frequently mentioned how loyal they were towards their teams, how they took care of each other, helped each other and how they always had their teams best interest closest to their hearts. As group identity is created by similarities in characteristics (Steele, 1998), and influences individuals regarding desired norms of social groups they want to identify with (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), the behaviour of the organisational members at Jewellery Co is not



surprising, especially during this time of change. However, what we found was that the subcultures themselves had become so dominant, that the organisational identity was further subdued, creating a problem in maintaining and old, as well as fostering a new organisational identity. According to Whetten and Godfrey (1998), an unclear organisational identity presents the greatest challenge for maintaining one, and at Jewellery Co, this is clearly the case. This has resulted in a scattered social environment in the organisation as all teams are so submerged in their own teams responsibilities that they fail to acknowledge the ones of others, as well as the whole. According to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015), various subcultures in organisations can generate and foster cultural variety, rather than unity and coherence. We perceive this as something that can be both positive, and negative for an organisation, and at Jewellery Co, it has become a double-edged sword, as it is interfering with the creation of an overall organisational identity.

#### **5.4 Individual identity becomes submerged**

During our research, we found that the individual identity of the different organisational members at Jewellery Co was vague, and we observed that employees often referred back to the team when talking about their own characteristics. According to Gioia (1998), individuals usually construct themselves by encompassing unique characteristics to define a self-concept. However, at Jewellery Co, we saw how employees used unique characteristics to define the group instead of their own identities when we spoke about this. This observation points towards the identity work individuals carried out in relation to this subcultural level, where the soldier image is subduing the individual identity. The soldier image sees the overlap of the organisation and the '*self*' as important (Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994), however, at Jewellery Co this takes the form of an overshadowing between the subculture and the '*self*', as the subcultures have become more dominant than the organisational identity.

Individual identity work is often conducted in relation to other social groupings, and individuals create their identities to suit their social environments (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). This usually does not submerge the individual identity as we observed at Jewellery Co, as the individual identity seeks to answer the question of '*who am I?*' (Alvesson, 2004), whilst at Jewellery Co this question becomes '*who are we?*', referring to the teams. What is usually observed is that individuals within organisations hold multiple identities, aligning to specific roles or context (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998). At Jewellery Co, we found that the organisational members thought that they were describing themselves, and through this holding several identities. However, almost all statements revolved around the team, signifying that at an individual level, the individual identity work towards the '*self*' is lacking, making the subcultures even stronger.

## 5.5 Subcultural Tensions

Within Jewellery Co, we observed multiple subcultures. These all had their own loyalties towards each other and their own beliefs regarding the organisation's purpose and goals. According to Jernier et al. (1991), this is often the case. However, this also created tensions between the different subcultures. At Jewellery Co, we also found that the teams largely held the same values (cf. Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015), but seemed not to be aware of these shared values on a cross-departmental level. This was expressed when they described their teams values and when comparing themselves to other teams, explicitly focusing on that they were better than other teams at Jewellery Co. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), group identity is often strengthened through this type of behaviour, especially where individuals seek for positive differences between themselves and others, heightening their own self-esteem (Tajfel, 1982). This in turn strengthens their self-esteem and subcultural identity even more and creates further frictions between the subcultures. As Jewellery Co does not have a clear organisational identity, and the organisation has changed so many times over the years, it has become difficult for the organisational members to latch on to an organisational identity, seeking the next best thing, the subculture. This focus on how one team believes that they are better than other teams can be seen as a way for organisational members at Jewellery Co to understand and make sense of the social system to which they belong (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998) meaning that it can be an expression of culture. Culture includes the practices, beliefs and values of everyday life (Hatch, 1993), and our observations highlight that there are strong beliefs amongst the organisational members within the different subcultures that they are better than others. However, we argue that this can be both a cultural expression and a way for individuals to conduct identity work in relation to their subcultures.

According to Whetten and Godfrey (1998), organisational identity can change quicker than individuals can reinvent themselves. Within Jewellery Co, this has then created these dominant subcultures, as they have not changed in the same way as the organisational identity has, and many of the organisational members within these subcultures have worked for the organisation for many years. As the subcultures are so strong within Jewellery Co, they can also influence employee behaviour and create resistance if they feel that a directive goes against the group, which is in line with the findings of Morgan and Ogbonna (2008) and Wines and Hamilton (2009). We observed some anxiety and worry in relation to the other groups when it came to setting targets and goals that were dependent on more than just your own team, showing a lack of trust on other teams ability to deliver expected targets. This once again depicts a mentality of '*we are better than you*'. These tensions spread to encompass questions of loyalty if an organisational member were to help another team, meaning that not only are the subcultures viewing themselves as more distinct and better than each other, but also unwilling to help across departments. We observed that this could be due to an inarticulate sense of competition

between the teams, indirectly strengthening the subcultures yet again. This can again be linked to the identity work bearing the image of soldiers, carried out by individuals in the subcultures, viewing loyalty towards the team as highly important. However, these tensions between the teams stretch even further to encompass tensions towards the organisation as a whole.

## **5.6 Tensions between organisational and subcultural identity.**

We observed that there were tensions within Jewellery Co, not just between the subcultures but also between the subcultures and the organisation. This relates back to the lack of an organisational identity, and how employees view Jewellery Co as being schizophrenic and holding multiple personalities, whilst describing the characteristics within the teams as being cohesive and constant. This results in the subcultures encountering difficulties in fostering an organisational identity, as they do not define themselves with the same characteristics as they describe the organisation, which according to Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail (1994), is a key requisite for organisational identification. Because of this, the subcultures clash with the organisation, especially in this time of ongoing change as the organisation is demanding more from the different teams than their usual tasks. Moreover, we also observed that the organisational members could more easily describe values of their subcultures than the organisation, in fact, many of them stated that there were no organisational values. This affects where individuals loyalties lie as they do not have any organisational values to identify with, whilst there are subcultural ones. According to Cheney (1983), there must exist targets for individuals to identify with the organisation, if they are to adhere to organisational needs that demand more from them than their usual work tasks (Tompson & Cheney, 1987; Empson, 2004). Therefore, when the organisation demands more of the employees at Jewellery Co, as in this change process, it creates tensions as these targets do not exist and they cannot identify with the organisation.

Robust and strong values can affect loyalty to the organisation itself (Cheney, 1983; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Pratt, 1998). However, at Jewellery Co, these values do not exist, and therefore, loyalty lies with the subcultures and not the organisation. As these subcultures have not changed substantially over time, this makes it harder for the organisational identity to emerge during this change, but also for the individual identity to become important. According to Alvesson and Willmott (2002), there is a constant negotiation between the identity-regulation from the organisation, the one of the individual and the subcultural groups, to which an individual belongs. As Jewellery Co tries to create an organisational identity through this change process, a cognitive dissonance becomes apparent in the tensions that arise. Therefore, the question arises if the organisational members should stay true to their subcultural '*self*' and their team, or become immersed into the evolving organisational identity.

This cognitive dissonance is in line with the findings of Alvesson and Willmott (2002), who state that multiple identities in clash can create this.

We found that the organisational members of Jewellery Co carried out individual identity work in relation to the organisation through the self-doubter image, as well as in relation to the subcultures, through the soldier image. However, on the individual level, referring to the *'self'*, the identity work carried out was lacking as it was absorbed by the dominant subcultural identity work undertaken by the organisational members. Furthermore, we observed that due to the change process being carried out at Jewellery Co, the organisational members were being pushed to conduct identity work in a third image, bearing resemblance to that of a surfer, which according to Alvesson (2010), is similar to the self-doubter image, but is concerned with a hope for a core *'self'* in order to maintain stability in a changing environment. What we observed is that this identity work in itself is fuelled by the leadership of Jewellery Co as the need for flexibility and adaptation is valued, especially during this time of organisational change. We also observed how this created issues as they were torn between being loyal to the subcultural *'self'* or allowing themselves to be pushed to this new organisational *'self'*. This can also be seen as identity juggling, which according to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), implies a minor form of identity struggle as a result of friction between the *'self'* and the demands of the surrounding environment. They also argue that this can lead to identity wrestling, where individuals are forced to repair and revise their *'selves'* in situations that are perceived as socially unfavourable. At Jewellery Co, this was apparent as we saw how individuals were exposed to conflict and friction between multiple identities. If this is not dealt with by the individuals, it could potentially lead to temporary identity crashes which, according to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2016), occurs when there is no positive link between the work and the *'self'*. We observed signs of potential identity crashes in some of the middle managers at Jewellery Co, which further highlights that there are strong conflicts between the multiple identities in play. We argue that there are similarities between the image of surfing and juggling as both forms of identity work deal with instability or unfavourable conditions, as in this change process. However, Cohen (1994) highlights an issue with the surfer image and argues that it exaggerates the flexibility of individuals, which was something we also observed at Jewellery Co, where individuals showed signs of struggle in adapting to this demanding environment. Moreover, Handley et al. (2006) argues that if you ignore historical experiences in the individuals life, smooth adaptations to new situations may become difficult. This is also apparent at Jewellery Co when the organisation has had so many historical changes before this one, which have not been fully implemented and therefore individuals have a low trust towards these types of changes.

Ybema et al. (2009, p303) state that identity is a: “negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside, between past and present”. This negotiation within Jewellery Co does exist but they are missing a clear picture of it, as the different identities are either lacking or submerged in others. Therefore, this once again boils down to the fact that the organisational identity is eviscerated and unestablished, and the fact that the subcultural identity is highly dominant within the organisation.

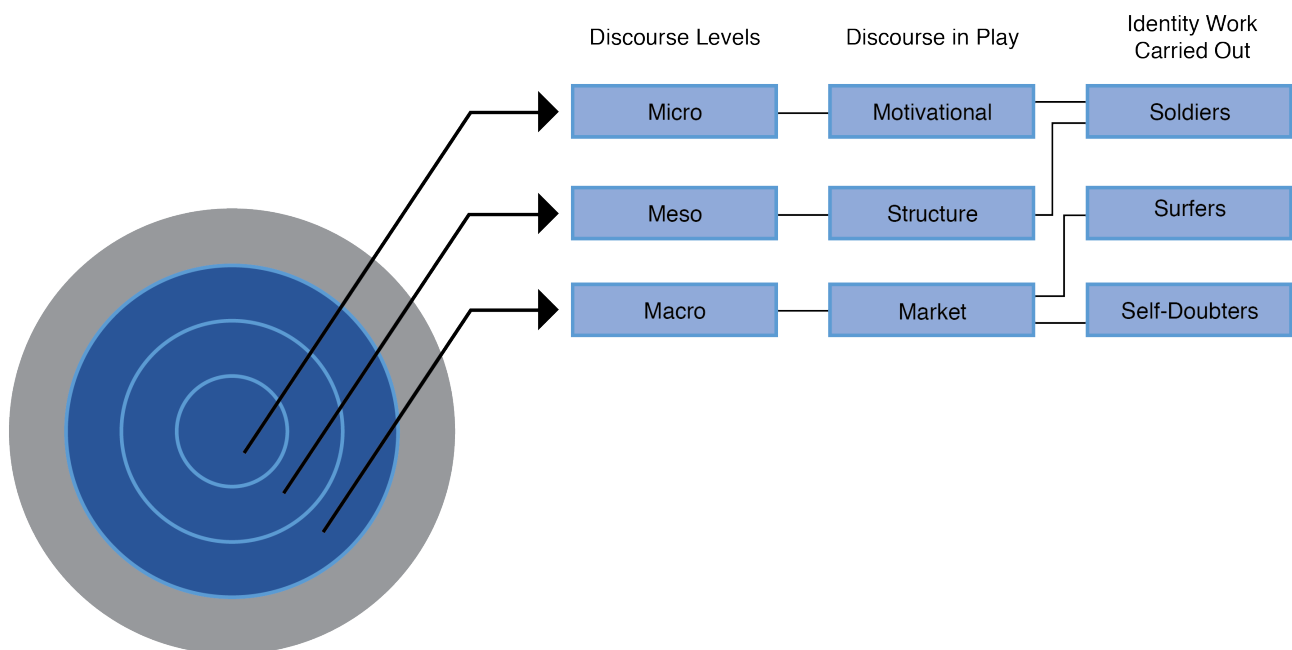
## 5.7 Discourses affecting identity work

As discourses affect how individuals construct their ‘*selves*’, thoughts and actions (Sherzer, 1987), we argue that this affects how they conduct their identity work. We observed discourses on different levels, and mainly on the macro-level, we identified a market discourse. This discourse emphasises the need to change in order to survive and remain relevant on the market. The market discourse is highly relevant in this current change process at Jewellery Co, and as the change is initiated by the CEO due to a gap in the market, the market discourse is dominating at the macro-level. We argue that this discourse affects individuals identity work in relation to the organisation. Through this market discourse, they express concern for the future if they do not change, which makes them conduct identity work which resembles the self-doubter image, which according to Alvesson (2010) works as a coping mechanism for dealing with insecurity.

On a discursive meso-level, but also somewhat on the macro-level, we identified a structure discourse. This discourse emphasises the need to change through a need for structure, processes and coherent leadership. In this change process, it highlights how organisational members express that they lack a functioning working environment and how cross-departmental communication is hindered by this. This structure discourse shapes how individuals conduct their identity work towards their teams and others, bearing resemblance to the soldier image, which as stated by Alvesson (2010), has a strong self-definition centred around a social group. Moreover, the motivational discourse on a micro- and meso-level highlighted the need for change in how employees are valued and acknowledged, which also affects their identity work. This motivational discourse then affects the identity work in the image of a soldier even further, as if the organisation does not recognise the importance of the employees then they will turn to the subcultures and become even more loyal towards them. At Jewellery Co, we observed an attempt to foster organisational engagement and highlight that each individual matters in the big picture. This is done through the use of a TES. However, we argue that focusing predominantly on the team when trying to foster collaboration, only creates further emphasis that the team, or subculture, is the most important, as this is what the TES measures. The use of such hard measurements as the TES, NPS, PET and SMART goals can be seen as a cultural expression, as these measures serve

as a way for individuals to make sense of their own, and others, actions (Golden, 1992). However, as culture influences identity and identity enforces cultural norms on multiple levels (Whetten & Godfrey, 1998), we realise that these expressions can refer to both.

We also found that macro-level discourses affected the identity work conducted between the subcultures and that of the organisational identity, as they spoke about the need to change to survive. This discursive level pushes individuals to surf as the market discourse highlights an uncertain future, and the organisational change at Jewellery Co has created an unstable environment. According to Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015), and Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2009), organisational change can be a cause for instability in the surrounding environment, and as Alvesson (2010) states, individuals who are conducting identity work in the surfer image are constantly responding to a complex world, which can cause fragmentation and fluidity. This is something we observed at Jewellery Co, and we argue that the market discourse strengthens the identity work of the surfer image, as organisational members are seeking stability in a fragmented environment. This is illustrated in the diagram below (see fig. 5.1), highlighting how the different discourses on the micro-, meso- and macro-level affect the different organisational members identity work.



**Fig 5.1 – Discursive levels and effects on identity work**

In the context of Jewellery Co, we saw that the lack of organisational values resulted in insecurity and anxiety, leading to organisational members conducting their identity work in relation to the organisation through the image of self-doubters (Alvesson, 2010). We identify this as an issue as this further fuels the identity work in relation to the subcultures. Moreover, employees at Jewellery Co

conduct identity work in relation to their subcultures through the soldier image (Alvesson, 2010), highlighting further loyalty to the team, which is problematic as the subcultures become stronger. Finally, the organisational members of Jewellery Co are pushed towards conducting their identity work through the image of a surfer (Alvesson, 2010), as they are seeking to maintain stability in the instable environment that has been created as a result of the change process at hand. Furthermore, it is worth acknowledging that as there are three dominating discourses at Jewellery Co, which compete with each other and can themselves cause identity struggles (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) as multiple and competing discourses may at times clash or contradict each other (Sveningsson & Sörgärde, 2015), which we found to be apparent at Jewellery Co. Organisational members of Jewellery Co are exposed to discursive pressures through the market discourse from the macro-level, which they try to adhere to, although it seems like both the meso- and micro level favour the structure and motivational discourse. This is in line with the findings of Sveningsson and Sörgärde (2015) who state that individuals have their own favourite discourses based on their interests, goals and beliefs, although the starting point lies in the strength and popularity of the discourse (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003).

## 5.8 The change at Jewellery Co

We argue that it is apparent that Jewellery Co needs to change, and it is good that the organisation has realised this and is attempting to change. We observed that the change at Jewellery Co is driven from the top, especially from the CEO, who applies a framework to organise the change. This makes the change process take the form of planned change, seen as predictable and controllable, as outlined by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015), and Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2009). The framework used by Jewellery Co resembles a n-step model, and although it does not apply any classical approach, such as Lewin's (1951) *'unfreeze, change, refreeze'* they have still managed to un-stabilise the environment. Jewellery Co is trying to create an organisational identity, as well as organisational values. However, we have found the steps to be jumbled. They have begun with looking at where they need to go, then jumping back to where they are, continuing with what needs to be done, how they will get there and finally finishing with 'why'.



Fig 5.2 – The 'Change Framework' applied at Jewellery Co

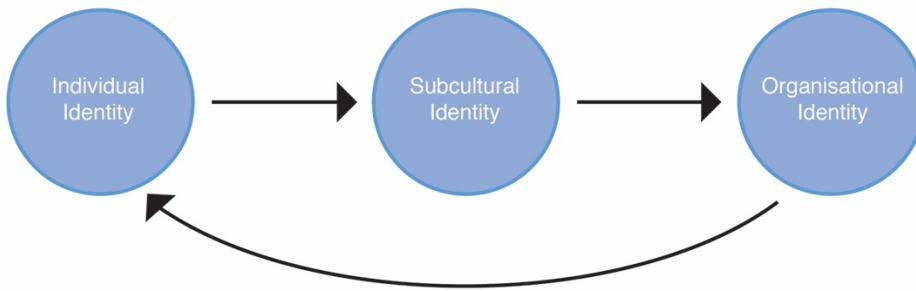
Up until now in the change process, they have managed to 'unfreeze' the organisation that was, although this has unfolded in a processual way, something that views change as emergent and evolving (Weick & Quinn, 1999), as opposed to a strictly planned way. Throughout this, many aspects have been destabilised, but a dominant subcultural identity is one aspect that has remained stable. What we have seen by following this change process so far, is that there is a prevalent desire to have a better understanding of 'why' and 'how' as the organisation has not agreed upon any established values. This in turn has resulted in organisational members having difficulties connecting to an organisational identity and further reinforcing their identity work towards their subcultures. What we see as a consequence of this is that Jewellery Co has already encountered challenges in creating an organisational identity, and instead of enabling individuals to carry out identity work towards an organisational identity, they have hindered it. If the subcultural identities continue to be as dominant as they are now, or become even stronger, Jewellery Co will have difficulties in seeing this change process through to full implementation.

Because the 'how' and 'why' are not yet present, the organisational identity is non-existent. According to Whetten and Godfrey (1998), this can be something that is beneficial for an organisation, as it can then pursue complex challenges without disrupting core values. However, they also highlight that this can present an arduous challenge for maintaining and creating an organisational identity. This is something we have found to be apparent in the context of Jewellery Co, as they had no issues with pursuing a change process. However, it did create further challenges when it comes to their organisational identity. Based on what we have seen in this change process, some of the challenges could have avoided if the 'why' and 'how' had been established earlier. Simultaneously, the focus within Jewellery Co lies on hard KPI's and not on softer human aspects, once again making the individuals more prone to identify with the subcultures as they value these softer aspects higher. According to Heracleous (2003), focus needs to lie on softer aspects in order to lessen resistance in organisational change, and this subcultural identification can be viewed as a form of passive resistance from individuals as this creates distance between the individuals and the organisation. Furthermore, as stated by Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2009), for a change to become implemented and sustainable, it needs to be accepted by the people affected by it, and although people in general talk very positively about change at Jewellery Co, they are not really willing to let go of their old ways, subsequently sticking to their current subcultural identities. This implies that they have not fully accepted the change.

Usually, the individual identity feeds into the subcultural identity which assists in shaping the organisational identity, which in turn feeds back to the individual identity again, creating a continuous

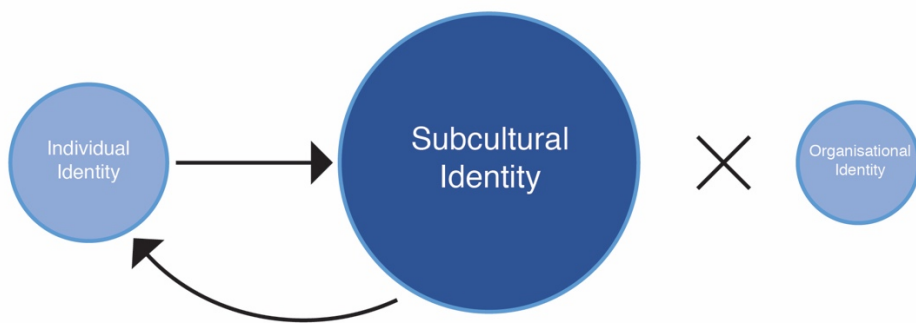


cyclical relationship between them, usually all on equal terms with each other (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Gioia & Schultz 1995). In order to visualise this, we have created a diagram (see fig. 5.3).



**Fig 5.3 – ‘Normal’ identity loop**

However, at Jewellery Co, we have observed that these relationships between the different levels of identity within an organisation have been deformed, allowing the subcultural identity to take a larger dominant form, whilst diminishing the individual identity, and the organisational identity being absent. This also means that the relationship between them becomes changed into a smaller loop, only really allowing the subcultural and individual identity to affect each other. As the individual identity has become submerged into the subcultural identity, this makes the subcultural identity very dominant. This is illustrated in the diagram below (see fig. 5.4).



**Fig 5.4 – Identity loop at Jewellery Co.**

We argue that the consequences of this will be that the organisational identity that Jewellery Co is trying to create will have a hard time to emerge, and their individual identity towards their ‘selves’ will continue to be submerged into the subcultural identities. Therefore, the subcultural identities will continue to be dominant at Jewellery Co if they are not broken up to give space for the other identities to evolve. If this does not happen, we foresee that Jewellery Co will have extreme difficulties in seeing this change process through. This leaves Jewellery Co as having come ‘close, but no cigar’, missing the target whilst still continuing with the change process.

## 5.9 Summary

In the analysis of our empirical material, we have uncovered a number of insights. Our main finding is that individuals identity work carried out within Jewellery Co is mostly done in relation to the subcultural identity, as this has become dominant. The individual identity work is carried out in relation to the subcultural identity, and not the 'self', meaning that the 'self' has become submerged within the subculture. As a result, the organisational identity struggles to emerge, as the subcultural identity, encompassing the individual identity, has become increasingly dominant. Moreover, we found that there exists three distinctive discourses circulating on different discursive levels at Jewellery Co, and each of these affect how individuals carry out their identity work. In a simplified view, we have shown how individuals identity work is carried out at Jewellery Co (see fig. 5.4), where the relationships between the different identities are unbalanced and broken, creating a self-perpetuating feedback loop. Overall we see that the identity work resembling the image of a soldier is the strongest and that this feeds back into the subcultural and individual identity. In light of this, we argue that Jewellery Co will struggle with creating and implementing the organisational identity needed to see their change process through.

## 6. Conclusion

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*This thesis has aimed to explore how a specific organisational change unfolds when there is no established, or envisioned, organisational identity. We conclude our thesis by first summarising our main findings from our analysis, and elaborating on what insights these have provided us with. Thereafter we also address the limitations of our research as well as give our final recommendations by proposing that organisational leaders should not underestimate the value of values.*

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The purpose of our research is to explore how a specific organisational change unfolds when there is no established and no envisioned, organisational identity. In order to investigate this, we formulated our research questions:

- *What challenges does an organisation encounter in a substantial change process when there is no established or envisioned organisational identity?*
- *How does this affect organisational members identity work on multiple levels?*

In our research, there were three main findings, the first two leading to the strengthening of the third.

### 6.1 Main findings

#### ***Subcultures are dominant***

At Jewellery Co, multiple identity work is being carried out by individuals. These occur on three different levels: organisational, subcultural and individual, in varying amounts. However, we found that the subcultures at Jewellery Co are so dominant, that the individual identity was being absorbed by the subcultural, whilst the organisational one was not given the opportunity to take root and emerge. We believe that this is due to the organisation coming from many previous changes, that have not been fully implemented, leading to the organisational identity becoming eviscerated. This in turn has led to the subcultural identities becoming very important for the organisational members at Jewellery Co as an identification source and as such giving up their individual identities in this process. The result of this subcultural identity dominance is that there now exists tension on all levels within Jewellery Co, meaning that the different subcultures are competing, and are more concerned with the wellbeing of the team than that of the organisation, and sees it as a question of loyalty or treason when it comes to working with other teams. As Jewellery Co are trying to create an organisational identity, this is a challenge that they are now facing and will continue to face. We believe that if the dominant

subcultural identities are not dissolved, it will be difficult for Jewellery Co to move forward in the change process and create an organisational identity.

### ***Dominant discourses affect identity work***

Whilst researching Jewellery Co we found three dominant discourses, existing on three different levels, and in turn affecting how individuals carry out their identity work. These discourses consisted of a market, structure, and motivational discourse. It was especially the structure and motivational discourses that we found were affecting the individuals identity work towards the subculture. The structure discourse highlights the tensions between the different subcultures as it emphasises the problems with cross-departmental communication and cooperation. We believe that this discourse further influences the identity work the organisational members of Jewellery Co conduct in relation to their subcultural identities, especially enforcing the dominance of the subcultures. Moreover, this is also the case for the motivational discourse, as this highlights the employees feelings of being unappreciated by the organisation, and as a result turn towards their subcultures. We believe that in the current organisational change, this will cause a problem as the subcultural identities are already highly dominant within Jewellery Co, and do not need any further enforcement.

### ***Moving from an eviscerated to an unestablished organisational identity***

We found that when attempting to change organisational identity from an eviscerated to an unestablished one, it creates challenges for the individuals who are affected by the change. This means that there are no targets, like robust values, for individuals to connect with, meaning that they will search for this elsewhere. In the case of Jewellery Co, we saw that this led to organisational members seeking another anchor to identify with, that of the subculture. Moreover, the leadership is divided, making it even more difficult for organisational members to know who, or what, to follow, as loyalties have become split. We believe that this will cause substantial problems for Jewellery Co in this change process as it is important to have an organisational identity for individuals to connect to, especially when seeking to change. Otherwise this can hinder instead of help, turning it into a further challenge. Furthermore, as Jewellery Co is lacking an organisational identity, but has several highly dominant subcultural ones, it indirectly affects organisational members willingness to change.

## **6.2 Limitations**

Throughout our research we have found both practical and theoretical contributions, in the form of a cyclical understanding of how different levels of identity affect each other, and especially what occurs when the relationships between them become obstructed, one missing, and the other becoming submerged. We acknowledge that we are not the first to conduct research in the field of organisational

change, organisational discourse, identity and identity work. However, our context and specific environment has provided new insights into the difficulties of conducting organisational change when there is no established or envisioned organisational identity. We believe that this finding is important, as it in practical terms can aid other organisational changes, and in academia holds the potential for further research, specifically focusing on similar situations.

However, we realise that there may be some theoretical limitations, and we feel that they are necessary to address. Firstly, organisational change, organisational discourse, identity and identity work are very broad theoretical concepts, which are complex and have several definitions and perspectives, meaning that we have not been able to encompass everything in our study. That being said, we stem from an interpretive and social constructionist perspective, and therefore we are not in the business of defining and categorising such concepts. Instead our research has intended to provide a rich and descriptive detail about these concepts in particular a context to further elaborate on, and inspire research within this field. Secondly, we realise that we have not been able to observe all factors that may have influenced the specific context. Although our research contains an element of auto-ethnography, which has provided us with more historical and deeper understandings of the social aspects, we have not been able to observe everything, all the time. However, this was never our aim for this study. Furthermore, we realise that we are but human, carrying our own personal biases and pre-understandings of theoretical concepts, but we have aimed to remain reflexive and try to not let this colour our findings. We feel that we have managed to keep our biases to a minimum and that our research is detailed enough to justify our findings and contributions within this study.

### ***Don't underestimate the value of values***

When changing an organisation, it is highly important to have something to tie in to, as this is required for organisational members to move from one identity to another, or to create a completely new one. Based on what we have found in our research we are of the opinion that in order to identify with an organisation, you need an organisational identity. In order for this to occur you need strong, robust values. When these are non-existent, it creates a substantial challenge, if not an impossible one, to manage to change anything at all. We also found that it is challenging to change an organisational identity, when something stronger already is in place, in this case, the subcultural identities present currently at Jewellery Co. Our final recommendation to organisational leaders embarking on demanding organisational changes such as these, is to ensure that there exist strong, relatable and robust values, for individuals to connect to, before changing anything else. Values constitute the organisations very core and what organisational identity is. Organisational members need something persuasive to rally behind, without this it is likely that change will fail before it even completely begins.

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