Communicating and perceiving cultural identity in international organisations

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The concept of work as closely related to people's sense of identity and self-worth has been identified as a prevalent perspective in the 21st century. Work and positions of responsibility are associated with leading meaningful and fulfilling lives. Moreover, the focus on identity and its importance as a phenomenon has been identified as recent development in contemporary world. Identity became a matter of interest both at a personal, individual level and at organisational level. This concept created grounds for communication centred treatment of identity within organisations. Questions concerning identity in general and cultural identities of individual members and their identifications with organisational identity became salient.

The aim of this thesis is 1) to make a methodological contribution by combining critical and interpretive approaches by presenting theoretical reflections on the ways in which the ability to communicate individual cultural identity creates an intrinsic value for and within an organisation; 2) to make recommendations, based on the empirical study, on the ways internal communications can impact acknowledgment and recognition of diverse cultural identities within international organisations.

The research applies Interpretive Phenological Analysis (IPA) and borrows from the conceptual roots of narrative inquiry (NI). IPA draws its philosophical underpinnings from hermeneutics and phenomenology, whereas NI is located within the Deweyan ontology of experience. NI gives voices to individuals, thus allowing for their stories to be heard. IPA, with its phenomenological approach focuses on people's perceptions and experiences of the world in which they live, and which gives them meaning.

The findings reveal that employees with diverse cultural background are perceived as marginalised others, and outsiders, of whom not much is known. The internal communications do not embark on any clear-cut practices in order to promote knowledge and acknowledgment of these individuals.

The role of communications professionals is crucial when it comes to recognising the importance of the connection between cultural identities of individual members and the way they identify themselves with the organisations. Through effective communications, they can promote the recognition and acknowledgment of cultural values of individual employees, thus contributing to development of truly international organisational cultures.

Contents

1   Introduction

The conception of work as closely related to people's sense of identity and self-worth has been 21st century prevalent perspective (Mumby, 2013, 4017). Ashforth and Kreimer (1999) claimed that "job titles serve as prominent identity badges". People also associate their work and positions they hold within organisations with leading meaningful lives; the work one does contribute to having a fulfilling life. Mumby (2013) further suggests that the value and importance of the kind of work one does has a presence in defining people's lives and the sense of selves. The work itself, therefore has to be meaningful.

At the same time the focus on identity and its importance as a phenomenon is a fairly recent development in contemporary world. Identity became a matter of interest both at a personal, individual level and at organizational level. On an individual level, Lasswell (1935) noted connections between national and cultural expressions and individual needs for self-definition and a sense of security. His concept created grounds for communication centred treatment of identity within organisations. Questions concerning identity of individual members and their identifications with organisational identity became salient.

One could also claim that individual cultural identities and the organisational cultures are connected; the way individual cultural values are aligned or misaligned with an organisational culture plays a pivotal role in the wellbeing of employees. Therefore, within organisations it is communications professionals who play an important role in recognising the importance of the connection between cultural identities of individual members and the way they identify themselves with the organisations. Through effective communications they can promote the recognition and acknowledgment of cultural values of individual employees, thus contributing to development of truly international organisational cultures.

Cheney et al (2014) claim that both individual identity and identification with organisations are connected to their historical and cultural contexts. The authors thus imply there is an interplay between "operationalisations of individual identification with organisations, organisational formulations of identity, and the larger social landscape for identity formulation in the contemporary world" (Cheney et al, 2014).

Identity research brought together a combination of perspectives bringing together culture and identity. For example, it combined cross-cultural perspectives of identity (Hofstede, 1980, 2010) with identity perspectives in terms of ethnicity, nationality, social groups, as well as organisational belonging.

This research is exploring the following research areas: the importance and value of cultural identities of individuals working in international organisations, stigmatised and threatened cultural identities, the

role of organisational internal communications in promoting diverse cultural identities in international organisations.

The research questions are:

Q1: How are individuals with diverse cultural identities perceived by communication professionals?

Q2: To what extent do internal communications play a part in acknowledging the value of individual cultural identities?

The aim of this thesis is 1) to make a methodological contribution by combining critical and interpretive approaches by presenting theoretical reflections on the ways in which the ability to communicate individual cultural identity creates an intrinsic value for and within an organisation; 2) to make recommendations, based on the empirical study, on the ways internal communications can impact acknowledgment and recognition of diverse cultural identities within international organisations.

Firstly, the thesis presents general definitions and basic concepts of identity. By doing so, it shows how vital identity is both as a concept and as a personal experience. Secondly, it locates identity definitions within the context of cultural studies. This shows the connection between one's identity and the culture from which the identity stems. Thirdly, by adopting a critical lens, the thesis looks at identity work, paying particular attention to identity threats within organisations. It finally shows how internal organisational communications can influence acknowledgment and promotion of culturally diverse employees.

Cultural identity in this thesis is understood as one's sense of self as an individual. Within organisations, identity is communicated internally and externally in various projects, such as vision and mission statements, marketing materials, public relations. This thesis focuses only on the internal communications within international organisations.

Harvard referencing system was used in this thesis.

2 Literature review

2.1 Identity

Identity is a "construction of the self that rests on the alteration, or "otherness" construction: "Who am I not and how am I different? How am I different and from whom? How am I similar and from whom?" (Czarniawska, 2007, 4, cited in Holck et al. 2014, 49). Further, identity "constitutes the most meaningful, most intriguing, most relevant concept we deal with in both our personal and organizational lives. Gioia (2013) sees identity as fluid, temporal, and in flux. Identity is about us-as individuals and as organization members- and it enquires into the deepest level of our sensemaking and understanding". (Gioia, 2008, 125). Ashforth and Mael (1996) see organizational identity as ongoing stories organisations tell about themselves, their history, and their future visions. This dynamic view of identity resonates with the social construction perspective on identity (Corley et al. 2006). It views identity as emerging from the shared interpretive schemes that members collectively construct. Identity is therefore derived from repeated interaction with others (Cooley, 1982) and collectively negotiated and shared.

Albert et al (2000, 14) see identity as problematic, and at the same time as crucial to the way one values, thinks, feels, and what one does in all social domains, including organizations. Finally, following Holck et al. (2014) the concept of identity and identification is crucial to understanding diversity.

2.2 Cultural identity

Hall (1996, 3) proposed a definition of cultural identity as "collective or true selves hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed "selves" which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common". This definition suggests that cultural identities are never unified, but rather fragmented. They are not singular, but rather multiply constructed across discourses and practices. They are subjected to constant changes and are contextually dependent. Hall continues by saying that identities are subject to historisation and debates on identities should be situated within historically specific developments. This is particularly relevant to post-colonial world. Identities invoke the origin in historical past with which they are still connected, and from which they stem. Therefore, as Hall further implies, identities are about using the resources of history, as well as language in order to develop, evolve and actually become rather than simply be. What is of particular interest to my research is Halls's concept of representations: he claims that identities are not so much about who we are, or where we come from, but more about how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. "Identities are therefore constituted within, not outside representation (Hall, 1996, 4).

Identities are constructed within discourse, not outside of it. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines discourse as "verbal interchange of ideas, conversation" or" mode of a mode of organizing knowledge, ideas, or experience that is rooted in language and its concrete contexts (such as history or institutions) ".

Discursive practice, as defined by Foucault (1977), refers to: ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social **practices**, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. **Discourses** are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning, they are always context bound; they emerge as products of specific modalities of power. If that is so, then they will be products of markings of exclusion and difference. An identity can therefore be constructed as a result of being related to something that is Other. Identities are constructed within the play of power and exclusion, being a result of naturalized and overdetermined process of what Bhabha (1994) and Hall (1993) call 'closure'.

Hall (1996) appropriated the term identity in the following way: identity refers to a meeting point, or the point of suture between the discourses and practices, which in turn produce subjectivities that can be spoken. What this means is that identities are points of contemporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. Identities are positioning that subjects must take whilst knowing that these positions are representations. According to Hall, representations are always constructed from the place of the other.

Giddens (1991, 8) defines self- identity as a clear "set of self-images, traits or social attributes", a reflexively organised narrative, derived from participation in various discourses as well as experiences. "This reflexive construction of self-identity is made up of cultural raw material: language, symbols, meanings, values" (Giddens, 1991, 8). Various encounters with others, experiences over a period of time have strong impact on one's sense and awareness of self-identity. Life situations are routine nowadays, they are fragmented and fractured. This means that the reflexive narrative is also often broken down into smaller fragments.

2.3 Identity and Identification

Cheney et al (2014) claim that research into identity and identification within organization studies have been influenced by the notion of belongingness hypothesis (Baumeister and Leary, 1995) which claims that human beings have a fundamental motivation that drives them into forming positive relationships with others. This concept found its way into organization studies; a consideration into what the need to form relationships can mean for communication processes in organisations was a point of interest. Developing relationships creates belonging to groups, and therefore membership and identification with these groups. Organisational identification is defined by Mael and Ashcroft (1992, 104) as "perception of ones with or belongingness to an organisation".

A communicative perspective influenced by social identity theory (SIT) sees identity and identification as emerging from interactions with an interest group with which one associates him/herself. According to SIT identification means that an individual psychologically identifies him/herself as being a part of a group, even if he/she does not belong to a particular group. Weick (1979) calls this partial inclusion; it suggests an intensity of an attachment that one communicates. Identification refers to the extent to which one places high importance on and affective attachment to a specific identity in regard to one's own self-concept. For example, a person might identify himself as a woman (identity), but at the same time she may not find this central to her self-defining self- concept. (low self -identification). For her being a woman is not that important, therefore it has low identification level. As a result, she will not be threatened if somebody makes a joke about women.

In the context of organization studies Alvesson and Wilmott (2002) see identity as an important, yet still unexplored dimension of organizational control. They link the concept of identity, for example to ethnicity, entrepreneurship, as well as motivation and meaning making (Alvesson et al, 2008). They further explore identity as" encountered by individuals, understood as social being embedded in organizational contexts" (Alvesson et all, 2008, 6). For them identity refers to subjective meanings and experience, as well as visions of the self. Moreover, identity is temporary, context-sensitive, and fragmented. It is a matter of becoming as well of being". Clifford (2001, 477) expands this definition by describing it as "a dialectic entanglement of both indigenous "roots" and traveling/migratory "routes".

2.4   Identity work

In a workplace identity is crucial in navigating social interaction. A lot of organizational life and interactions take place in dyadic interactions with others. "Through interacting with others, we create shared meaning, which both informs and constraints identity" (Weick at al., 2005). Face-to-face interactions within a workplace "allows for the positive enactment of valued identities" (Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). In dyadic interactions two different features of identity are relevant: 1) different self-concepts become activated at different times and in different contexts, and 2) dyadic interactions offer individuals opportunities to meet their fundamental needs for self-verification. Accordingly, individuals use identity cues to adopt interaction strategies. These strategies are likely to confirm their existing self-views to interaction partners. Therefore, it can be concluded that workplace interactions may attenuate or exacerbate the psychological discomfort caused by lingering identity threats.

People undertake identity work (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006) in many ways. These can be identifying refuting information from the past that can compensate for the bad feedback received. It can be spinning the identity (Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep, 2006) through which one finds a nuanced meaning to one's identity to seek for compensation. This can also be done through exiting one's identity temporarily and entering an alternative identity.

2.5   Identity threats

Identity, and the need for self-enactment in a workplace, viewing oneself in a positive light as well as being held in high esteem by others "is fundamental to social life" (Baumeister, Dori, & Hastings, 1998), thus individuals react to various identity threats by enactments of their identities in order to support identity motivation. They can also carry out activities supporting identity maintenance. For example, dishonesty in a workplace may stem from threats that block the enactment of the identity/identities that an individual value the most. Identity threats are" experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity" (Petriglieri 2011:641, in Leavitt & Sluss, 2015). In cases when identity is threatened individuals use different ways to mitigate and manage these threats. The identity work that comes into play can be carried out in different manners, for example through identity exits.

 These threats 1) jeopardise an individual's ability to fullfil the specific identity motives associated with the corresponding level of identity. 2) Individuals try to negotiate these threats through adopting certain strategies of identity work. 3) Through the process of identity enactment interactions with others may help the process of self- affirmation or create pressures.

Identity can also be compromised as a result of structural role conflicts (Levitt & Sluss, 2015) that can occur when one's personal standards are at odds with institutionalized expectations. Drawing on symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934; Stets & Burke, 2003) identity and expectations for identity enactment are the person-based, relationship-based, and collective-based expectations that are negotiated. They form the shared experiences and sense-making of unique but situated and interdependent individuals. In other words, the meaning of identities is made and modified via social interaction and discursive practices. Individuals make sense of themselves based on their abilities to enact their identities in the company of others. Therefore, workplaces are localities where enactments of identities take place. Workplaces provide opportunities as well as pressures for these identity enactments. Further "identities serve as both sources of self-esteem and meaning structures that help us make sense of the world" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996).

Identity threat sensitivity describes subjective interpretations of experiences, rather than objective events (Elsbach, 2003). People will interpret the same event in different ways. People with high identity threat sensitivity will see an event as threatening, but people with low identity threat sensitivity will see it as benign. The level of identity threat sensitivity is a function of high identification (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), chronic self-identity (Johnson & Young, 2010) and low social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Chronic self-identity is a difference in individuals' propensity for self-definition at the personal, relational, and collective levels. Some people have stronger or weaker propensity to construe their sense of self at these three levels. For example, if one construes himself at a relational identity level, he may find it threatening if a client is not happy.

Social identity complexity is an identity structure in which an individual recognizes that his/her ingroups are not fully convergent or overlapping. If an individual has high identity complexity, he/she will view himself as members of many differentiated groups or relationships. Individuals with low social identity complexity will perceive all of their identities embedded within a single representation. Individuals with high social identity complexity will find events less threatening than their counterparts with low social identity complexity. Further individuals with low social identity complexity may see only one rigidly defined identity, whereas individuals with high social identity complexity see varied interpretations and multiplex distinct identities. Accordingly, high social identity complexity reduces the interpretations of events as identity threatening, because the reduced overlap in identity membership suggests that threats are compartmentalized and there is less to lose (Leavitt & Sluss, 2015).

Identity threat sensitivity increases the likelihood that identity threat will undermine the relevant identity motives. Identity threats create psychological distress and motivate people to mitigate such threats through a series of effortful communicative strategies (Leavitt and Sluss, 2010). People will use three different ways in which they mitigate the threats: identifying refuting information, nuancing the meaning of the identity, exiting, or replacing identity. These processes take place if the threat is intractable (the belief that an identity threat is unresolvable under existing conditions).

What happens in situations where some identities are stigmatized, and therefore can be threatened? Some identities are stigmatised and are therefore under constant threat. For example, foreign employees, employed in a company in a host culture different to their own, or employees of colour.

The concept of prototypicality of the threatened identity is very interesting and provides explanations to the negotiating strategies such individuals might adopt. "Social identities are cognitively represented in terms of prototypes" (Turner, 1982). What happens here is the following: people construct social identities in the moment to maximize meaning by identifying category boundaries that highlight key similarities and differences. When an identity is threatened an individual draws boundary between ingroup and outgroup members around the most salient properties of the prototype for that identity. And when an individual interacts with someone who is highly prototypical of a threatened identity (a person with different skin colour, for example) the interaction can make that identity particularly salient and heighten the psychological discomfort.

What happens within organisations and how can organizational communications impact these tensions?

2.6 Identity in organisations, a critical perspective

Critical Theory (CT) sees identity formation as a dialectic process that occurs between structure and agency. Clark et al. (2009, 52 cited in Holck, 2014) claims that identities are achieved, but they "may not be of your own choosing". In line with Clark (2009) CT explores identity in terms of navigating between identity regulation that places individuals within social structures, and, on the other hand, identity work concerned with individuals' efforts to make a coherent sense of self in response to the scripts provided by organizational discourses. These external factors, (power and discourse) impact an individual thus rendering his/her autonomy in identity construction impossible.

Giddens developed a concept of 'self-identity', that brings together personal and social identity. He sees it as" a reflexively organized narrative, derived from participation in competing discourses and various experiences, that is productive of a degree of existential continuity and security. Self-identity is not a distinctive trait, or even a collection of traits, possessed by an individual. It is the self as reflexively understood by a person. Self-identity is continuity (across time and space) as interpreted reflexively by the agent" (Giddens, 1991, 53).

In a stable life situation "the narrative of self-identity runs fairly smoothly" (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002, 626). On the other hand, nowadays identities tend to be more open. They are not ready-made and given but achieved and roles are improvised rather than scripted (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The identity work that Alvesson and Willmott (2002) are talking about involves one's conscious work in constructing self-identity in organisations. They imply that specific events, encounters, experiences, transitions serve to heighten awareness of constructed identity and compel undertaking conscious identity work. One tends to secure his/her identity position as a result of "psychological-existential worry" (Alvesson & Wilmott 2002, 626), which is s result of the scepticism or inconsistences faced in encounters with others or with our images of them. When one faces tensions associated with the feeling of being oneself being threatened remedial identity work sets in.

At the basis of this identity work there is a shifting discursive framework provided by what is socially regarded and accepted as normal and rational.

Alvesson &Willmott (2002) draw attention to identity as an important yet still not sufficiently explored dimension in organisational control. The authors propose that control exerted by organisations have been more focused on impersonal and behavioural features without paying much attention to the meaning, culture, or ideology. They further claim that this kind of organisational control can be easily attained as the employees willingly position themselves according to and within discourses infused with managerial messages. Deetz (1995, 87) states that "the modern business of management is

often managing the "insights" – the hopes, fears and aspirations – of workers, rather than their behaviours directly".

Positivist and functionalist approach assume that management is a neutral entity routinely implemented, articulated, and legitimised in functionalist forms of organisational analysis. Specifically, designed processes and structures are planned and implemented in order to attain control. If these are met with resistance, additional training is put in place, or the staff is simply replaced. Allegedly shared meanings, values and beliefs are created through discursive and reflexive processes that create and regulate identities of employees.

The more fluid and fractured one's identity the more vulnerable a person become. It is then easier for corporate discursive practices to target and mould such employees. Various corporate projects can be more easily be achieved. Identity regulation is a pervasive and intentional modality of organisational control. It achieves its aims, but it also increases employee cynicism and resistance.

Processes such as promotion, induction, training are designed and implemented specifically to impact the shaping and direction of identity. When an organisation becomes a source of identification for individuals, corporate identity informs self-identity work. There are process e of identity regulation and formation that take place then. Alvesson and Willmott (2002) suggest several ways in which identity regulation is controlled by. The regulation of identity can be implemented through people's central life interests, self-awareness, and social values. This happens when a person questions his/her personal and organisational identity and expresses concern of self-esteem. The regulation can also be implemented through coherence and distinctiveness. This happens when a person defines him/herself as different to someone else and has a sense of continuity over time.

2.6.1   Identity regulation as organisational control

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) show three patterns of identity regulation: managerial, cultural-communitarian and quasi-autonomous.

Through mobilising the communicative discourses in processes of identity formation, maintenance, and transformation individuals identify themselves as separate and unique from others. They do this and adopting different discourses they repair their sense of identity. In an organisation individual have different discourses at their disposal, represented by such concepts as 'corporate culture'. These discourses can be taken as such, or they can be interpreted by the employees. Individuals are not passive; they critically interpret these discourses and enact them. Through specific formulations management can strategically introduce, influence, and legitimize the presence (or absence) of particular discourses. Ideological and disciplinary forms of power operate through various and specific discourses, as well as their frequency. (O'Doherty and Willmott 2001).

Of particular importance here is the linking of the discourse to the processes of self-identity formation and regulation. Identity is influenced, regulated, and changed within work organisations in several ways. These are: defining a person directly, defining a person by defining others, providing a specific vocabulary of motives (Mills 1940), explicating morals and values, knowledge and skills (one's identity is equal to what one can do, education and professional affiliation), group categorisation and affiliation (developing social categories to which one belongs), hierarchical location, establishing ideas and norms about the 'natural' ways of doing things), as well as specifying the context.

These ways in which discourses influence identities and the sense of self can be implemented strategically and as by-products of other activities. They can be more or less conscious or not. They can be expressed through direct control (clear specification of one's tasks with little or no relevance of one's identity, or through responsible autonomy.

Goia et al (2013) discuss organizational identity, its development, formation, and change. It is looking at individuals and the question of "who are we as an organization". The authors propose a definition that states that an organizational identity is characterized by three features: core, endurance, and distinctiveness.

When looking at the enduring identity proposition they link it to an individual level (an approach they called "extended metaphor analysis"). The criteria of distinctiveness and continuity are drawn from conceptions of individual identity. The aspect of continuity is connected to Erikson's (1968) work on identity crisis. Erikson talks about personal "sameness and historical continuity" (1968, 22) as necessary for psychological wellbeing. Erikson's ego-identity is defined as "an awareness of the fact that there is a self-sameness and continuity to the ego's synthesising methods and a continuity of one's meaning of others". In times of constant or frequent change stability of identity serves as a psychological anchor. A change within an organisation can cause distress, anxiety, discomfort and lowering or loss of self-esteem. Gioia (1998) questions this connection between individual identity and organisational identity.

 Individual identity is connected to social identity. Individuals belonging to an organization describe their social identity as one of the organisations. When organizational aspects that members cherish (both as organisation's enduring identity and as part of their own social identity) are threatened, they employ various tactics to preserve their organisation identity.

Identity is temporal, in flux, fluid (Gioia, 2013) The dynamic view of identity resonates with the social construction perspective on identity (Corley et al. 2006). This views identity as emerging from the shared interpretive schemes that members collectively construct. Identity is derived from repeated interaction with others (Cooley, 1982) and collectively negotiated and shared.

There were also three decisive moments that characterized the research process: identity work, identity politics, problematised relationship of the researcher and the researched.

3   Theoretical framework

3.1   Research philosophy and rationale for adopting a qualitative paradigm

In my study I was not interested in gathering empirical facts, proving a hypothesis, or testing an existing theory. I was interested in performative recreations of lived experiences expressed by the study participants through their personal narratives and stories. These accounts, I believed, were the doors to the themes revealed through the voices of the individuals. In my study I viewed human beings as relational, subjective, and embedded in their contexts. The empirical inquiry I was interested in was dialogic where the truths were incomplete, subjective, and relational. This called for a shift towards "concentration on horisons of human meanings" (Gadamer, 1975, in Bochner, 2018) and more hermeneutic approach, where there would be room for subjective meanings, moral reflections, contextual embodiment, compassion, empathy. I concur with Jovanovic (2011, 3) who describes qualitative inquiry as "a rich, heterogenous field comprising various techniques, methods, concepts, theories, interpretive patterns, values, orientations, ontological, anthropological, epistemological assumptions, ethical principles and social and political views" . This description embraces participatory role of people as part of the research process, thus acknowledging their voices as knowledge creators. It empowers rather than controls, it includes rather than excludes. Moreover, in view of the above the qualitative approach offered the best potential to render rich and deep insights into the perceptions of the individual lived experiences.

Although, social constructivism does not reject the existence of an objective world, it focuses on the perceptions, experiences, and process of learning that individuals have developed about the world that they live in. This approach allowed for the premise that there is less separation between myself as a researcher and the participants, the narratives are socially constructed, conversational interaction takes place, and reflects the theory that participants' interpretations are as important as my own.

At the other end of the spectrum lies critical realism, which considers an objective reality as one that exists independently of individual perception but also recognises the role that individual subjective interpretation plays in defining that reality. It occupies the middle ground between the two opposites of positivism and subjectivism. It accepts objectivism and presents a stratified view of reality that looks at emergent entities and the underlying structures that cause events to happen. Subjective observers create a variety of interpretations, and a hierarchy of meanings emerges to justify from an objective standpoint and how it is understood, perceived, and theorised by subjective observers. With the critical realist approach phenomena are looked at through an explorative process to identify the structures and mechanisms that lie beneath the surface and cause the events that constitute the phenomena. The primary function of critical realism thus lies in determining what is objectively real and what is subjectively accepted (Taylor 2018).

My approach was interpretative, but I also saw the stories that I analysed as co-constructed (more on narrative analysis later) and intersubjectively embodied. That positioned my approach between critical realism and relativism.

3.2 Epistemological Stance

My understanding of cultural identity was referred to one's sense and understanding of who one is, a sense of self. I drew on several conceptualisations in order to create my own understanding of the phenomenon of what sense of self meant to me. For example, Wan & Chew (2013) defines cultural identity as an individual's self- definition. Delanty (2011) proposed, viewing one's culture as a synonym of one's identity and a process of self-constitution. Culture and one's sense of who one is (self-definition) are therefore viewed as a defining element, synonymous with one's identity.

The formation of one's cultural identity develops as a result of one's connections and ties to the culture one is exposed to. This happens at an early age and is influenced by the values dominant in a given culture. Jameson's (2007) model of cultural identity integrates social elements and change of time. Stuart Hall (1993) posits that cultural identity is contextual, temporal, and it is constantly evolving. Based on the above definitions and concepts I formulated my understanding of cultural identity as a temporal sense of self, derived from and driven by social values dominant in a given culture at a given point of time.

The value of stories as sources of knowledge was advocated by Jerome Bruner (1986) who called it a "narrative approach to knowing". According to his claim that narrative modes of knowing function as a central form of human thinking. He provided a framework for the psychological study of autobiographies, stories, and life narratives. He also claimed that they play a key role in the construction of the self and identity.

Inspired by Ricour's (1983) concept of narrative identity, expressed through emplotment in stories people tell about themselves, I adopted an open and focus group interview as my method.

Since the narrative was both the method and phenomena of the study, it presented a possibility of interactivity between me and the participants. Narrative analysis in my study started in experience of our meeting, during which narratives of experiences were shared with me. This involved the reconstruction of the participants' experiences in relationship both the other and to a social milieu (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Riesman (2000, 25), "personal narratives provide windows into lives that confront the constraints of circumstances. Attention to personal narratives in interviews opens discursive spaces for research subjects." The discursive space in my study was filled with conversations and more probing questions.

3.3 Rationale for adopting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is a relatively young research methodology, predominantly applied within 'applied' psychology (Larkin et al. 2007), but one that can be utilised in other areas of human sciences. I saw it as a suitable methodology for my study for several reasons.

Firstly, the aim of IPA is to explore how participants make sense of the way they experience their personal and social world, and its focus is on the study of the meanings of particular experiences or events. IPA is interested in people-in-context, and the way they make sense of their experiences in terms of them being related to and engaged with those experiences. IPA pays attention to the life worlds of the participants, and it explores their personal experiences. It does not concern itself with the production of objective statements, but, on the contrary it is concerned with an individual's personal perception or account of an event or experience (Smith & Osborn, 2007), which is the focus of my study.

Secondly, IPA is characterised by its reflexive component. As IPA acknowledges my participation as a researcher, and my own conceptions, it required application of a double hermeneutic perspective. This meant a two-stage interpretation process. On the one hand, the participants made sense and created interpretations of their experiences, and on the other, through my analysis I attempted to interpret the participants' accounts

Thirdly, IPA calls for smaller groups of participants. It requires detailed case-by-case analysis of individual transcripts, and the aim of such an analysis is to examine particular cases and draw conclusions about particular groups of participants. This idiographic method of study, as opposed to a nomothetic one, focuses on individual cases and allowed me to formulate statements about those individuals. Therefore, I selected a purposive group of four participants.

4 Methodology

My study applies IPA and borrows from the conceptual roots of narrative inquiry (NI). IPA draws its philosophical underpinnings from hermeneutics and phenomenology (Smith et al. 2012), whereas NI is located within the Deweyan ontology of experience (Dewey, 1938). NI gives voices to individuals, thus allowing for their stories to be heard. IPA, with its phenomenological approach focuses on people's perceptions and experiences of the world in which they live, and which gives them meaning. It looks at human experience as a topic in its own right. The reason for selecting IPA and incorporating NA was their shared intellectual commitments and their complementary qualities; each one adds a dimension that is missing in the other one (more on this later). This combination made my investigation and data analysis deeper, more detailed, not to mention more interesting.

4.1 Stories and narratives

As a research methodology, narrative is an interpretive approach in social sciences, used in sociology, organisational studies, gender, studies, education. It considers 'story' to be a fundamental unit that accounts for human experience. Human experience, rather than research, constitutes the basis upon which valuable knowledge is gained. I found this understanding suitable for my study as the connection between a story and experience was explicit here; experiences were expressed in stories. According to Campbell (1970), stories brought people more in accord with themselves, others, the mystery of life itself and the universe. Stories passed on from generation to generation carried not only the plots, but also the values that endured for hundreds of years. The stories followed a timeless and universal pattern, which formed a blueprint, within which a story communicated a balance of various opposing forces. Through stories people shared, and still do, their personal truths. By doing so, they create links with those who participate in the exchange.

In view of the above I considered using this form of data collection as one that enhanced the most natural way for them to share their lived experiences, as well as contributed to the validity of the data. For most people storytelling creates a way to recount an experience, provide a solution to a problem, or allow to make sense of the social world they live in (Moen, 2006). Polkinghorne (1988, 1) regards narrative as "the primary scheme by which human existence is rendered meaningful ". He further claims that people without narratives do not exist. Smith (2007) argues that people create stories out of life and /or within relationships. Atkinson (1998) claims that storytelling constitutes a basic and fundamental form of human communication. By telling stories and by sharing important knowledge of themselves, people also discover deeper meanings in their own lives, by becoming protagonists and active agents. Storytelling is a process of oral expression of events, integrating past experiences into meaningful learning as well as foreshadowing the future (McAlpine, 2016). By telling stories people create coherent, understandable, and meaningful frames for their lives, and can become effective means in social and individual transformation (Gergen & Gergen, 2006). They can also be important in

constructing sense of self, as individuals understand themselves through telling stories about their lives and experiences (McAdams, 2006). Stories are also created in relation to others (Bamberg, 2006) and are influenced by the contexts, settings and audience.

The contexts and settings are located in culture. Culture therefore imposes its meaning on the events and experiences people narrate throughout their lives. Concurring with Bruner (1984) stories must be considered as rooted in cultural societal settings, and the way individuals construct them is also influenced by their settings. The way individuals gain knowledge of the world that they experience is constantly constructed and it is relative. It depends on the time, place, and the interactions with others. The storytelling thus is a form of organising that begins already during the childhood and continues into people's adult lives. Heikkinen (2002) posits that human knowledge as well as individual identities are constructed, narrated, and revised in a continual and on-going process. There is no single and static reality, but instead there are numerous realities, being constructed as a result of interactions. Therefore, human knowledge is relative and depends on people's past, their experiences, their values, the people the stories are addressed to, as well as the time and place (Bakhtin, 1986).

5   Implementation and outcomes

5.1   Focus group interview

In order to gather the necessary data a group interview, a focus group to be precise was organised. The focus group consist between 4 and 12 participants (Saunders et al. 2016). There were 4 participants, chosen using probability sampling. The group consisted of four communication managers, working for international Finnish companies, located in Helsinki area. They shared a similar status and had similar work experiences. The reason for selecting such an 'information rich' group (Krueger and Casey (2009, 21) group was the fact that they represented a critical group of experts who were able to provide knowledge that I was looking for.

The participants were invited to a workshop (see Appendix 1) a few weeks in advance. They were briefly introduced into the nature of the subject of the workshop, but they had no prior knowledge about the methodology of the workshop. They all understand the scope of their contribution and they all agreed to participate. The order of the workshop was planned by the researcher and the flow was followed according to the agenda.

The workshop took 1,5 hours and it took place at Haaga-Helia in a regular classroom. The sitting was arranged in a way that facilitated an open, relaxed, and friendly discussion and sharing of the views and experiences. The participants were seated around a table facing inward, with equal distance from the central point.

As an interpretivist researcher I used the focus group interview as a means to construct meanings through social interactions and sense making about a topic. My role as a researcher in such a setting was one of a moderators who facilitates a discussion, encourages expression of opinions, whilst at the same time not to steer the groups towards certain opinions.

5.1.1   Story creating and sharing

After the introductions, the participants were introduced to the first task of the workshop. They were asked to write a short story on a topic of their choice. The only prompts they were asked to follow were:

Character/setting

Goal/dream of the character

Forces that hinder the character

After the stories were written the participants read their stories to the others. A discussion followed where the participants were asked to identify the main themes of each other's story and share their impressions and comments.

5.1.2   Procedures

In the following sections I detail my recruitment and data collection procedures, the analytic process I followed, discussion of ethical considerations and assessment of the quality and validity of the study.

Participants and Sampling

IPA calls for small groups of participants. Within the framework of IPA Larkin et al (2018) suggest a sample with a uniform set of demographic characteristics, and Smith et al. (2009) suggests a selection of a small homogenous sample of three to six participants (Smith et al., 2009) as this number provides enough cases to analyse convergences and divergences between participants. Homogeneity refers to a group of people with a probable shared perspective on the investigated phenomena. I adopted the means of purposive sampling and interviewed four participants: female communications managers.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Due to the specificity of my study, I was broad with my inclusion criteria, yet remained mindful of ethical practice due to the sensitive nature of the phenomenon. In order to select a homogenous and ethically sound sample I created inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The participants had to have been working within the field of communications for several years in Finland. The participants have completed higher university degrees in their field of expertise.

Recruitment

Initially I approached individuals I have been acquainted with, through previous education. I introduced the interest of my research to them and asked for their help and contribution. I sent invitations (see Appendix 1) via email to six potential participants. Four responded positively and agreed to participate.

I provided an outline of the purpose of the study and informed them about general areas of my interest. I invited them to read all the main points. I also emailed them a general outline of the questions and topics I was interested in talking about to provide transparency of the loose and general structure of the questions before the interview. I ensured anonymity of the research process. We also agreed on the time and place for the workshop.

Situating the sample

At the time of interviews, all participants were in full-time employment in Finnish international companies.

5.1.3 Data Collection

The context of diversity management provides a platform where various narratives are communicated and created. It also provides a possibility for privileged and less privileged narratives to develop. Boje (2001) claims that his ante narrative approach, when it comes to analysing narratives, can be helpful in unravelling which narratives are privileged and which one are silenced. Analysing the narratives from this critical standpoint challenges the conventional diversity management discourse, which is based on mainstream hegemonic stories and discourses. The point here is to find multivocality in the narratives, rather than look at them from only one perspective.

6   Findings

Drawing on Boje's (1991) concept of stories I see them as oral or written performances involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience; they therefore involve characters, sequencing plots, and scripting actions. In the workshop the storyteller and the story listener were co-constructors. This co-construction happened when the participants shared and discussed the stories as a group. This created a multiplicity of stories and their enactment in a multiplicity of sites, of brief encounter, in and around organisations. This also rendered plurivocity. "The notion of plurivocity, that there are multiple meanings in the story, is very empowering, because it gives organisational participants considerable flexibility to create their own interpretation of what is going on" (Thachankary, 1992, 231).Because of the opportunity for multiple interpretation, much of management is about judging stories and storytellers and capturing story characters in a panoptic, interconnected network of interpretative-disciplinary relationships.

Foucault called stories "the vigilance of intersecting gazes" (1977: 217). Stories discipline by being explanatory myths, qualitative simplifications, conceptual constructions, and perceptual themes that interpret and frame organizations and characters. The discursive dynamics of the storytelling collective are also revealed in the level of contestation among stories.

In sum, people do not just tell stories: they tell stories to "enact" an account of themselves and their community (Browning 1991). Stories also shape the course and meaning of human organisation.

Although more research on organisational stories is needed, what is even more urgent is to propose models that focus on the linguistic qualities of human organisations. Organisations cannot be registered as one story, but instead are a multiplicity, a plurality of stories and story interpretations in struggle with one another. Organisational life is more indeterminate, more differentiated, more chaotic, than it is simple, systematic, monological, and hierarchical.

Boje (2011) suggests several methods of analysing narratives and stories. In my analysis I focused on two of them: deconstruction analysis and microstory analysis. The former exposes the taken for granted, accepted viewpoint of a story to its excluded opposite. Through this process the story is reversed by placing the marginal at its center. This manouvre creates a possibility of seeing the story from a different render the excluded voices to be resituated and a novel different viewpoint to be considered. The latter method proposed by Boje (2001) focuses on groups of people who are usually excluded from historical narratives, such as ethnic minorities for example. Microstory analysis sits well with the deconstruction analysis as it traces acts of resistance by 'little people' (Boje 2011, 56) to the grand narratives that control their lives. Through this process the dominant narratives can be re-narrated, thus creating a multivocal text.

6.1   Deconstruction analysis

I transcribed segments of the stories written by the participants. This enabled me to better contextualize the meanings of the stories in the larger conversation units and to do word and sentence fragment searches. I further employed the deconstruction methods that allowed me to put the stories into even larger meaning contexts and to explore how themes evolved over time and across accounts.

Following Calas and Smircich (1991) explanation, deconstruction emphasises how words, and in this study, stories, are "polysemous"—have multiple meanings. To deconstruct was to me to actually analyse the relations between the dualities in stories—such as the positive and negative, the central and the marginal, the essential and the inessential, the insider and the outsider—to show the ambiguity embedded in them and to show the storytelling practices used to discipline particular meanings.

Table 1. The characters of the stories and their goals

CHARACTER	SETTING	CHARACTER'S GOALS AND DREAMS
A boy of 12	not specified	"to build a robot that will change lives"
Maria, a girl of 10 world"	Namibia	"to design the most unique building in the
Lucy, girl of 5	not specified	"to create a world where we all can unite building the bright, common future together"
A girl of 11	small village in England	to alleviate injustice in the world

As can be seen in Table 1 all characters in the stories were young children with big dreams of changing the status quo of the world their knew, for the better.

The first duality is the contrast between the negative present status quo of the world they know and the positive vision of a changed world of the future. All characters in all the stories wanted to change the environment they lived in. The interpretation of such a choice of goals points to the fact that the environment they lived in was not good and needed to be changed for the better. This renders the following interpretation: the participants of the workshop recognize the inadequacies of the internal

communications strategies they use in their everyday work but are not able to change them. This, in fact was also acknowledged by them in the discussion: most of the internal communication is in Finnish, thus excluding non-Finnish speakers from having full access to the information.

Another duality is the young age of the characters, contrasted with a magnitude of what they want to attain. The characters were all children and young adults with big goals and dreams to change the world. I was also intrigued that in workshop about communications and identity at work the communication executives created stories where the main characters are represented as small, marginalised, helpless, with no decisive voice, and no power to influence their environment.

There are two ways this conceptualization can be interpreted. One is the helplessness of the internal communications within organisations which remain entangled and limited by the conduit (explained below) manner of transmitting information. This actually was pointed out by the workshop participants during the discussion.

Another way of interpreting the characters in the stories is the smallness and helplessness of the individuals, especially foreigners whose identities remain marginalized, silenced and with no power to influence the environment.

Another striking duality revealed in the stories is the juxtaposition between the central and the marginal: the positive aspect of the goals of the characters is contrasted with the fear they all express: the fear of being ridiculed, laughed at, or the fear of facing the challenge which overwhelms them.

 Another duality demonstrated in the stories is seen in the juxtaposition of the position of the characters against their settings. All the children are described as contrasted with the surroundings: a rustic, quiet village (inessential) vs busy middle-aged men in black suits in expensive cars going to work in London every day essential); Lucy's world (the girl of 5) is contrasted with a world of men who rule the world, her lack of voice with their power; undeveloped country is contrasted with technological development in Finland.

Because of the big dreams all the characters are also portrayed as outsiders in their own homes. In order to endeavour to achieve their goals they feel they must leave the places where they leave, be it a village in England, or their country.

6.2   Microstory analysis

As mentioned earlier the microstory analysis brings into light the taken for granted, accepted viewpoints of stories to their excluded opposites. Through this process the stories of the participants were reversed by placing the marginal at their centres. This manoeuvre created possibilities of seeing

the stories from a different perspective, thus rendering the excluded voices to be resituated and a novel different viewpoint to be considered.

In all the stories the main characters were presented as being on the outside, marginalised. Through their own reflections (see Table 2), descriptions of the settings it can be seen that they viewed themselves as being insignificant others. If one were to reverse this positioning and placed the main characters as central and their voices as powerful change makers, the ideas and dreams about creating a better world would not only become attainable, but their creators would also be heard and considered as valid negotiators.

Table 2. The otherness of the characters.

CHARACTER	CHARACTERS AS OUTSIDERS
A boy of 12	"he knows it will not be easy, it might not be possible without taking big risks and leaving something behind"
Maria, a girl of 10	"her heart is broken, she does not have money, she is lonely"
Lucy, a girl of 5	"while her friends played with dolls, Lucy went out and about to save cats and dogs or whoever was in need of help"
A girl of 11	"they had been laughing at her and her silly dreams", "they were not interested"

If these stories were recreated, they would depict characters who were children who already at a young age had big dreams and goals. Despite many inhibitions imposed on them by their peers, adults, and societies where they lived, they managed to pursue their paths in order to create great things that changed the world for better. Some broke away from their intolerant parents and oppressive surroundings (Lucy), some pursued studies in a foreign, more developed country (Maria), others took big risks, and others accepted their alienation and continued their pursuits. In the end they all succeeded in their accomplishments and their inventions and knowledge turned out to be instrumental in recreating the order of the world.

Both the deconstruction and the microstory analysis of the stories show that the stories created by the participants of the workshop bear striking similarities, both in characters and the themes. They show individuals who are helpless 'others', with no voice, and at odds with their surroundings.

Whichever interpretation one choses to accept the general picture remains clear: the communications professionals created characters who were marginalized others. This renders an interpretation that this is the way the culturally different employees in their organisations are perceived as such. The fact that these marginalised characters had big goals and dreams suggests a perception that suggests unknown potential of the diverse cultures within organisations, and also the need to explore it for the benefit of an international organization. It can, therefore be concluded that there is a need to create a more dialogic and open communications in order to create a platform more conducive to dialog and exchange of views and opinions.

Based on the analysis of the stories written by the focus group participants and their comments expressed in the discussion that followed reading of the stories I draw on Davies'(1996) model and propose the following suggestion for a change.

7   Recommendations

The way people think about communication influences their way of behaviour and communicate with others (Mumby 2013,19). This understanding resonates in Axley's (1984) conduit metaphor which dominates communication in modern organisations. Axley claims that everyday communication in modern organisations is dominated by transmission of information that is based on four principles which can be summarised as follows: thoughts and feelings are expressed through words of speakers and extracted by listeners. This conduit model undermines any possibility of dynamic, interactive, dialogic communicative modes of exchange. It does not allow for expression and transmission of any other information, insights apart from those included in the information as intended by the speaker. It does not open any possibilities for human relationships to develop, let alone any knowledge creation about each other, the cultural identity, or each other's cultural values.

Davies (1996) created an approach that consists of three parts: establishing domains of change, implementing a process to collect and review stories of change, conducting secondary analysis of the stories.

In the first stage the evaluation audience identifies the domains of change that they think needs to be monitored at the project level. In the case of this research it will be changes in internal communications practice. A Delphi technique can be applied here as a research method. Instead of applying performance indicators technique (popular in business organisations) the Delphi technique would render findings not clear and deliberately fuzzy, in order for the audience to interpret the findings and determine the areas of change.

The second stage builds on the first one. The areas of change identified in the first stage are reviewed and the stories of significant change are collected. The stories are collected by the individuals directly involved in the project delivery, in the case of this research the communication executives. The stories are then reviewed by the individuals at different level within the organisations, and the most significant ones are selected. This selection is done by a voting process. The information is then shared with the storytellers and the project leaders.

Finally, the final stage involves a round table discussion and reaching an agreement as to implementing changes in policies and practices.

Figure 1 below illustrates a simplified model, based on dialogical storytelling approach to negotiated diversity management. It is a conceptual model involving individuals from diverse groups within an organisation representing mainstream and marginalised narratives. Their stories may, for example represent their workplace experiences of implications of their cultural identity in recruitment and

selection or performance management. To analyse these stories a microstory or deconstruction analysis can be used.

In the second stage plurivocal rendition of the stories can be written. For example, the storytellers are asked to focus on critical incidents, such as experiencing bias or prejudice in the recruitment process. The next stage invites reflexivity and discussion of representation of identity. This happens as a discussion where individuals with various cultural identities take part. The focus here is to elicit stories "peeking out of the margins (Syed and Boje, 2011).

The following stage involves identifying practical actions that can be taken as a result of the reflection and discussion. The participants here develop common a new conceptual understanding of the diversity management. In the final stage, the feedback stage the new framework is revised and altered if needed.

Figure 1. Simplified dialogical storytelling approach to negotiated diversity management.

For this dialogic, negotiated approach to work it has to be understood and implemented as a holistic process where the organisation creates an enabling environment. If diverse individuals and diverse stories participate in co-creation of the new frameworks and policies then consideration is given to their diverse stories thus addressing issues such as participatory decision making, empowerment and multiculturalism.

9   Conclusions and further research

This thesis explored the importance and value of cultural identities of individuals working in international organisations, stigmatised and threatened cultural identities, the role of organisational internal communications in promoting diverse cultural identities in international organisations.

The understanding of work, and professional positions as closely connected to people's sense of identity and self-worth has been 21st century prevalent perspective (Mumby, 2013, 4017). It is also associated with   leading meaningful and fulfilling lives, as well as sources of self-worth and a sense of self. This created grounds for communication centred treatment of identity within organisations. Questions concerning identity of individual members and their identifications with organisational identity became salient. The role of communications professionals is crucial when it comes to recognising the importance of the connection between cultural identities of individual members and the way they identify themselves with the organisations. Through effective communications, they can promote the recognition and acknowledgment of cultural values of individual employees, thus contributing to development of truly international organisational cultures.

The findings of this thesis show that employees with diverse cultural background are perceived as marginalised others, and outsiders, of whom not much is known. The internal communications do not embark on any clear-cut practices in order to promote knowledge and acknowledgment of these individuals.

Davies approach is suggested as a possible process of implementing a dialogic, negotiated, and holistic way to be implemented within international organisations by communication professionals. Through such an approach diverse individuals and diverse stories can participate in co-creation of the new frameworks and policies then consideration is given to their diverse stories thus addressing issues such as participatory decision making, empowerment and multiculturalism.

If such a process were to be implemented future, research could investigate and test its validity. The implementation of the process itself could render access to qualitative data (storytelling) that could be analysed and its preliminary findings could serve as a test to its validity.

Another study into identity could be carried out among Finnish employees in international organisations about their perceptions of employees with diverse cultural identities.

10 Final reflections

The area of this investigation was of particular interest to me as it widened the dimensions of my current doctorate research which investigates experiences of black African professionals living and working in Finnish companies. The focus study group in this study provided insights into the Finnish perspective. I am aware that I only interviewed one focus group of four communications professionals, and the findings cannot be generalised to the entire Finnish environment of international organisations. However, the research carried out for this thesis does provide insights into a phenomenon that should be investigated further, by interviewing different communications professionals at other Finnish international organisations.

Adopting storytelling as a methodological tool proved to be a suitable medium to obtain data in a non-direct way, which also proved to be enjoyable for the study participants. Writing stories rather than answering interview questions created a more relaxed environment where views were shared in a more creative way. Even though this way of generating data provided creative and fictional accounts, it provided even deeper insights than answers to interview questions would do. Writing stories when investigating an issue within an organisation was also acknowledged by the participants as a useful way of conveying information as part of internal communications.

I have used storytelling methodology in previous research and was confident that this methodological tool was suitable for this thesis. The story analysis however, deconstruction and microstory, was novel to me. As in every qualitative, interpretive research project that is data driven, I was very aware that throughout this process I did not know what I will find. It was, therefore not only exciting but demanded finding suitable analytical tools in order to provide valid findings.

 I decided to apply deconstruction and microstory analysis as the parts of the stories that were most interesting to me were the characters. I wanted to provide an effective and deep analysis of the characters' goals and dreams. I was interested in the way the non-Finnish employees were perceived by the communications professionals. I have made the choice of the analytical tool was made after I have read the stories and noticed, to my astonishment, that all the characters were marginalised others. The microstory analysis was particularly appropriate as it allowed for another angle, thus perception of the characters. In addition, the microstory analysis also was closely connected to a practical application that I outlined in the recommendations.

In summary, effective internal communication within international organisations conveys information, sends messages, or gives directions. Internal communications also play an important role in connecting employees through the way the communication flows throughout all organisational levels. It can do it in traditional ways, through messages and information written in the Finnish language, thus excluding non-Finnish employees. It can also adopt more creative, un-orthodox ways of reaching all

employees, also those with foreign background, thus creating inclusiveness, well-being, and appreciation of all employees.

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FOCUS GROUP/GROUP INTERVIEW

TIME: tbd (1,5-2 hours)

PLACE: Haaga-Helia UAS Pasila, Helsinki

MODERATOR: Anna Kimberley

SUBJECT: Cultural identity of employees as an intangible value in organisations

FOCUS: The purpose of the focus group is to explore of the intangible value of cultural identities of employees within given organisations:

1) Present status quo: do organisations acknowledge individual cultural identities of their employees; if so how?
2) What is the role of communications in promoting this acknowledgment?
3) What can communications do to develop the present situation?

PROCEDURES AND METHODOLOGY:

15 min introductions: moderator and the participants (with coffee and light refreshments)

Task 1

45 min (individual)

Each participant writes a simple story based on cues provided by the facilitator (setting and character, dreams the character has, problem the character faces). The stories have no endings at this point. After the stories are completed the participants read their stories to the other group members.

Task 2

45 min (group)

The group discusses the themes of each story, asks questions, etc. The group identifies the problems in each story and discusses possible solutions. As a group they discuss and propose possible solutions to the characters' problems. On a large sheet of paper the group writes the themes, the problems and the solutions.

Task 3

15 min (group)

The group provides feedback about the activity in a form of informal discussion and exchange of opinions.