

# Organisational Culture and Meaning after a Merger: Challenges regarding Craft, Identity and Values in the Lab

Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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Henley Business School**

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**November 2017**



## **Declaration of Original Authorship**

### **Declaration**

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Oluyemisi F. Bolade-Ogunfodun

## **Abstract**

This study is an ethnographic analysis of culture and meaning in a post-merger organisational context. It adopts the Geertzian notion of culture as the main conceptual framework which emphasises patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction (Geertz, 1973). In contrast to the dominant positivist epistemological approaches to mainstream organisational culture studies, this study takes an interpretivist approach. The focus is on less dominant perspectives (voices) in the post-merger organisation as a way to highlight and challenge assumptions about the nature and role of people within mechanisms underlying expressions of culture.

The research questions address the nature and sources of meaning systems in a culturally diverse post-merger community and investigate responses to observed incongruences. Using an ethnographic case study methodology, post-merger cultural interactions are explored. A thematic approach is adopted for the analysis of data and main findings show the significance of the nature of creative knowledge work in the acquired population's culture. Findings reveal how incongruence in meanings emerges from interactions between the craft culture and imposed organisational values underpinning the bureaucratic post-merger context. In addition, the study uncovers nuanced connections between craft identity, practice and the person as salient elements of the meaning system in the professionals' community, incompatible with the more dominant market-driven ethics in the organisation. Findings also show the ethical challenges which emerge for the acquired team from the coexistence of incompatible meanings. The ethical challenges arise from the protective role played by the craft in preserving the acquired team's meaning system against assimilation by the acquirer's culture. These findings are relevant for studies on knowledge workers, cultural implications of strategic alliances and inform ethical concerns around incompatible values as described in Aristotelian virtue ethics theory. The cultural analysis is thus critically expanded and connected with concerns in the international business literature and relevant ethical debates.

## **Dedication**

I remain forever thankful to God who makes all things beautiful in His time.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to sincerely thank my supervisors, Dr Kleio Akrivou and Dr John Latsis for such an amazing experience on my PhD journey. You have been wonderful role models in living out the values of the academic profession and in remarkable ways you produce learning opportunities for me at every encounter with you. Thank you for sharing your wisdom and experience. Your thoroughness with supervising my research motivates me to strive to continuously improve.

I am grateful to the excellent faculty at Henley Business School and the wider University of Reading for the many opportunities for me to develop as a researcher and academic. A special thank you goes to Dr Evelyn Fenton for her kind support since the beginning of this journey.

My deepest thanks and appreciation goes to my husband, Bolade. Thank you, Sweetheart, for being a constant companion, supporter, encourager and ardent fan. I am most grateful. To my darling son, Demilade, who bore with grace the many hours of sharing Mummy with her 'work', I say thank you. To my dear parents, Prof T.O. Adewoye and Dr (Mrs) E.O. Adewoye, I say thank you for giving me such a solid foundation to build upon. I appreciate all my extended family members for their love and prayers.

I appreciate my good friend, Dr Christson Adedoyin for being a steadfast source of support and encouragement throughout the programme. You have been such a blessing. Many thanks to all my friends at home and abroad for all their support as well, Mrs Omolara Awe, Mrs Chika Amaku, Mrs Antoinette Ackuaku, Dr Obioma Uchendu, Mr Opeyemi Oduwole, members of RCCG Bracknell VA and many others whom I may not have mentioned here. Your encouragement along the journey is invaluable. My sister-friend, Mrs Ayobola Chike-Michael deserves special mention. Thank you for the many, many hours of listening, sharing or simply being there. You are the best.

You have all been so supportive. Many, many thanks.

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## List of Abbreviations

M&A	Merger and Acquisition
MAP	Merger and Acquisition Process
FTE	Full Time Employee

## **Statement of Co-authorship.**

Material from a book chapter of which I am a co-author was duly acknowledged and incorporated in this thesis as an estimated 6.9% of my discussion chapter. In line with the University requirements for the submission of thesis, I hereby state that my specific contribution to the co-authored book chapter was looking over bibliographical references for accuracy and is an estimated one percent of contribution. The principal and third authors have a 98% and 1% estimated percentage contribution to the chapter respectively.

# **1. CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter introduces conceptual issues associated with the study of culture, gives an overview of the context of the study as well as the research purpose, research questions and outline of the thesis.

## **1.2 Conceptual issues surrounding studies on organisational culture**

The idea of culture sits at the heart of human interaction. Similarly, in organisations, culture takes a central position and can reveal much about the organisation as well as the people within it. Studies on culture abound in the literature and have provided a means for better understanding human societies. The study of organisational culture as a more specific area represents attempts to build a framework for the different dimensions of culture which are peculiar to organisations. Cultural studies have been the subject of numerous academic and empirical enquiries across different disciplines with resultant variations in focus, interest and perspectives. The cross disciplinary relevance of the culture phenomenon is a source of much complexity in gaining a clear understanding of the nature and composition of culture but could also present inherent opportunities to explore meeting points and boundaries for the various perspectives in order to provide a concrete and more holistic framework for understanding culture. As a result, various theoretical constructs on culture reveal differences in conceptualisation by different scholars and will be examined subsequently.

The study of culture has by tradition been associated with the discipline of anthropology where social scientists have attempted to understand society through culture. Historically, the study of culture is often associated with early 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists (Tylor, 1871; Kroeber, (1932; 1963); Radcliffe-Brown, 1950; Levi Strauss (1963; 1969); Geertz, 1973) but has also attracted the interest of socio-political theorists (Bottomore, 1973; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Milliband, 1989;

Hutchkinson and Smith, 1994; and Barry, 2001). These scholars are generally interested in understanding society through culture but anthropologists are often associated with conducting ethnographic studies on primitive tribes and societies in different parts of the world. Through anthropological accounts, important aspects of culture are revealed, i.e. symbolic thought and practice, cultural artefacts, values, kinship, social structures and social interaction patterns. The historical evolution of the concept of culture is significant because it reveals how conceptions about the nature and study of culture have developed over time.

Amongst researchers, there is little agreement as to a unique definition of culture. Different assumptions about the nature of culture have formed the basis of how culture is defined and studied. As a result, there are a myriad of studies on culture and interpretations have varied from one scholar to another. The important cause of variations in interpretations of culture is the philosophical assumption guiding approaches to culture studies which are revealed in ontological and epistemological orientations underpinning views on culture (Alvesson, 1993). Against a background of diverse interpretations of culture, the theoretical framework provided by a multidisciplinary perspective to understanding culture is considered useful because it allows for exploration of questions about the nature, origins, boundaries and dynamics in culture which can give a richer understanding of the phenomenon. Examining the socio-political and anthropological literatures on culture is considered relevant for enabling a richer understanding of the background to many conceptual issues surrounding culture, and reveals how conceptual and empirical studies on culture in the management literature have been subsequently influenced. The identified literatures on culture are therefore relevant for facilitating an in-depth analysis of organisational culture as an observable, dynamic and symbolic phenomenon.

By nature, cultural phenomena and the subject of cultural studies are normative phenomena and are imbued with ethical questions, implications and considerations which underlie values held and indicate what is considered morally right or wrong. For example, values often emerge from within the framework of an ethical environment (Blackburn, 2001, p. 6) which generates specific understandings and meanings about such values. A review of the contributions of the selected key authors suggests that through intersubjective processes of meaning making, cultural phenomena also involve a plurality of views and alternative interpretations, as well as processes behind the

emergence of dominant interpretations. As a result, normative aspects of culture are often embedded in background processes but can be elicited by probing the nature of culture.

A cultural perspective of organisations in mainstream management literature emerged from the view that organisations have frequently been viewed as having symbolic aspects (Smircich, 1983). Practical interest in culture studies gathered momentum in the 1980s as theorists sought to explain the success of Japanese businesses in the face of decreasing competitiveness of the US economy. Prompting a rethink about the hitherto known success factors of systems and strategy advocated by the American management philosophy, a notable study by Ouchi (1981, p. 4) revealed that the key to productivity was an involved workforce and the success of Japanese firms was attributed to a people-centred organisational culture. This became a turning point in organisational research and cultural perspectives began to significantly influence later studies and debates on culture in organisations. This study focuses on a particular organisational context which allows for investigating diversity in culture. The context is a post-merger and acquisition environment which has been the subject of much research in the management literature. The next section discusses the contextual background for the study.

### **1.3 Contextual background for the study: Mergers and Acquisitions**

The chosen context for this study involves the acquisition of a smaller software engineering company by a much larger multinational company as described in more detail in chapter four. The acquirer operates within the industrial manufacturing sector and produces a wide range of products for industrial, commercial and personal use. The acquired company specialises in the production of highly complex and sophisticated engineering products for image capturing, applicable to a range of uses. This study began after a period of two and a half years had passed following acquisition. The post-acquisition time frame allowed for some degree of integration to have been initiated in



the organisation, such that it would be possible to investigate cultural interactions after the acquisition.

### **1.3.1 Importance of Context and Theoretical Framework for the Study**

The context for the study is that of cultural diversity as a result of organizational change and gives opportunity to explore the nature and dimensions of culture in dynamic workgroups. M&As represent a form of organizational change and provide a rich background within which to understand the coming together of two organizations. Organisations have been viewed as social entities exhibiting diverse cultures (Smircich 1983; Morgan and Ogbonna, 2008). In this light, M&As can also be seen as social processes. The organisational context of interest is that of a Merger or Acquisition Process (MAP), taken to refer to a structural change in an organisation or in its activities such that a meeting point for the interaction of work cultures is created. A MAP thus presents potential complexity in understanding meaning systems and social relations, including processes behind the emergence (or decline) of ways of valuing. Within this context, it is possible to explore normative aspects of interactions between cultural dimensions. This is an area which is insufficiently addressed in the literature. This study aims to contribute to the theory of culture within the management literature and show the relevance of key findings for the diverse organisational context studied. Through a cultural analysis of the selected organisation, this study uncovers insights regarding the nature of culture and dynamics of cultural interactions in a context of diversity. Given the multidisciplinary interest in the phenomenon of culture, the study considers and integrates relevant theoretical perspectives which allow for exploring the nuanced connections between culture and ethics. The ethical dimension of culture is a relevant concern for this study not only because it provides additional theoretical perspective to the way the phenomenon of culture has been studied in the literature but also because it provides a challenge to the taken for granted aspects of culture in many studies on culture. A multidisciplinary theoretical approach which integrates anthropological and management theories on culture with socio-political perspectives relating to culture is used to explore research questions relating to the nature, origins, boundaries and dynamics in culture. Specifically, the Geertzian anthropological conception of culture (Geertz, 1973) forms a key conceptual framework for the study.

The theory of culture developed by Geertz (1973) is considered of primary relevance for the research because of its emphasis on the role of the symbolic in culture. Geertz (1973) views culture as comprising of patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction. Patterns of meaning are inherited conceptions (Geertz, 1973, p. 89) represented by symbols and which become an exemplification of more concrete views on life. The focus on meaning emphasises a reality behind the visible aspects of culture and suggest that a deeper understanding of cultural actions is made possible only through an interpretive approach to what is perceived. Patterns of interaction reflect the ways in which members of social groups or units interact within the context of their various human roles in society (Geertz, 1973, p. 144). Patterns of meaning and interaction become more nuanced in the context of a merger and acquisition.

#### **1.4 The research gap and purpose of the research**

Within the management literature, culture studies indicate a dominance of a functional perspective to culture. The main concern is around how culture can be ‘managed’ or made useful for the organisation to further the agenda of management with respect to specific outcomes such as productivity, effectiveness, organisational commitment etc. This perspective is reflected in the many studies on organisational culture which are underlined by assumptions which take for granted the nature of culture and people within a given culture. One assumption is the objectivist and positivist paradigm within which cultural research has largely been conducted within the discipline: being viewed ontologically as a distinct and separate property of the organisation, culture was seen as amenable to being altered or manipulated. Some studies however adopt a more constructionist and interpretivist perspective of organisational culture, seeing the inseparable ontological connections between culture and the organisation itself. Under this paradigmatic approach, understanding organisational culture requires one to challenge the assumptions of the positivist view to focus on exploring the nature of culture and gaining an understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of members of the culture.

A few studies which recognise the dominant functionalist pattern in the concerns of scholars within the management discipline raised the need for a more inclusive perspective in organisational culture research (Davis, 1985, p. 163 in Kilman et al., 1985; Alvesson, 1993). Alvesson (1993, p. 78) and Cartwright et al. (2012) have argued for the need for methods in research on culture which yield richness and a depth of understanding. Such methods are embedded in qualitative studies on organisational culture such as ethnography which emphasise interpretive approaches and embeddedness in the context whilst considering current and historically anchored influences on culture (Martin and Frost, 1999). This thinking within the critical management literature re-emphasises the weakness in the dominant positivist approach used in mainstream studies as lacking attention to understanding both the symbolic and the routine. Embeddedness in the context which ethnographic research allows for is significant in the study of culture. It aligns with a social constructionist paradigm and provides an avenue to understand on a deeper level the nature of culture and to interrogate the taken-for-granted assumptions about organisational culture as well as people within the culture. Ethnographic studies of culture in M&As have been identified as rare in the literature (Cartwright et al, 2012, p. 99-100; van Marrewijk, 2016, p. 342). By leveraging on ethnographic methods of enquiry to uncover the various dimensions of culture in an M&A, the theoretical understanding of organisational culture can be enriched, with reference to various related literatures in cultural anthropology, politics as well as debates in the ethics literature.

Given the perspective of organisations as cultures within the management literature (Morgan, 1997; Smircich 1983), an interaction of cultures is created when there is a MAP. Such contexts have been established in the literature as sites of cultural diversity and complexity (Buono et al., 1985; Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988; Buono and Bowditch, 1989; Cartwright and Cooper, 1993; Larsson and Lubatkin, 2001 and van Marrewijk, 2016). There are also issues around trust, uncertainty and change which characterise mergers and acquisitions (Ager, 2011) which need to be given voice in cultural research. A MAP presents potential complexity in understanding meaning systems and social relations, including processes behind the emergence (or decline) of ways of valuing. The target population of professionals who are identified as creative knowledge workers is significant to study because of its strong sense of cultural identity and relationship to the craft of the profession while being also part of a complex

organisation. Within this context, it is possible to explore embedded normative aspects of how values emerge, especially dominant ones. In addition, one is able to achieve an understanding of the interaction between different and possibly incongruent values and meaning systems to illuminate the ethically relevant implications for practice, intergroup relations and identity. The ethical dimension is an area which is insufficiently addressed in the literature on culture in mergers and acquisitions and in the ethical literature on organisational culture in such diverse context.

The anthropological literature provides a foundational understanding of culture. However, the review of the selected influential anthropologists suggests that some of the premises on which the ideas are based make certain assumptions about the nature and role of people within cultural mechanisms which underlie expressions of culture. A fundamental assumption is of passivity of members of a culture in the process of adopting cultural elements. Contributions by influential socio-political scholars also provide further insight into the understanding of culture by addressing questions about the origins of culture and illuminating other mechanisms involved in dynamics of relations between groups. However, the ideas also rest on the assumptions of passivity of members of a culture. These assumptions around the understanding of organisational culture are explored through the research questions in this study.

Given the gaps identified from the review of the relevant literatures, this study aims to explore connections in ideas on culture across the anthropological, socio-political and management literatures in order to arrive at a richer understanding of culture in a diverse context. From the cultural analysis, this study also shows how ethical concerns and challenges are embedded and emerge from incompatibility in meaning systems within the context. Methodologically, adopting an ethnographic approach for this study contributes to ethnographic studies on culture in merger and acquisition contexts which are few in the management literature (Cartwright et al., 2012). The dearth of ethnographic studies on culture in M&A contexts has been associated with challenges of securing research time and access, factors critical for ethnographic research. This study more specifically contributes to the literature on knowledge workers by highlighting embedded and underlying cultural dynamics from an M&A perspective.

## 1.5 Research Method

The research method used for this study is an organisational ethnography (Schwartzman, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, Van Maanen, 1975) which requires the researcher to be embedded within the context of study as a member of the community. Sources of data include 51 participant observations accounts, 18 in-depth interviews selected from a total of 24 conducted, documents on the organisation (historical, operational/routine, public relations documents, symbolic and web based data in public domain) and the researcher's analytical memos which bring in reflexivity into the research process to improve reliability. The different sources of data also provide a means of triangulation to ensure validity. As a way of gaining in-depth understanding of relationships in the research setting, a behavioural approach to kinship - known as fictive kinship - was drawn on in the ethnographic study of workgroups as a novel approach (Schneider, 1984, p. 99) to studying close-knit groups in the context. Schneider advocated a social and cultural basis for structuring kinship groups, resting on the assumption that within a societal context, kinship terminology, associated behaviours and a system of shared expectations about rights and duties are all socially constructed. By studying patterns of interaction and patterns of meaning in close-knit groupings within the setting, the researcher is able to penetrate superficial data, overcome social-desirability bias and encounter deeper-level structures of meaning.

The population was made up of employees from both the acquired (Brownfield) and the acquiring (Alpha-D) organisations. Consistent with ethnographic sampling techniques (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), a purposive sample of participants from 6 work groups within the target population was drawn to reflect adequate representation based on people (demographics), context (formal and informal settings) and timing (days and times throughout the duration of field work).

Field journal records were used as the primary method of data entry and the plan for analysis utilises pattern identification and thematic analysis. A Non-Disclosure Agreement was executed to secure the confidentiality and anonymity of participants and ethical approval was also obtained from the University prior to commencement of fieldwork. Verbal assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were also given to individual participants as a complement to the organisational level ethical approval.

## 1.6 Aims and Objectives of the study

The broad aim of this study is to achieve an anthropologically-driven understanding of organisational culture from a paradigm standpoint which is less used in research on organisational culture in M&A contexts within the management literature. In contrast to many M&A studies on organisational culture, this study adopts the ontology of social constructionism and an interpretivist paradigm for the exploration of the nature of culture in a selected professional group of creative knowledge workers in a post-acquisition context. Through an ethnographic research methodology, the objective of the study is to conduct a cultural analysis of the target population as a way to probe the taken-for-granted assumptions regarding the nature of culture as well as regarding passivity of members of a culture in a diverse organisational context of cultural relations.

## 1.7 Research Questions

The research questions focus on enabling a cultural analysis of the post-merger environment and are as follows:

- (1) What is the nature and what are the sources of meaning systems in the merged Alpha-D and Brownfield workgroup community? Can areas of incongruence in meaning be identified?
- (2) What were the Brownfield work groups' responses to incongruence in meaning regarding the nature and ethics of work?

As noted in the earlier sections, cultural analysis is impossible to separate from normative issues and concerns. Given this, my thesis in the latter discussion and conclusion chapters expands the analysis of findings beyond the main management, anthropological and political literatures, discussing the relevance to important debates in ethics. This is done through a critical discussion of ethical challenges emerging from coexistence of incongruent meanings regarding questions of identity, craft and broader values in the Alpha-D and Brownfield workgroups.

## 1.8 Organisation and outline of thesis

This thesis is organised into six main chapters.

Chapter one introduces the framework for the research, highlighting cross-disciplinary conceptual issues in the understanding and study of culture and the theoretical framework guiding the exploration of culture in the selected context of the study. The chapter also gives the research gap, research methodology, aims, objectives and specific research questions to be explored.

Chapter two is a review of the key literatures relevant to the understanding of the phenomenon of culture, focusing on key studies by influential scholars on culture across the disciplines of management, anthropology and the socio-political literature, which provide a theoretical and conceptual background for the research.

Chapter three describes the methodology for the research and provides the justification for the research design. The philosophical assumptions which underpin the study are described and linked to the research methodology. Selection criteria for participants, the target population, sampling, data collection and analytical strategy are also described and justified. The research protocol is described and issues regarding credibility and reflexivity are addressed.

Chapter four presents the context for the study, describing the sectoral background of interest and the organisations involved in the acquisition. A description of the organisational context itself is also given, integrating historical and current sources of data as well as outlining the structure of the target population, the people and interaction patterns within and across workgroups.

Chapter five presents the findings from analysis of data and is organised as thematic discussions covering first the contextual and participant observation data and secondly, the interview data. An integrated discussion of findings across the different sources of data concludes the chapter.

Chapter six is the discussion chapter and discusses the findings in relation to the research questions, showing connections between the literatures reviewed, findings and other relevant debates within related literatures and fields of study.

Chapter seven gives the conclusions from the study, highlights implications of the study, identifies limitations and also provides recommendations in addition to highlighting areas that can benefit from further research.



## **2 CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction: conceptual issues in the study of culture**

Various theoretical constructs surrounding the concept of culture reveal that there are differences in how culture is conceptualized by different scholars. The study of culture has by tradition been associated with the discipline of anthropology where social scientists have attempted to understand society through culture. Historically, the study of culture is often associated with early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars (Tylor, 1871; Kroeber, (1932; 1963); Radcliffe-Brown, 1950; Levi Strauss (1963; 1969); Geertz, 1973) in the social sciences from within the discipline of anthropology but has also attracted the interest of political sociologists (Bottomore, 1973; Hobsbawm, 1983; Milliband, 1989; Hutchkinson and Smith, 1994; and Barry, 2001). These scholars are generally interested in understanding society through culture but anthropologists are often associated with conducting ethnographic studies on primitive tribes and societies in different parts of the world. Through anthropological accounts, important aspects of culture are revealed, i.e. symbolic thought and practice, cultural artefacts, kinship, social structures and social interaction.

Historically, conceptions of culture have evolved and show how the understanding and study of culture have developed over time across different disciplines, as indicated in the introduction chapter of this thesis. In particular, there is an absence of a unique definition of organisational culture amongst management scholars due to variations in theoretical perspectives and interpretations. These perspectives derive from differences in philosophical assumptions which guide approaches to organisational culture studies (Alvesson, 1993) as reflected in the diverse literature on organisational culture. Conventionally, anthropological studies on culture are concerned with providing answers to questions about expressions of group identity, interaction, the relevance of symbols and group cohesion. However, since organisations have frequently been viewed as having symbolic aspects, the concept of culture has found its way into mainstream management literature as academic researchers began to take a cultural perspective on organisations (Smircich, 1983).

Practical interest in culture studies gathered momentum in the 1980s as theorists sought to find an explanation for the success of Japanese businesses in the face of decreasing competitiveness of the US economy. Rather than the known success factors of systems and strategy which the American management philosophy advocated for, a notable study by Ouchi (1981, p. 4) revealed that the key to productivity was an involved workforce and the success of Japanese firms was attributed to a people-centred organisational culture. Prior to Ouchi's studies, the USA was considered as the greatest exporter of management education. However, his studies revealed that while American firms were unable to successfully export their management approach to their Japan-based American firms, the Japanese were able to transport their management style to US-based Japanese firms. This indicated the difference in the way Japanese firms were run. The historical importance of Ouchi's text is that it became a turning point in organisational research and cultural perspectives began to significantly influence later culture studies in organisations. Since his published work, the concept of culture has attracted the attention of scholars giving rise to intense debates.

A critique of the relevant literature on the key dimensions of culture will be attempted in this chapter in order to uncover gaps left unaddressed by the key authors on culture. Examining the anthropological and political literatures on culture is considered useful for enabling a richer understanding of the background to many conceptual issues surrounding culture, and reveals how conceptual and empirical studies on culture in the management literature have been subsequently influenced. The identified literatures on culture are expected to facilitate an in-depth analysis of culture as an observable, dynamic and symbolic phenomenon.

## **2.2 A review of the Management literature on key areas relevant to the study.**

This section will address contributions from the management literature on the key areas relevant to this study such as approaches to understanding organisational culture, a review of knowledge work which applies to the target population of professionals and an examination of the literature on mergers and acquisitions. The discussion is aimed at showing the salience of organisational culture in the population of knowledge workers

within a culturally diverse context which the post-acquisition organisation presents. To start with, a review of interpretations of the concept of organisational culture within the management literature is presented.

### **2.2.1 The Management literature on organisational culture**

Within the disciplines of the social sciences, while the research tradition of Anthropology seeks to understand the nature of culture, and the socio-political literature emphasizes the dynamics and oftentimes background processes surrounding culture, there is a managerial tradition which is more concerned with how culture is ultimately linked to achieving organizational goals. There have been a myriad of studies within the organizational behavior literature which reflect this orientation (Kangas et al., 2017; Riivari and Lamsa, 2014; Campbell and Göritz, 2014). There have also been several studies which take a more critical position, challenging the more traditional approaches and drawing attention to other aspects of culture such as socio-economic contexts of culture studies, material aspects of culture as against over-emphasis on ‘peripheral’ and symbolic aspects of culture such as organizational stories, events or myths, and the importance of relating material and non-material aspects of culture in order to gain a holistic and more- meaningful understanding of culture. (Alvesson, 1993; Martin, 2002; van Marrewijk, 2004; 2017). As a result of different focus of scholars on organizational culture, the literature on management is a reflection of inconsistent and sometimes conflicting perspectives about culture (Martin 2002). Martin’s (2002) notable work classifies studies on organizational culture into three broad perspectives namely: integration, differentiation and fragmentation perspectives. The integration perspective views organisational culture as a unitary notion, with consistent interpretations of expressions of culture shared by members of the culture. The differentiation perspective acknowledges the existence of subcultures as a result of inconsistency in such interpretations while the fragmentation perspective views interpretations as neither consistent nor inconsistent, but varied and multiple. Fragmentation studies tend to view consensus as transient and unbounded by sub-group culture and as a result there is a prevalence of ambiguity, contradictions and multiple meanings. (Martin, 2002). Despite the multiple perspectives of studies on

organizational culture within the management literature, the literature reflects ideas which have come from other disciplines.

In order to provide a neat inroad into the perspectives of the management literature on culture, an important guiding framework given by Smircich (1983) is relevant for illuminating the understanding of culture as a concept and also understanding how the concept has been used in organizational studies. Smircich's framework shows how understanding the nature of culture can illuminate aspects of the organization. Drawing from anthropology which is traditionally associated with culture studies, five salient characteristics of how culture is understood and paralleled in studies on organizations is identified. What is prominent in this approach is that culture is generally used as a social metaphor to understand aspects of an organization, and organization is then explored as subjective or intersubjective experience.

The metaphorical approach relates to five perspectives of culture. The first perspective of the metaphor is of culture as a machine used to serve certain needs of society and the parallel of this is that organisations are seen as social instruments for achieving tasks. Studies applying this metaphor assume a functional perspective to organisations and see culture as an object which can be used to change aspects of an organization (Becker and Geer, 1960; Marcoulides and Heck, 1993; Meyerson, 1994; Chatman et al 1998; Sorensen, 2002; Kotrba, et al 2012). This functional view is echoed in many studies in the management literature which approach culture as one of the management tool-kits, used to achieve outcomes such as efficiency, productivity or change (Sorensen, 2002; Weber, 1996; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003; Marcoulides and Heck, 1993). A second view sees culture as a regulatory mechanism for uniting individuals within social structures. This is partly a functionalist/structural perspective and studies using this approach view organisations as adaptive organisms with interdependent parts within the context of a changing environment. Contributions by scholars on organizational culture which emphasise the regulatory role played by culture are examples of this perspective. The focus is on aspects of culture which act as mechanisms for ensuring that particular behaviors, beliefs and attitudes are maintained. Schein's theory of culture (Schein, 1985) aligns with this view and gives a perspective which is well established in the management literature. His theory describes culture as existing on three levels: artifacts, espoused values and underlying assumptions as shown in figure 2.1. Artifacts exist on a visible level in culture and can be tangible (i.e. physical objects, physical arrangements

and artwork) or intangible (such as language use, stories, traditions, rituals and myths). They can also serve a symbolic or non-symbolic purpose within a social community depending on the meaning that is attributed to them. Espoused beliefs exist on a less visible level and are not observable as objects. They represent highly valued ideas on life, philosophies or conceptions which may be represented by symbols within a culture. They form the basis for a norms, attitudes and behaviours which characterize a culture and are justifications which underpin activities of members of a culture i.e. rituals, ceremonies and rules for conduct. Attributed meaning is the significant connection between artifacts and beliefs and is an embedded aspect of a culture. Underlying assumptions are unconscious and taken-for-granted perceptions which act as a framework for values, beliefs and action in a culture. They are taken-for-granted assumptions and this suggests that they mostly go unquestioned. They are so well entrenched that people are largely unmindful of them in their day-to-day interactions. The success of the socialization process where ideas are passed from custodians of a culture to new members of the culture is underpinned by taken-for-granted assumptions which can be seen as foundational to the culture.

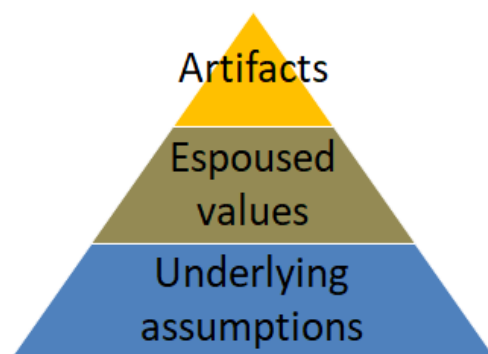


Figure 2.1 Schein's model of organisational culture (1985)

Schein's theory of culture has informed several studies on organization culture and allows for a layered view of the organization (Schein, 1996; Peterson, 2014; Hatch , 1993; Armenakis and Lang, 2014) The third perspective sees culture as a system of

shared cognitions, describing perceptions, reasoning and thought which people are jointly aware of. Studies relying on this perspective view organisations as systems of knowledge, that is, there are subjective perceptions which organizational members share and which appear to function in a rule-like manner (Martin, 2002). The most popular framework within this approach is the Hofstede taxonomy of culture (Hofstede, 1980) which has tended to dominate empirical management studies. Hofstede identifies national level constructs which he views as dimensions of culture. The dimensions describe ways of analyzing cultural values and suggest that these national values can be related to the values of cultural members which in turn can be linked to their behaviours. The dimensions developed are depicted in figure 2.1 and are: power distance which emphasizes acceptance of social hierarchies, uncertainty avoidance-which describes tolerance for uncertainty, individualism or collectivism, long or short-term orientation, masculinity or femininity (which differentiates between an orientation to tasks or to persons) and indulgence as opposed to self-restraint. These dimensions have been influential on studies at national, sub-national and organizational levels (Hofstede, 1980; Brewer, P., & Venaik, S. (2011; 2012).



Figure 2.2 Hofstede's cultural dimensions

The results of Hofstede's studies indicated that different countries exhibited different levels of these dimensions. However, some critics have argued that some of these classifications are composite measures (Venaik and Brewer, 2013) and even then, should only be applicable at national levels to avoid drawing wrong inferences (Brewer and Venaik 2011; 2012; Venaik and Brewer, 2010; 2013, Venaik et al 2013, Fellows and Liu, 2013). Caution in applying Hofstede's dimensions is particularly important for preventing a situation where quick assumptions are made about a firm on the basis of host or home-country culture without giving detailed attention to the unique characteristics of the organisation itself.

The fourth interpretation to the metaphor of culture was made popular by the anthropological work of Geertz (1973) and views culture as a system of shared symbols and meanings. Given the view that actions are symbolic, there is a need to interpret or decipher the symbols to understand the meanings behind them. For organizational studies taking this perspective, the organization is viewed as a pattern of symbolic discourse where communication rests on interpreting related symbols meaningfully and the role of language in facilitating shared meanings is acknowledged (Barley, 1983). The fifth understanding of culture draws from Levi-Strauss' (1963) ideas on structuralism and sees culture as a projection of the mind's universal and unconscious processes. Drawing from this viewpoint, organizational practices and forms are seen as a projection of unconscious processes which are manifested in observed practices. From a Straussian perspective, structural analysis in organisations are aimed at transforming isolated bits into a related whole by making connections between them.

Given the understanding of organizational culture made possible by contributions of different scholars on culture, it is relevant to explore this understanding in the selected population of study, which is considered as a group of professional knowledge workers who produce highly complex and sophisticated products within interdependent teams known as labs. The management literature on knowledge workers is reviewed subsequently.

### 2.2.2 The Management literature on Knowledge workers

There are conceptual differences in the understanding of knowledge workers in the management literature but a shared assumption is that knowledge resides in people, such people have high expertise and training and they are engaged more in intellectual work than physical work (Alvesson, 2001; Benson and Brown, 2007; Marks and Scholarios, 2007; Barnes and Van Dyne, 2009; Mladkova, 2011). While some studies view knowledge workers as professionals (Barnes and van Dyne, 2009, p. 60; Marks and Scholarios), others studies draw distinctions between knowledge workers, suggesting that there is some overlap between workers in knowledge-intensive organisations and professional organisations respectively (Alvesson, 2001) as well as between creative and non-creative knowledge workers (Edmonds and Candy, 2002). Examples of knowledge intensive organisations include high-technology (high-tech) companies, Research and Development (R&D) units, engineering companies and accounting or law firms (Alvesson, 2001). Alvesson (2011) argues that professional organisations have less variation between them due to standardisation coming from a common knowledge base and a recognised identity. However, he differentiates knowledge-intensive organisations as exhibiting more organisationally specific variety. Based on this understanding, professionals are viewed as a narrower subset of knowledge workers. This view implies that within a broad group of knowledge workers, there may be other non-professional sub-categories. These may include technical and low skilled support staff (Marks and Scholarios, 2007) who perform roles involving maintenance, quality control, testing and service. Alvesson highlights the fact that knowledge-intensive occupations which are less professionalized still depend strongly on their internal communities for recognition.

In the management literature, knowledge workers have been defined by high levels of education and experience, the dominance of intellectual work which is unobservable though the final output can be produced in an observable form, a high level of independence in decision making where knowledge workers often create their own standards for work and considerable control of their work processes and methods, oftentimes not working in a linear, easy to follow fashion (Mladkover, 2011). Alvesson's (2011) empirical study highlights the significance of the symbolic role of external networks and social relationships in affirming the expert status of knowledge-



intensive organisations. His study identifies industry-based differences in the centrality of rhetoric, noting that professional service firms such as management consultants, accountants, and computer consultants- knowledge workers often relate with their clients and actively manage their social relationships. However, within high-tech organisations, he argues that there is still a need to manage internal rhetoric and image of knowledge-intensive units due to the centrality of ambiguity in knowledge work. Furthermore, Alvesson reasons that management is able to exert control through culture around organisational beliefs about hierarchy and career advancement. In this case, the pressure to conform to corporate culture acts as an object of management control and contributes to a form of pressure on knowledge workers to gradually change their identity (Alvesson, 2001, p. 877) in line with the prevailing culture. This suggests that knowledge-workers who are unable to manage image and social interaction processes to their advantage are open to challenges in the area of career advancement. On the face of it, this shows a broad assumption that a lack of self-marketing skills by knowledge workers has potential to hamper their career progression within such organisation. Such assumption is open to debate and would benefit from empirical evidence. Again, many knowledge workers enjoy relative freedom in choosing employers and it is not unusual to find specialists engaged on temporary contracts with organisations, leaving them with the choice to seek employment elsewhere when the contracts expire.

There could also be personality differences (Feldt et al., 2010; Kosti et al., 2016) which make some knowledge workers such as engineers less open to extroverted self-promoting activities than others. Studies also indicate there are gender differences in expertise-based self-confidence (Bailyn, 1987) as well as in strategies to project professional identity (Hatmaker, 2013) which Alvesson's argument fails to explain (Faulkner, 2011). While Alvesson argues that the knowledge-worker identity is open to organisational control through a prestigious corporate brand, managerial ideologies, normalisation through indirect organisational social control and subjectification (which describes how individuals become transformed into subjects of power relations through their organizational participation) (Alvesson, 2001, p. 881), there is a tacit assumption that workers will internalise organisational norms. It is plausible to expect that time plays an important role in the process of norm internalisation. Furthermore, there is a social component to the process of internalisation underpinned by intersubjective processes of meaning making. It is questionable that worker identification is driven

more by internalization of imposed values than by the practice of their jobs. Additionally, other studies show that elements of identity derive from personal understanding of work and expertise (Anderson et al., 2010) as well as social recognition of membership of an external expert community (Reis, 2015; Marks and Scholarios, 2007) in which case, direct or indirect attempts at identity control by an organisation would have potentially different effects on workers, especially where knowledge-worker self-esteem is strong and identity is not tied to the corporate organisation.

Similar to knowledge workers, there is considerable difference in the ways that professionals are viewed in the literature. Alvesson (2001) views professional groups as homogenous groups characterised by standardisation in education and certification criteria, who operate as formal associations with entry regulations and ethical codes. Professional work is also often associated with a higher social purpose hence it is accorded high status by society (Koehn, 1994).

Also, because contemporary organisational market and social conditions are dynamic and call for relevant knowledge responses, there is a need for knowledge to be non-static and for solutions to be drawn from both codified and tacit forms of learning. Alvesson suggests that in knowledge intensive firms, knowledge workers and other professionals conventionally operate under persistent conditions of uncertainty (Alvesson, 2001, p. 867). While uncertainty about problem or solutions allows knowledge workers to be creative, the lack of knowledge by those outside the sphere of expertise makes it difficult for outsiders to evaluate professional work. Alvesson argues that ambiguity characterises much of what knowledge workers claim they know, what they do and what the outcomes of their work are (Alvesson, 2001, p. 869) and therefore projecting an image of proficiency serves as a substitute for tangible representations of their expertise. He suggests that in an indirect way, image management is used to attribute legitimacy to their existence. While Alvesson's argument may hold at a corporate level where owners of senior management may be able to manage impressions about a knowledge-intensive firm, at an individual level, it is doubtful whether knowledge workers are preoccupied with maintaining an expert image or projecting expert-like behaviours. Empirical research would be valuable in providing insight on the extent to which image management is a significant preoccupation of knowledge workers. The actual characteristics of knowledge work may account for this

difference. It is suggested that where there are knowledge occupations which traditionally involve minimal social interaction, there may be conditions created which allow for impression management activities. Conversely, knowledge work which involves high levels of client contact and targeted image management leaves ample room for leveraging on social relationships with key stakeholders to project expertise. For example, engineering work traditionally requires high levels of intellectual concentration and sometimes isolation and as such is generally averse to social distractions which are capable of slowing down work (Bailyn, 1987; Faulkner, 2011; Hatmaker, 2013). The sense of work in such type of knowledge workers is often intrinsic and unrelated to external perceptions but on personal achievements, experience and potential (Anderson et al., 2010). Furthermore, given organisational contexts that impose additional pressure to demonstrate productivity in terms of number of hours worked (Perlow, 1998) and the tangible outcome of such hours, software engineers are likely to be less preoccupied with image management and more with productivity.

### **2.2.3 An ontology of practice as relevant for understanding knowledge work**

The management literature on knowledge work reveals the centrality of the work being practised to the understanding of professional or occupational groups. The focus on ordinary action, activities or practices characterises practice-based approaches to social research. The practice ontology flows from a process perspective where social phenomena can be studied by looking at the connections between regimes of ordinary actions. A number of assumptions underpin the practice perspective. The first assumption of the practice approach is that ordinary actions are key to understanding and explaining social and organisational phenomena. (Nicolini, 2007, Nicolini et al., 2008; Nicolini, 2011; Bourdieu 1990; Giddens, 2001, p. 67). These seemingly ordinary actions are seen not only as the product of something else, but as important ways through which social paradigms are reproduced. Bourdieu suggests that a society's ways of living and thinking is reproduced in ordinary actions. From this perspective, large social phenomena can be studied by looking at ordinary actions.

The second assumption of the practice approach is that ordinary actions are performed not in isolation but as part of longer or larger sequences of actions. For example,

individual actions or practices by respective school administrators are part of the larger sequence of administrative actions by which a university system is run. Within a practice, there are smaller activities which are meaningful not in isolation but in the context of the larger whole. For example, the practice of uploading numerical scores on to a system by a school administrator becomes meaningful when viewed in the context of a flow of activities beginning from students taking an assessment to the release of results for the module.

The third assumption underpinning the practice approach is that practice and their configurations can be used to explain other phenomena. i.e. to explain meaning, social change, power, social inequality, social change, sustainability etc.

The practice approach adopts an ontology of social research that focuses on practice as the place to start the research. There is a direct implication of this orientation for the methodology that is appropriate to conducting social research. The practice approach puts action and activity at the heart of research enquiry. However, because practice is viewed in the context of other linked activities within a larger process, actions have impact on other actions within the process. As such, practice is able to change the conditions within which the actions take place because of changes in sequences of relationships between actors.

When these assumptions are used as a lens to empirically look at the organization, it illuminates embedded aspects of ordinary activity in a way that facilitates a deeper understanding of organizational practices. The practice approach allows for a focus on practices in organisations which are associated with a post-merger or acquisition environment. For this study, it is relevant for examining the activities of an acquired population who are knowledge workers and who are expected to fit into a new organizational culture. An important implication of the key assumptions of the practice view for knowledge workers in a post-acquisition setting, is that the continuous sequences of their ordinary actions is taken to have an impact on the context, rather than being influenced by a static notion of context. In other words, the practice of knowledge work can be viewed as actively interacting with the organizational context.

More specifically, an understanding of the significance of meaningful elements of the practice of knowledge workers is important for revealing the culture of such professional groups. In a context of cultural diversity particularly where there is

dominance or imposition of incongruent external social structures on the culture of a group of social agents, Bourdieu (1990) suggests that the resultant inequality may be invisible to the dominated. He describes it as symbolic violence which is practiced indirectly through the control of language, images and symbolic meanings. It is violent in the sense that it disregards the internalised structures of symbolic meanings existing within the dominated group of social agents and causes an internal disposition where they accept as legitimate their own domination. The context of an M&A provides opportunity to explore interactions between different organisational cultures based on a practice orientation to the study of knowledge work(ers) and an ethnographic methodology which lends itself to a practice view.

#### **2.2.4 The Management literature on mergers and acquisitions**

Mergers and acquisitions (M&As) are conventionally viewed as economic transactions which bring about a structural change in an organisation or its activities and are seen as sources of value such as growth, economies of scale, diversification or efficiency (Buono et al., 1985; Weber, 1996, Larsson and Lubatkin, 2001; Tsolmon, 2005). A broad range of structural forms are classified under M&As: mergers, acquisitions, takeovers, investor /management buy-outs, spin-offs, joint-ventures, de-mergers, divestments (Weber, 1996). Many studies in the literature on M&As focus on the impact of culture on different organisational outcomes (Shaver, 2006; Lubatkin , 1983; O'Neill, 1998; Borys and Jemison, 1989; Jemison and Sitkin, 1986 and Hoskisson and Turk, 1990), reflecting a functional view and adopting a positivist approach to understanding culture. Cartwright et al. (2012) establishes that M&A research has been dominated by quantitative and positivist approaches as shown in figure 2. 3. According to Cartwright et al (2012), less than 4% of the total research on M&As conducted between 1963 and 2009 were qualitative in design and have their focus away from developing causal explanations for organisational outcomes as a result of M&As.

## M&A research: 1963-2009 (Cartwright et al., 2012)

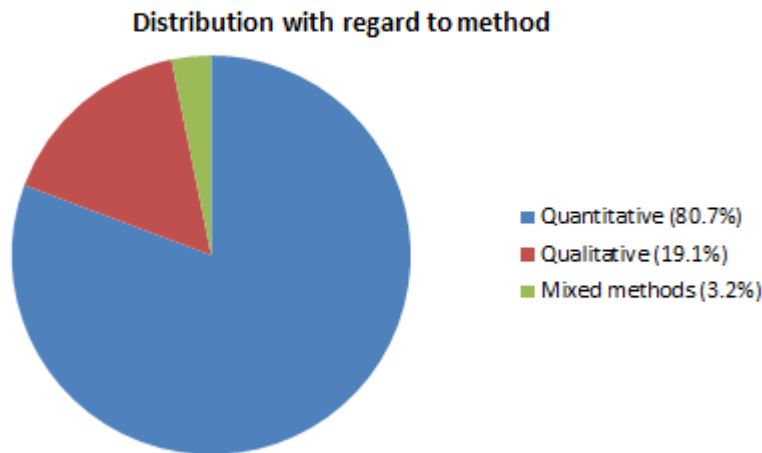


Figure 2.3 M&A research: distribution by research methods

Other studies (Schneider and Dunbar, 1992; Schweiger, 1987; Hogg and Terry, 2000; Fulmer and Gilkey, 1988; Dwight, 1987) are concerned with sociocultural aspects of M&As and reflect a mix of positivist and interpretive approaches. However, some studies explicitly focus on organisational culture (Buono and Bowditch, 1989; Buono et al., 1985; Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988 and Larsson and Lubatkin, 2001). A significant and highly cited contribution to such culture studies is Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988) which advances a conceptual model for acculturation in M&As that explains conditions for achieving consensus on mode of acculturation by both merging entities. Acculturation describes changes in one culture arising from the influence of another such that the two become increasingly similar (Kroeber, 1963, p. 233). A concern with conditions for achieving consensus shows an awareness of the importance of ethical considerations but the means to explore this in detail is not captured by the model.

Despite its contributions, the concept of deculturation (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988, p. 83) in the model lacks clarity and weakens the model's explanatory power for a uni-cultural organisation's acquisition of an unrelated business. Deculturation is conceptualised in the model as a situation where members of a culture are

psychologically and culturally detached from their own culture and the acquirer's culture and so disintegrate as a cultural entity (Mahavandi and Malekzadeh 1988, p. 83). A uni-cultural organisation is assumed in the model to possess a unique set of cultural characteristics. According to the model, the acquirer is less likely to interfere with the culture of the acquired where the acquired has an unrelated business. However, it is plausible to expect that cultural assimilation could take place in this context and the acquirer's culture would dominate post-acquisition. The model's explanation thus becomes logically inconsistent and could benefit from empirical verification to ascertain its robustness. This critique is significant because it speaks to the ability of employees to respond to and make choices regarding the context of cultural disequilibrium they find themselves in after a merger or acquisition. This is particularly relevant for the targeted population of this study who are knowledge workers. As established in the section 2.2.2, a key aspect of the culture in this population is driven by the nature of the work they do.

In addition, the model prioritises observation of specific / one-off events over everyday work practices which takes for granted or ignores the connections between routine work and culture. Understanding organisational culture would require observation of both the material and the symbolic. This research aims to contribute to the M&A literature on culture by employing a methodology such as ethnography which allows exploration of both symbolic and non-symbolic activities in order to achieve an in-depth understanding of culture in a diverse organisational context. Qualitative approaches to M&A research have been shown to be a small fraction of total studies examined (Cartwright et al. 2012; van Marrewijk, 2016) as depicted in figure 2.3. Within the body of studies adopting a qualitative approach, ethnographic research on culture in M&A contexts have been established to be few in the M&A literature as portrayed by figure 2.4 (Cartwright et al. 2012; van Marrewijk, 2016).

## M&A Research (1963-2009) (Cartwright et al., 2012)

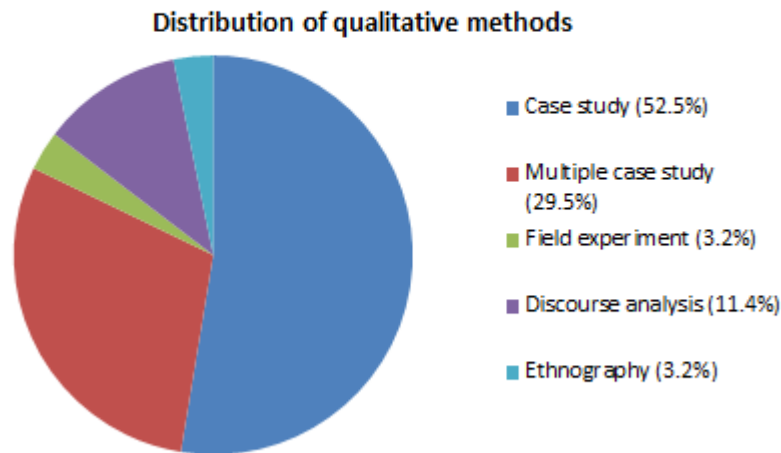


Figure 2.4 Ethnography as a percentage of qualitative M&A studies

The ethnographic methodology adopted by this study is therefore considered as an important addition to existing research on organisational culture in a post-merger setting. More specifically, the approach is relevant for illuminating the nature of organisational culture in a professional group of knowledge workers in order to reveal dynamics of cultural interactions within a post-merger setting. The management literature reviewed so far indicates that organisational culture is an important concern in both academic and practitioner domains. In post-merger or acquisition contexts, organisational culture has been viewed as significant for achieving a successful strategic alliance between organisations. The literature suggests that there is the dominance of a managerial bias towards how culture is viewed, mainly in relation to how organisational culture can be utilised as a tool to further the agenda of management. As discussed earlier, there is also an implicit assumption that the acquirer is the dominant figure in the relationship and this dominance underpins decisions about how to integrate cultures following a merger as well as the emergence of the prevailing value system (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988). This suggests that there are embedded socio-political dimensions around the understanding of organisational culture which are relevant for an M&A context. The following section examines some key



studies by socio-political scholars in order to illuminate embedded aspects of organisational culture.

### **2.3 Perspectives on organizational culture drawn from the Socio-Political Literature**

While management scholars have predominantly been concerned with the value of organisational culture for specific organisational outcomes, socio-political scholars (Bottomore, 1973; Hobsbawm, 1983; Milliband, 1989; Hutchinson and Smith, 1994; and Barry, 2001) have also made contributions relevant to understanding organisational culture by shedding light on other important dimensions of culture. Specifically, the political literature allows us to consider dynamic but embedded background issues in organisational culture such as: power, influence, conflict and representation. These dimensions concern structures and processes underpinning social relations and are relevant to clashes between cultures in reconstructed work groups following a merger or acquisition. The political literature provides a framework within which the dimensions can be understood. By drawing on ideas from some main texts by influential socio-political scholars: Bottomore (1973), Milliband (1989), Hutchinson and Smith (1994) and Barry (2001), the aim is to enrich the understanding of the concept of organisational culture from a political perspective. The discussion will attempt to show the relevance of the contributions of these authors for culture as a phenomenon.

A discussion is presented on the political perspective using three jointly interacting lenses: origins of culture, broad limits of culture and dynamics of interaction between groups in a culture. The lenses are expected to help in addressing areas which have received less attention in the management and anthropological literature. The perspective of joint interaction enables one to expect to find components of origin in the parameters that define an existing culture and this provides an appreciation of the roots of cultural identity, at least on an apparent level. It also helps one to recognize the general boundaries of a culture as perceived by important actors who are classified in Bottomore (1993) as elites and non-elites. Limits of culture are important for making

classifications, enabling a stricter focus as well as identifying interactions within and across cultures. For example, it would be of interest to know what would be the impact of stretching or blurring the boundaries of culture such that it can accommodate other groups and how this relates to conflict.

Interaction between groups can also be related to origin, as one can explore for instance, how custodians of culture determine membership criteria and resolve conflicts about cultural boundaries. For instance, we may investigate the significance or usefulness of cultural sagas for constraining or facilitating behavior across different social groups. The political literature allows us to examine these different sides to the concept of culture in attempting to provide answers to the challenging questions of origins, limits and dynamics of interaction in culture.

Specifically, the political literature allows us to uncover and consider dynamic but embedded background issues such as: power, influence, conflict and representation but which sometimes come to the fore when examining the phenomenon of culture. This section will be a review which draws on ideas from some main texts: Bottomore (1973), Milliband (1989), Hutchinson and Smith (1994) and Barry (2001), in order to understand culture theoretically from a political perspective. In the following subsections, three specific lenses through which culture will be viewed are discussed: origins of culture, broad limits of culture and dynamics of interaction between groups in a culture. These lenses are expected to help in addressing the limitations of other literatures on culture e.g. management and anthropological literature, by providing answers to the questions yet unanswered by them. It is believed that this approach will allow for a more in-depth understanding of culture. The review will also discuss how the three lenses interact in explaining the complex nature of culture. For instance, it is plausible to expect that components of the origin of a culture will be reflected in the parameters that define an existing culture. As such, having an understanding about the origin of culture helps to give an appreciation at least on an apparent level of the roots of cultural identity. If the origin of something is known, then what is presently seen can be understood and interpreted in the light of that origin.

Also, understanding the origin of culture helps in recognizing what constitutes the general boundaries of a culture from different possible perspectives i.e. perspectives of different members of a culture. It is also possible that cultural boundaries are viewed

differently by different actors within a culture. Some of these actors will be discussed using the classifications in Bottomore (1993) by focusing on the concept of elites and non-elites, in terms of their size, influence and power. Limits of culture are important to consider and study because the perspective this gives allows for classifications to be made about culture and enables a stricter focus on specific aspects of culture. Within broad limits, it then becomes possible to attempt to identify interactions within and across cultures. For example, it would be of interest to know what would be the impact of stretching or blurring the boundaries of culture such that it can accommodate other groups, to reveal whether previous boundaries are calmly reconstituted or there is occurrence of conflict. The answers to these questions will indicate how this takes place and who the responsible actors are. It will also inform about the nature of culture.

With respect to origins of culture and dynamics of interaction between groups, one can study for instance, how myths about the origin of a culture may change over time as a result of an oral mode of transmission which empowers individuals to choose how to retell stories. Myths about origins of culture often change but retain central elements which are publicly recognized. This is not to say that a documented and codified version cannot be changed. But the emphasis is on the role and influence of whoever retells the story. As significant actors within a culture, custodians of culture can determine membership criteria and resolve conflicts about cultural boundaries. If origin is understood, its relevance and role can be examined in the relationship between the different actors that exist in a culture. For instance, we may investigate if knowledge of the origin of a culture constrains or facilitates behavior across different social classes, if it limits changes to the culture in the light of changing circumstances, or if the origin is detached from the existent cultural reality in terms of the relations between groups in a culture. The political literature allows us to examine these different sides to the concept of culture in attempting to provide answers to the challenging questions of origins, limits and dynamics of interaction in culture.

### 2.3.1 Origins of culture

An opportunity is provided to investigate the origins of culture through an examination of the origins of a nation. The reason for this approach is because similar parallels can be drawn when examining the concepts of nations and cultures which can facilitate understanding and interpretation. Both concepts for instance involve people, identities, group interaction and social structure and so it is helpful to attempt to view one in the light of the other. The political literature suggests that state identity is often not arrived at by means of widespread dialogue. For example, Hobsbawm (1983) views state creation as a deliberate act carried out by a group of individuals who are assumed to possess certain knowledge and skills which enable them to take decisions that have far-reaching impact for future generations. This perspective is useful for understanding how culture originates in the formation of a political social community. It also helps juxtapose this perspective on the origins of culture with assumptions in literatures outside scholars in politics. For example, it is useful to consider whether other literatures take the existence of culture as given and so ignore questions about origin totally. In addition, exploration of culture as something that is simply observable in how people relate with one another or driven by other causal factors can be undertaken. The anthropological literature for instance views culture as an observable phenomenon which is rooted in deeper meaning systems. The management literature also reflects this view of culture but in addition, suggests that a more formal compliance environment exists. The political literature however, points attention to the fact that there is a considered set of actions directed towards a purpose and usually this purpose can be linked to social / cultural identity.

In Hobsbawm's (1983) perspective about the origin of culture, it is implicitly assumed that decisions about 'how things are done' are tied to an exercise of power. Possession of power, knowledge and skills gives definition to the profile of this group of individuals. It is necessary at this point to explore what types of power can be exercised during state creation, how such power is derived as well as who the significant actors are. The political literature provides interesting conceptions of power as will be discussed subsequently. For the analysis of power, a theoretical power continuum will be assumed within which at one extreme, there is coercive power; while at the other extreme there is communal power. It is recognized that different political theorists

conceive of power in different ways. For this discussion, the definition by Lukes (1974) which advances a three-dimensional perspective of power will be employed. Lukes (1974) describes a three-dimensional view of power which is considered useful for understanding how culture originates in the formation of a political social community. The three dimensions are described as: decision-making power, non-decision-making power and ideological power. These conceptions are significant in understanding the relationship between groups of political actors. The first dimension describes coercive power while the second describes influence-power over the setting of agendas. The third dimension describes a more subtle form of power; the power to influence the wishes and thoughts of people in a specific direction, sometimes contrary to their own self-interest.

While coercive power does not tolerate contestation, the second dimension of power is able to circumvent the emergence of visible conflict, Lukes (1974) emphasises, by defining what can be publicly addressed. Power expressed in agenda-setting is power to determine what gets decided. Understanding this second dimension of power is relevant for analysing the origin of a state especially where a state emerges but not through obvious conflict. In a similar way, it is directly useful for understanding how a culture begins. It gives a framework to work with and we can already establish that there are at least two (classes of) actors in society; one dominant and the other, compliant. Powerful actors in society have been described in different ways by political sociologists. Bottomore (1973) advances descriptions such as dominant class, elites, power elites and ruling class which all indicate the presence of social inequality.

At the other end of the power-continuum, we can have what Graeber (2004) describes as anarchism, a situation characterised by self-governance amongst voluntary institutions. Relations between groups are characterized by free agreements and there are no formal governmental structures. The exercise of power rests with different groups who through agreements take decisions on matters which affect them. An example of this is the Kibbutz groups in Israel, a collective community initially based on agriculture and where everything was held in common. A variant of this is the Paris Commune, where government functions were performed by municipal councilors who were revocable at short-term and everyone was paid workmen's wages (Bottomore, 1973). This suggests that diffused power, rather than coercive power is being exercised. However, this interpretation is superficial because the arrangement can mask covert

conflict. Where these voluntary groups are set against the state, Graeber (2004) describes it as a dual-power situation. In this case, for example, social institutions such as self-governing communities and labour unions maintain relationships based on free agreements but are set in opposition to the government. In the two cases, power is exercised in different ways by different actors or groups of actors.

There are theories about the involvement of groups in the process of state formation and it is useful to examine the identities of these groups to uncover their roles in the formation of a state. The identities will reveal whether they are dominant or minority entities and what kinds of power they are able to exercise. So far, Lukes' definition of power draws attention to notions of influence, control and authority based on recognition and acceptance. Various expressions have been used by political sociologists to describe such groups. Bottomore (1973) is known for his classification of elites to identify influential figures in society. One of the earliest uses of the word elite is associated with Vilfredo Pareto, a sociological theorist who describes them as people naturally endowed with esteemed capacities in every sphere of life. Based on this description, we can distinguish between elites and non-elites, governing, non-governing and power elites. While governing elites rule directly by occupying command positions, non-governing elites do not but have influence over their governing counterparts. Power elites are a dominant class which essentially controls state power, industrial, commercial, military, religious, intellectual or financial institutions (Bottomore, 1973; Stanworth and Giddens, 1973). However, in addition to social valuation, recognition and endorsement also legitimize the exclusive identity of the elite. The political literature establishes that membership of elite groups changes over time as new groups are formed or as non-elites are incorporated (Bottomore, 1973). This is known as the circulation of elites. Specifically, the routes of circulation are between different categories in the governing group, movements from a lower stratum to the governing group directly or through a newly formed elite group which competes for power with the governing elite. Elite groups are often thought of as cohesive groups, but this may not always be the case. While movements across elite groups could facilitate cohesion because of shared understanding of interests, total cohesion within elite groups is unlikely except perhaps in single party communist states. Cohesion would depend on how diverse or similar group interests are.

Hobsbawm (1983) articulates the role of the political elite by arguing that there is an invented component of national identity, and theorising that deliberate social engineering using three creations is instrumental to constructing tradition. The first creation is the introduction of a formal system of primary education. Two things are significant about primary education: first, in most societies, it is compulsory. Secondly, it is specifically timed to occur in the early years of a person, when contestation by the learner is unlikely. In this early period, a person is most impressionable and primary education equips a budding citizen with a pre-determined frame from which to view and interpret the world as he/she grows up. For example, in the United Kingdom, there is a statutory body responsible for designing the primary education curriculum and advising the Education Secretary of issues relating to the curriculum as it concerns early childhood and primary education. The content of the curriculum is not left to chance but is deliberately crafted.

In England, the Department of Education is in charge of making reforms to curriculum, although sometimes, drafts are subjected to public consultation. Usually, only education experts can give useful feedback on curriculum content, so only a minority of members of the public are likely to contribute to education reforms. This illustrates the power of political elites to set agendas, as explained by Luke's (1974) second dimension of power. The dark side to agenda-setting through a system of primary education is that it can be used as a tool for conveying the views and interests of the course-plotting political elite. Its content basically consists of what has been judged as necessary. While it is recognized that education is not limited to formal methods alone, a publicly identified system of primary education is a powerful tool for transmitting information. Culture in a similar manner can be transmitted through formal channels of education as learners are compelled to think and act within the context of the culture. Bottomore (1973) reveals that in France and Britain, high-ranking civil servants were traditionally educated in high-status and socially elite schools through which social attitudes and political viewpoints of the ruling class were taught. Political elites were thus able to indirectly control future bureaucrats. Used in this way, education becomes a tool of domination and control for the ruling elite even though paradoxically its content is usually thought of as empowering.

The second facilitator in the creation of nations is the creation of public ceremonies. Public ceremonies are formal activities conducted on public occasions usually to

celebrate events or play a social role. They could be performed by a person vested with authority such as a cultural leader, a religious leader, a senior member of the judiciary or any high-ranking public officer. Public ceremonies can be formal or informal and usually have a legal, cultural, historic or national significance. An important feature of a public ceremony is that it is experienced by members of the public. Some of the activities conducted during public ceremonies are ceremonial while others are recreational. But because public ceremonies are experience-events, they are also agents of socialization and useful for educating society as well as fostering social cohesion. They are also more easily embedded in the sub-consciousness of participants. For example, induced by the start of the French Revolution in 1789 when France asserted itself as a nation, Bastille Day became an annual opportunity for every citizen to participate in a festival which featured fireworks and dancing (Lusebrink, 1997).

Although its purpose is a joint celebration of what the revolution stands, it is a dual symbol of tyranny and freedom and so leaves room for confrontational expressions by the people. The festival reinforces French values in the consciousness and collective memories of people. Through repetition, such a public ceremony becomes associated with a people's culture and through public ceremonies, social cohesion and harmony is built up. For example, the singing of a national anthem, recitation of a national pledge or public swearing to an oath of allegiance evokes feelings of national consciousness, patriotism and duty. When such acts are turned into rituals or formal procedures via repetition, we can say that a culture is being created. The difference between primary education and public ceremonies is that the latter is a more inclusive activity and gives the opportunity for people to develop a sense of ownership (or contestation) through participation; unlike the former which is a tight system of pre-determined frameworks for learning. In creating culture, public ceremonies can be used to build cohesion and create an atmosphere of harmony. However, communal solidarity can be drawn upon for other purposes as is the case during conflict situations such as revolutions against ruling governments.

The third novelty identified by Hobsbawm (1983) in creating a nation is the mass production of public monuments. Monuments are very durable and well known symbolic structures which have meaning for a social group as part of their culture. Monuments have been used over the years for a variety of purposes such as: to improve the scenery of a location, to remind people about an event of historical significance, or



to commemorate an event of importance at a particular location. Public monuments could be in the form of buildings, statues, or other structures such as fountains, columns or mounds which are often built to impress and awe the viewer; hence they are very imposing structures and attract a lot of attention. Given that monuments are constructed with very durable materials such as stone or metal, they tend to be long-lasting. Monuments are useful in inventing tradition because they are enduring structures and in the public eye; as a result, meanings associated with them are reinforced every time they are viewed. They are powerful ways to entrench values in the mind-sets of people. However, because the meanings attached to monuments are socially constructed, they can also be contested and interpreted differently. But what is significant about public monuments is that they are symbolic structures which encapsulate both the values and history of a social group.

Usually, monuments are strategically located, constructed and positioned in order to accentuate the meanings associated with them and what they represent. People are then generally expected to operate within the confines of the meanings and interpretations given to the symbolic structure. An example of a public monument is the Statue of Liberty in the United States of America (Trachtenberg, 1976). The image of the statue has been widely imprinted on different aspects of American society for example, on coinage, stamps and logos. The statue is a sculpture of a robed female who represents the Roman goddess of freedom, Libertas. She holds a torch which represents freedom and a tablet invoking the law. The colossal size and height (305 metres) of the statue are of significance and suggest that liberty is an over-arching ideal. It is also of significance that the statue was constructed on land common to all the states of America; Liberty island, formerly known as Bedloe's island, which had been ceded to the federal government by the New York Legislature for harbor defense. Incoming vessels had to sail past it; therefore its strategic location was important for newcomers as a signal of welcome especially to immigrants arriving from abroad. The principles suggested by the different aspects of the statue articulate the broad framework within which the American way of life is to be practiced. For example, the torch suggests that the light of freedom and similar American ideals should enlighten the world; and the tablet emphasizes the role of the constitution in ensuring liberty.

Similarly, another type of monument is the Marianne, a symbol of French grassroots revolutionary struggle for emancipation which exists as sculptures but also as a national

emblem in paintings. The idea of the Marianne was a deliberate effort to create an engaging symbol that could personify the ideals of the Republic in such a way that commoners could easily relate to it and which would evoke feelings of loyalty and patriotism. This was the idea behind the choice of a female and the selection of a commoner's name (Agulhon, 1979). Prior to the French revolution, France was ruled by a monarchy which was headed by kings and the choice of a female also represented a break away from the old system. The Marianne is a representation of the French Republic, and is depicted by a beautiful peasant female. French artists have portrayed her in various ways in order to communicate different messages to members of the public and direct their attention to specific aspects of what she represents. For instance, she has been portrayed as a revolutionary leading her people, and also a calm young lady, less aggressive but still wearing the Phrygian cap, which signifies the pursuit of liberty. In either case, the depiction can evoke feelings of patriotism and is a reminder of the grassroots origin of French liberty. With widespread production and use of her image, people are constantly reminded that commoners were instrumental to the establishment of the Republic and this symbolic meaning is shared. An important point to note is the way in which the image was made readily available in various forms to the citizenry such it was possible for people at different socio-economic levels to acquire a depiction of the image, either through paintings or smaller sculptures. The effect of this was that its associated meaning was strongly reinforced in the everyday lives of citizens.

In explaining the origins of culture, the role of elite groups has been identified as well as the types of power that they can exercise. By looking to the theory of power, elites and a nation as an invented tradition, important elements of culture have been identified, making possible an explanation for the origin of culture. A system of primary education, public ceremonies and mass production of monuments have been identified as potent symbolic creations which are synonymous with elements of culture and through the exercise of power by elites, meanings can be embedded and transmitted. Tradition can therefore be a term which accommodates different expressions of culture. While the three identified elements are not exhaustive expressions of culture, they provide a framework for answering questions about the origin of culture.

### 2.3.2 The broad limits of culture

The limits of culture are the boundaries around which identity is given to culture. The word boundary here suggests that there is a unique identity and there is an area over which culture is influential. Boundaries give restrictions and differentiate between one culture and another (Kroeber, 1963) and are often influenced by human beings who are social actors. In the context of culture, it would be problematic to say that boundaries arise through a natural process of evolution because culture concerns human beings as social actors and social issues are seldom left to chance (Anderson, 1991). As a result, it is difficult to separate the boundaries of culture from the processes and actors that determine its origin. In explaining cultural boundaries or limits, two approaches will be discussed: first, a static approach which identifies limits based on fixed parameters such as lineage, language, values or geographical location which define a culture (Laponce, 2007). The static approach will be sub-divided into a lineage approach and a criteria-based approach. Secondly, a dynamic approach which focuses on the significant actors (Bottomore, 1973). A static approach suggests that there are specific unchanging parameters that define a culture, while a dynamic approach will focus on the important actors who determine the broad limits of a culture and the flexibility of culture itself. The lineage perspective of the static approach will now be discussed.

The lineage perspective of the limits of culture is a perspective regarding origin. The assumption is that a person is of a particular culture if by virtue of descent, migration and naturalization he possesses defining traits of that culture. For example, an English person is defined by English ancestry or migration. In examining migration, one can ask the question, ‘to what extent are migrants English if they still maintain their original traditional values, customs and practices’? What this suggests is that it is possible for a person to have more than one identity, even though a member of a visible culture. Ancestry and migration play a role (Martin, 2002, p. 333) in a surface level identification of a culture. However there is a deeper sense to the concept of identity which they do not address, often tied to social, ethnic considerations and which more finely identifies boundaries of culture. Whilst a naturalization process can attempt to artificially reproduce English ‘traits’ in migrants, such as speaking the English language or knowing about English history, (pass a formal Life in the UK test), encouraging good citizenship and engaging them in a public ceremony where they take an oath of

allegiance, it may have no bearing on their real identity. Being English in this sense does not refer to biological traits which are racial attributes that cannot be socially or politically controlled, but it refers to a more social, ethnic identity.

From this perspective, the boundaries of culture are defined by possessing these ethnic traits. But there is a weakness in this view. If traits are socially defined, it is possible for elements of it to exist in other parts of the world and indeed, in other cultures. In which case, attributes such as patriotism, the love of certain leisure activities, eating certain foods, or occupying a particular territory can be explained by other cultures and will not be unique to Britain. So the question of what defines the broad limits of culture is not answered by the claims of ancestry, descent or social traits because identity and affiliation have cognitive dimensions. The strength of membership of a culture here is being linked to a conscious endorsement of conditions that have to be complied with in specified formats. This endorsement can either refer to a personal ratification by the individual or via a formal and legal channel. The important thing is that it has to be conscious and meaningful before a person can assimilate a culture, showing active sense making activity by the person (Archer, 2004) . In order to explore other parameters for delineating culture, the criteria-based approach will be discussed.

In the criteria-based approach, different indices will be discussed in order to understand what constitutes the broad limits of culture. Laponce (2007) differentiates between objective and subjective markers, when defining ethnic groups. Objective markers are unbiased indices which have the same interpretation and can provide definition to culture such as: language, history, religion and a recognized political boundary. For example, the French language is uniquely associated with France and French colonies. These markers are fairly stable indicators of cultures but more so when taken together as a cluster. Subjective markers on the other hand are indices which have different interpretations and reflect varying degrees of bias. For example, the notion of an imagined community of people (Anderson, 1991) as political boundary is a subjective interpretation to political boundary. The reality of migration adds a dynamic dimension to the notion of imagined communities as a broad boundary for culture and shows that limits of culture could be interpreted differently and could change over time. It can reasonably be assumed that these interpretations would vary across the social structure of society. For example, minority groups within a culture tend to have a stronger allegiance to their sub-group culture because they are distanced from the ruling elite.

Therefore the broad limits of that culture for the minority would be a narrow notion, being a subset of the larger culture. A dominant group such as professionals in the dominant class would tend to have a much broader interpretation of the limits of culture than a minority group because they have a broader view of society. With this assumption, a criteria-based approach which identifies parameters that define a culture will be discussed. The parameters to be discussed are: language, geographical location and values.

Language is a complex system of communication which is socially created and learnt up by human beings within a group. Language is referred to by Anderson (1991) as being an important platform for social interaction, communication and cohesion. In general, language can be taken as an objective marker for establishing the boundaries of a culture. The extent to which language is a social criterion that defines the boundaries of a culture can be questioned. Similarly, the uniqueness of language to one or more cultures across several territories can be questioned. Answers to these questions can be attempted by examining the relationship between an imperial power and its colony. The colonial territory may have a mandatory imperial language imposed on it but may not lose its local identity or any of its local languages. Given this reality, the colony cannot be exclusively identified as belonging within the cultural boundaries of the imperial state. Viewed in this way language alone is insufficient as a defining factor for the limits of culture. Also, within a given culture, there may be a common language group which has several group dialects within it. These smaller groups may share similarities with the bigger cultural grouping but may differ along the lines of language. Over time, some group-specific practices may evolve and through the political actions of elites at that level, other elements become incorporated into these practices, i.e. values, beliefs and traditions. These then form distinct but smaller group cultures. What this suggests is that language is dynamic and over time, changes in language can bring about changes in culture. Although a loose form of boundary, language is necessary for superficially identifying culture because it facilitates interaction and exchange (Kroeber, 1963; Anderson 1991). However, it is insufficient for providing a distinct outline of culture.

The vast majority of cultures are associated with congregating as they interact on a common platform for exchange and communication. To this extent, cultures could be viewed in terms of territorial occupation of a particular significant geographical location. But the reality of migration weakens this argument because cultures migrate as

people migrate (Martin, 2002, p. 333). Nevertheless, some locations are symbolic and immediately identify a culture. Examples are Jerusalem and Mecca. What immediately comes to mind is that these two locations are of religious importance to Christians and Muslims who can be identified based on where they visit on a holy pilgrimage. The criterion here for identifying a religious culture is the geographical location symbolically associated with that culture and importantly the interpretations to what the location represents, which specify expectations about acceptable behavior within that culture.

The geographical location of symbolic buildings and iconic structures can also be considered. In this case, it would be of interest to know where the structures are located, in addition to the meanings attached to them. Usually, such structures are strategically located so as to emphasise what they stand for. People are then expected to abide by the values embodied in these meanings. For example, the Statue of Liberty in the United States of America was constructed on land common to all the states of America to reinforce joint ownership. The principles suggested by the different aspects of the statue articulate the broad framework within which the American way of life is to be practiced, otherwise described as the boundaries of its culture. For example, the torch suggests that the American ideals should enlighten the world; and the tablet emphasizes the role of the constitution in ensuring liberty.

In the examples given, geographical location and placement of buildings and iconic structures can be important criteria for giving a unique identity to culture and defining the limits of culture, especially when interpreted alongside the meanings attached to them. If geographical location is combined with language, a fairly soft outline for the limits of culture can be drawn.

Culture could also be viewed in terms of values. Values can be described as moral ideals or tenets of a culture. They represent the essence of culture and are usually enduring aspects of culture because they are publicly recognized and tied to people's identities. Values are an expression of culture and embody meanings; what is of worth, orientations and standpoints unique to a culture. Thus they are useful for providing answers to questions of why things are done in a certain way. Values can be expressed in different domains such as religion, ethics, culture, politics etc., giving rise to religious, economic, cultural, ethical and political values. In relation to the limits of

culture, values provide restrictions and guidelines for practices. Political values are important considerations for defining the limits of culture. They are political beliefs that are important to a person or group regarding ideas about equality, civil liberties: rights and privileges and representation. The guiding role of values suggests that they can constrain behaviour and guide attitude formation especially within a conducive political system. In a democratic system where values are diverse, cultural limits may be difficult to define. However, in a system where values are imposed, the specifications for what is allowable is already defined within the values.

But limits can also be viewed as borderlines, in which case, cultural limits are only boundaries which may be shared with other cultures and values then may not be unique to one culture. Two different cultures can share the same espoused values but have differing philosophical foundations informing those values. For example, male attitudes to work may be similar in two cultures, but the reasons behind the need to work may vary. In one culture, it may be a sign of adult responsibility; in another, work may be a source of identity. It is important to examine who determines what is valued in a culture. There are implications associated with key actors who can either be custodians of cultural values or members who choose to take on independent perspectives on values. The political system in operation can give an idea about relevant actors and dynamics during value formation.

Given that values are central to identity as well as to practices, it is reasonable to say that where the definition of identity is not imposed by a central authority such as in a military dictatorship, members of a culture are free to hold independent values. The limits of culture in this situation become difficult to define. However, where values are imposed by autocratic elites, the specifications for what can or cannot be allowed are embedded within the values. In this sense, values can be considered as criteria that define the limits of culture; groups who share similar values and interpret those values in a uniform way can then be viewed as constituting members of a culture. If we add values to the cluster of afore-mentioned factors of language and geographical location, we may have a stronger outline of the defining properties of culture and what this shows is that perhaps, a cluster of criteria is necessary to define the limits of culture, rather than a single defining factor.

The cluster formed by the identified criteria comprises a common language, a symbolic geographical location and commonly held values. However as mentioned earlier, this cluster of conditions is meaningful when held together by a conscious commitment to them by members of a cultural community. In defining the limits of culture, human beings in their different groupings give credence to culture through an endorsement of these criteria irrespective of the level at which a group is viewed.

The active role of human beings in ascertaining the limits of culture suggests that there is a dynamic component to culture. To explore this, the dynamic approach will be discussed. A dynamic view of limits to a culture suggests that cultural boundaries are not defined by static parameters but rather are taken as malleable and subject to change. This suggests that there may be multiple influences on what constitutes the features and limits to culture, a situation found in a political system that allows for participation of multiple groups in decision making. Such system can be considered as a liberal multicultural environment. From the discussion on the role of elites in different political systems, one can say that stretching or blurring the limits of culture to accommodate other groups can be done by both elites and non –elites. In a command type of political system with a central government, decisions about amendments to culture would be made by the ruling elite. Similarly, the power to re-interpret the parameters that define a culture rests with the ruling elite. Whereas in a western-type democratic political system, power is less concentrated and more diffused between the different groups of elites. For example, pressure groups, occupational / professional elites and the press are independent associations which are considered part of the dominant class but act as a check on the arbitrary or excessive use of power by the ruling elite. This suggests that decisions about acceptable or non-acceptable cultural boundaries would be taken through a more collaborative process. Also in a democratic political system, there is a higher degree of tolerance for opposition to public policy, conflict and civil disobedience than in a command-style system where changes are effected through protests and revolutions.

The flexibility of the three criteria of language, values and symbolic geographical locations will now be considered. The aim is to examine whether these aspects of culture can be changed and by whom. Language is one of the main areas through which culture can be spread and assimilated. It has been known to be subject to changes through imposition. For example, imperialist regimes can introduce a language as a



national language in colonial territories usually because there are varieties of ethnic languages being spoken, but more as a way of institutionalising control. While the new language may not be met with resistance, it does not eradicate the existence of local languages and they are likely to exist side by side. To illustrate, imperial Russia imposed the Russian language on areas it controlled in order to establish its dominance and control. In military dictatorships, there is usually no resistance to changes in language.

With symbolic geographical locations, it may be more difficult to change these because a lot of thought and consideration usually would have gone into selecting the location in the first place. Apart from this, there are enormous financial and political cost implications involved in such relocation. For example, if we assume that there is a plan by the Saudi Arabian government to relocate a place of religious significance such as Mecca; this may be a difficult and problematic move because pilgrims to Mecca come from all over the world and attach religious meaning to Mecca which is a cardinal aspect of Islamic religious worship. Any decision about changing such location has to appeal at least to a large following of Muslims and this would be difficult to achieve. Making changes to a symbolic cultural location can also create cognitive distortions which may be difficult to manage.

Unlike geographical locations, values are an intangible aspect of culture that are more closely linked with identities of individuals. If shared key values are stretched such that new standards are allowed, there may be cognitive disturbances expressed as protests. But a multicultural environment is the framework within which values can experience changes, i.e. one which allows members the freedom to hold and express independent values and views all cultures on an equal basis. In a multicultural system, there are likely to be traditional cultural groups, for example, Smith (1989) speaks of traditional elites who are custodians of sacred texts which define an ethnic group and its cultural values. Traditional elites are important for preserving cultural values. A change in what defines cultural boundaries is likely to be resisted by traditional elites who are unlikely to welcome changes to cultural values. Where such resistance is unmanaged, it may result in conflict. In an authoritarian system where power is concentrated in ruling elite, changes to what are considered cultural limits can be successfully effected, however, without a conscious commitment to them by members of the society, they remain superficial and provide little or no meaning.

The lineage, criteria-based and dynamic approaches to examining the idea of broad limits of culture tell different stories about culture. While the lineage approach offers no concrete boundaries for culture, the criteria-based approach relies on a cluster of parameters and at best only gives a soft outline. For such boundaries to be meaningful, individual or formal ratification is still required. The dynamic approach emphasizes the importance of political values which define the framework for interaction between elites and non-elites regarding cultural expressions such as language or values. This suggests that what happens to culture is contingent on social power relationships and political conditions. To explore this, an investigation of relations between groups will now be discussed.

### **2.3.3 Dynamics of interaction between groups in a culture**

The political literature further contributes to the understanding of the concept of culture by drawing attention to flexibility embedded in culture. The discussion so far on the origin of culture shows that there are deliberate actions which give rise to the emergence of culture and could define its broad limits. The role of elite group influence in this regard has also been highlighted. To further illuminate the idea of dynamics in culture and between groups, attention is again turned to the concept of elites, having previously established their role in the creation and transmission of ideas and culture. This time, focus will be on the relationship between different groups of elites as well as between elite groups and other non-elite social classes in terms of composition, cohesion and conflict resolution. Within this framework, the following discussion will cover the links between origin, limits of culture and how these interact with the dynamics of relationship between groups in a culture.

The political literature establishes that elite groups consist of a dominant class (Milliband, 1989) and the power elite. While the dominant class consists of people who own and control large corporations, professionals, military personnel and intellectuals, the power elite are a smaller subset of this group who wield corporate and state power. Bottomore (1973) also describes as functional elites groups such as managers, administrators, technologists, teachers, and scientists in modern industrial societies. Sociological theorists tend to agree that there is social mobility within society and this facilitates the emergence of elites, suggesting that the composition of elite groups is not

static. According to this view, elite groups undergo changes in membership in several ways and these changes are generally referred to as the circulation of elites. Bottomore (1973) identifies theorists such as Pareto and Kolabinska who agree with this view of the composition of elite groups as dynamic because there are movements into elite groups.

Specifically the routes of circulation were clearly articulated as between different classes in the governing group, or from a lower stratum to the governing group directly or through a newly formed elite group which now competes for power with the governing elite. Movements into elite groups can thus be vertical i.e. through hereditary membership as in the case of the Brahmins in India who were religious intellectuals, or horizontal i.e from one elite group to another, for example, the literati in China who were ruling intellectuals from feudal families. Other horizontal cross movements can occur across different sectors such as from military to politics, business to politics, clergy to business and vice-versa. Movements upwards from non-elite groups are a more dramatic type that can be facilitated by education or military recruitment. Sometimes, transition from non-elite to elite groups may be a gradual process taking several years rather than an abrupt one. It may also be effected by subsequent generations of offspring rather than by a single individual.

Vertical movement of elites suggests that homogeneity and cohesion will be ensured. Horizontal movements could also facilitate some degree of cohesion through shared understanding over time. But cohesion does not always exist amongst elite groups. Intellectual elites are traditionally regarded as a small group which contributes to the creation, transmission and criticism of cultural ideas and products (Bottomore, 1973). Perhaps the mixed composition of intellectual elites makes them more sympathetic to issues of social inequality. For example, French intellectuals tended to be more detached from the administrative processes of the French society and were radical critics. The aggregate of French elites cannot be described as a cohesive group in this regard. Similarly in the UK, elites in the intellectual domain possess much prestige, but have not been as prominent as the French in political life and do not have as much direct political impact. Business elites in Britain on the other hand tend to be more closely linked with political elites through personnel exchange, thus giving a relatively more cohesive group. However one cannot conclusively say that there is total cohesion amongst British elites.

The significance of analyzing the composition and cohesion in elite groups is that it sets the stage for what will flow from these groups in terms of the content of culture and the resolution of conflict due to divergent interests. The relations between the different groups also give an indication of how culture is transmitted, accepted or contested and how conflicts are resolved. For example, in a centralized system of government where there is only one ruling political party, it is likely that contestation will not be permitted as evident in Soviet-type communist states. In the context of a communist state, all elite groups are part of the ruling party and subject to the central government. As a result, decisions about culture are made by the ruling elite. A contrast is seen in a western-based democratic society, where there are alternatives to prevent the ruling elite from being completely dictatorial on culture. With respect to culture in the latter system of governance, there are multiple autonomous groups of elites who are made up from different social classes and who directly or indirectly determine culture. However, the plurality of elites builds into the system a weak level of cohesion because there will be different perspectives and different interests. As such, decisions about the content and boundaries of culture are therefore unlikely to reflect only the views of a single group. On the contrary, such decisions will mirror input from the different groups who at best have a choice as well as a voice.

It follows that contestation of culture is possible by different groups, both elite and non-elite alike, and this has the potential to heat up the system and bring about overt or covert conflict. Bottomore (1973) identifies some factors which determine ability to shape policy as: the type of political system, possession of economic wealth, gender, membership of particular ethnic groups and educational differences which could also heighten economic inequalities. These factors are also relevant for analysing successful participation in shaping culture. For example, membership of a particular ethnic group, economic wealth, education or gender may give more advantages to some individuals over others in effectively influencing culture. What inequality suggests is that in a democratic political system, different individuals and groups are playing on an uneven ground.

It could be argued that competition between elites preserves democracy because the different elite groups act as checks and balances for one another. This is not entirely true. A more effective check on the power of the ruling elites is the presence of autonomous voluntary associations that give opportunity to ordinary people to take part

in shaping policy on social matters that affect them on a real level. Often the problem with democracy is that decision making is often done out of reach, sight or control of the masses, especially where an elected representative group elects representatives, effectively distancing the lower classes from governance. So even though the representatives may have sprung from lower social classes, eventually, this distance is what is responsible for detachment and pursuit of self-interest by the elected elite.

Specifically, in a democratic system, conflict can arise amongst elite groups, between elite groups and the lower class, and amongst groups within the lower class of society. Within the lower social class, there can be representative groups which constitute an elite group at that level (Bottomore, 1973). Although those at the lowest end of the social structure usually do not participate directly in shaping policy, they can be active in pressure groups and trade unions, through which they make their voices heard. The unions are organized groups but are antagonistic to the ruling class which legally holds and controls government. This is not a bad thing in itself because such an autonomous group can act as a check on the excesses of the ruling group by being a watchdog. This situation is explained as counter power by Graeber (2004) where labour unions, militia or self-governing communities are organized in opposition to the state. Because the plurality of interests builds in a weak level of cohesion, it follows that contestation of culture and subsequently, conflict is likely. How conflicts are resolved in such situations would depend on the political structure of such society.

Liberalism is a political philosophy which rests on the ideas of equality and liberty for individuals within a society (Barry, 2001). With respect to cultures, this suggests that all are accorded the same status. But in reality, there may be a dominant culture while other minority groups maintain their own mix of cultural aspects within this dominant culture. On a micro-level, there may be pockets of differences even within sections of minority group culture (Kymlicka, 1989). Liberalism accords the same status to cultures at these various levels. Furthermore, group culture may not represent individual interests. In the earlier discussion on the origins of culture, the role of elites in creating culture was described. If we assume that elites play a significant role in the creation of culture, then we can also assume, given that culture is open to multiple interpretations at different levels, and the existence of various contextual political systems, that culture in its most obvious form is unlikely to represent the interests of every member of the

community as a whole. This suggests that a visible, unified culture may mask competing interests.

The idea that there are competing interests within and between cultures points to the dynamics of interaction at a more complex level. It also raises the issues of rights and privileges. There have been intense debates amongst political philosophers about the normative issues of equality, fairness, rights and recognition. Malgalit and Halbertal (1994) identifies three levels of rights to culture as indicative of the political environment within which these interactions take place. The fundamental right is the right to maintain a way of life without interference as long as this does not harm others. The second level is a right to recognition of one's culture by other members of the society. The third level is the right to support from institutions within the society so as to actively preserve that culture and help it flourish. Political philosophers differ in their conceptions about recognition of rights and attribution of culture-based privileges. As such, there have been debates over the years with some philosophers (Young, 1990) arguing for special privileges for minority groups who are said to be at a disadvantage because of their culture. Liberal philosophers (Rawls, 1971; Kymlicka, 1989; Barry, 2001) on the other hand take the perspective that all cultures are viewed on an equal basis and there should be equal treatments of people. The liberal ideology illustrates a cosmopolitan view of ethnic groups which is that all cultural groups are members of the same single community based on shared morality. But despite the moral argument for equality presented by the cosmopolitan view, some philosophers argue that there are differences in ethnic groups which are solely based on membership of a culture. For example, Young (1990) argues that certain groups within a society are inherently disadvantaged because of their cultures. To be fair to these groups, there was the need to accord culture-based special rights which would help to even the inequality gap.

Other philosophers take a less-extreme perspective in trying to reconcile the two opposite ends of the perspectives (Barry, 2001). This reconciliation addresses the dynamics within cultures as they seek to further their respective interests through a solution such as conciliation where a mediator meets with different groups separately and repeatedly until the most important issues are identified and prioritized, and a compromise is achieved (Barry, 2001). Misconceptions about classical liberalist positions are cleared up by Barry (2001) in his explanations of equality as the provision of equal choice-sets for all. Giving special privileges to any group would in fact be

going against the principle of equality and fairness. Saying that one culture is worse-off or better-off than another suggests that there is some value ascribed to these cultures. However, it is difficult to determine such value.

According to Barry (2001), in extreme cases dominant cultures gradually absorb minority groups who become assimilated until they finally eclipse. In other situations, there is acceptance and adaptation to the new culture by minority groups but certain aspects of the minority culture are retained. Through the process of social meaning making and ratification, minority groups are able to find areas of consensus between their values and those of the dominant culture and through this, they are able to arrive at a compromise which helps them to adapt to the new culture but retain their key cultural elements. This is known as acculturation (Kroeber, 1963). They retain key cultural elements because these are fundamentally linked to their identity and are hard to let go. In summary, the political literature provides insight about processes behind the formation of culture and dynamics of relations between groups. It also provides an explanation for links between the origins of culture, limits of culture and dynamics in cultural interactions between groups. These ideas are useful in understanding broader aspects of organisational culture. However, the concern is more with how dominant values or cultures emerge and less with providing an in-depth conceptual understanding of the internal structure and composition of culture as a phenomenon. Examining the anthropological literature fills this gap, given the traditional association of the discipline of anthropology with cultural studies. Anthropological perspectives on culture are therefore the subject of the following section.

## **2.4 Anthropological perspectives informing the understanding of organisational culture.**

This section will review the concept and works on the phenomenon of culture from anthropological perspectives. Ideas to be examined are from the works of key authors who are influential, highly cited and relevant to the historical development of academic and empirical studies on culture such as: Claude Levi-Strauss, Clifford Geertz and Alfred Kroeber. Their key contributions to the understanding of culture will be discussed while seeking to integrate their main ideas in order to draw out significant parallels as well as areas of differences. By focusing on significant elements of culture such as kinship, symbolism and social interaction patterns, this review aims to explore the different dimensions of these concepts with a view to revealing their normative relevance due to processes of culture clashes in the various communities that live with the consequences in merger or acquisition processes. A critique of the literature on the significant elements will be attempted in order to uncover gaps left unaddressed by the key authors on these ideas. It is expected that the anthropological literature on culture will allow for a dual in-depth view of culture as an observable and a symbolic phenomenon.

### **2.4.1 History of thought on culture in the Anthropological literature**

The discipline of anthropology developed around the concept of culture as social scientists attempted to understand society through culture. Anthropology is an empirical study of past and present human groups and as a discipline is divided into four main areas: Linguistics (the study of cross-cultural social life through examining language), sociocultural anthropology (the study of social practices and patterns across different cultures), biological anthropology (the interdependence of biological and cultural processes and how this helps man adapt to changing environments) and archaeology (the study of past cultures through their material remains (AAA, 2014)). Most anthropologists integrate these different sub-areas in their work. This essay will draw on ideas from the area of socio-cultural anthropology.



Anthropologists look at culture and try to study social practices and cultural patterns across different cultures. In doing so, they pay attention to both intangible meaning systems specific to groups and of course, tangible aspects of observable behavioural patterns (Kroeber, 1963; Geertz, 1973; van Maanen, 1975; Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Alan and Hallet, 2014, van Marrewijk, 2016). Kroeber (1963) differentiates between material and non-material culture; describing material culture as those aspects of culture which can be perceived or experienced with the physical senses; these are mostly tangible. Non-material culture refers to non-physical entities such as ideas and informal institutions. Kroeber recognises that an important aspect of material culture is that it may also have elements of non-material culture embedded in it. For example, knowledge about uses to which a physical object can be put is separate from the object itself which may be used up or consumed. It is this knowledge which is non-material and passed on to future generations. Examples of tangible aspects of culture are human achievements in art, music and literature (Giddens, 2001); while intangible aspects include the collective stock of symbols and unique meanings which are peculiar to a group and model its practices (Geertz, 1973).

Culture has been defined in different ways by anthropologists and there is no consensus on a unique definition. Edward Tylor, an anthropologist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century introduced the concept of culture when trying to explain the differences in societies. He defines culture as,

‘that complex (*multifaceted*) whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.’ (Tylor, 1871, p. 1).

Important elements are contained in his definition. The first is that culture is complex as it is made up of several interdependent components, both tangible and intangible. The second is that culture is learned and the learning process occurs within a group, rather than in isolation. Tylor is considered as an early proponent of cultural evolutionism which views societies as socially evolving entities. Evolutionary anthropologists explain similar customs across geographical locations as being the result of universal psychological features of people who have reached the same stage of evolutionary development. There is the tacit suggestion that later stages of evolutionary development are better than earlier ones but this may not necessarily be so. Both psychological and

non-psychological influences can affect evolutionary development and also, the basis for judging one stage as better (worse) than another is likely to be complex at best or otherwise biased and prejudiced. The evolutionary view has been criticised by later anthropologists who believe that each culture should be viewed on its own merits as each society has institutions that play a role in maintaining the social system. These anthropologists are concerned with showing how a community functions as a social system as individuals progress from birth to death, and how the functioning is useful for meeting human needs. They are known as functionalist anthropologists i.e. Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown (Leach, 1974). Functionalist views look at culture in relation to the role it plays in preserving a social system.

Other theorists respond to evolutionary perspectives by focusing on similarities in the intellectual potential of both primitive and modern man to create culture (Levi-Strauss, 1963; Leach, 1974, p. 27). Their emphasis is rather on similar patterns in the way the human mind interprets what it observes and places them in categories. A different emphasis is given to the study of culture by Geertz (1973, p. 5) which views culture as ‘webs of significance’ spun by man which can only be understood through interpretive approaches. With emphasis shifted from structure or function, culture is defined as ‘a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetrate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 89). The main focus of this view is the symbolic and intangible aspects of culture as models for attitudes and behaviours. The idea is that observable aspects of culture are only a symbolic representation of other unseen conceptions. Broadly therefore, culture describes the embodiment of a way of life of society, characterised by socially recognised structures of meaning which are identified through practices and institutions (Patten, 2011).

From the different conceptions about culture and main concerns of various anthropologists, salient aspects of culture are visible and these areas have been identified as: patterns and processes in social interaction, kinship and the importance of social affiliations or groupings which facilitate social learning, as well as the practice of symbolism and role of meaning systems. These elements will now be discussed.

### 2.4.2 Patterns of Social Interaction

Anthropology as a discipline studies patterns in societies as a way to gain insight into how societies are organised and how they function. Patterns can be understood as regular forms which are perceived from observed occurrences. Within society, patterns can be found in the way people relate, in actions and corresponding reactions of individuals, as well as in recurring interpretations given to experiences. Kroeber (1963, p. 119) describes patterns as ‘arrangements or systems of internal relationship which give to any culture its coherence or plan, and keep it from being a mere accumulation of random bits’. Different aspects of culture are therefore purposefully linked when they exist as patterns. With observable aspects of social life, patterns can easily be seen; for instance in speech, religion or food habits which are common to most societies. While food habits and speech are universal patterns found in all cultures, other patterns are described as systemic; that is, they are blocks of culture which share a content of common origin and are persistently arranged in a recognisable pattern (Kroeber, 1963 p. 120;129). Systemic patterns are persistent interrelated groupings of cultural elements which have proved reliable over time (Kroeber, 1963 p. 120;129). Examples are the alphabet system or monotheistic religion. The core of these phenomena persists through time although they allow for a wide range of variations however the variants can still be traced to a common origin. For example, alphabets differ from culture to culture but the idea of representing speech through written letters has persisted over time. Systemic patterns thus can give an indication about the origin of a group of related practices as opposed to random practices. So far, patterns have referred to identified and observed aspects of culture. However, it is less easy to identify patterns in subjective interpretations which individuals give to their experiences. Within society, learning plays a role in the transmission of social attitudes and behaviour and this suggests that a possible way through which patterns in meaning can be established is via a social learning process. Propelled by learning, social patterns often tend to be reinforced through repetition in the process of socialisation.

### 2.4.3 Processes in Social Interaction and Culture

Cultural processes are significant for understanding not only how patterns emerge but also how they are transmitted. They reveal the link between the formation of cultural facts and the resultant social patterns which derive from them. Kroeber regards culture as a phenomenon which is not static but undergoes changes in its various aspects. He describes processes of culture as those factors which work to stabilise and preserve cultures or enable cultures to grow and change (Kroeber 1963, p. 152). For example, change can be experienced in social structures, political organisation and in long-held beliefs. Such changes can be gradual, voluntary or revolutionary and terms with which he describes culture changes are: cultural diffusion, tradition, acculturation and assimilation (Kroeber, 1963, p. 195; 219).

The process whereby cultural ideas and customs are transmitted across space to other societies is known as cultural diffusion; whereas transmission across time within the same society via repetition and education is known as tradition (Kroeber, 1963, p. 219). Acculturation describes a change in one culture due to influence from another such that both become similar in certain aspects. It takes place as changes are brought about in a culture by gradual influence from another culture such that there is an increasing similarity between the two (Kroeber, 1963, p. 233). Acculturation can either be a one-way or a two-way diffusion of culture, in which case, both cultures influence each other. However, where one culture is made extinct because it is gradually absorbed by another dominant culture, this is known as assimilation. Kroeber acknowledges that in some cases, assimilation is superficial and minority cultures can maintain their traditions and values. This suggests that despite an apparent dominance of one culture over another, there could be barriers to genuine diffusion of culture or facilitating conditions for dual cultures to exist as a result of persistence of one culture.

There are two ways through which patterns persist in culture according to Kroeber (1963, p. 155). The first is through voluntary adaptation while the second is through education. Voluntary adaptation can be either a conscious or unconscious process. Where it is conscious, it refers to a willingness to take on a particular practice; whereas, unconscious adaptation occurs through habitual repetition of a practice. It is important to recognise that there is also a process involved in how an action becomes a habit, and

how a habit gets established but Kroeber is not really concerned with this. His main concern is with how both conscious and unconscious voluntary adaptation processes reinforce each other in achieving a transmission of culture.

Taken as a conscious voluntary adaptation mechanism, education guides a person into becoming a member of a culture. Although Kroeber is silent on how education allows adults to fit into a society, he assumes that it is effective in directly teaching the young about their culture and ensuring that they fit in. It is taken for granted that young members of society are not able to query what they are taught and so are likely to be passive receptors of education. This thinking is echoed by Geertz's conception of culture which also assumes that culture is not disputed, and the individual mind is a passive conductor rather than a change-agent. He assumes that symbols in culture are pre-constructed and fixed and is silent on who constructs them. Symbols and meanings are thus given to individuals who simply internalise them and ask no questions. Geertz's main contribution to anthropological theory is a symbolic view of culture which tends to give more emphasis to culture over the individual. Perhaps this is not so much a problem because it tallies with the general sense in which the word culture is used. The significance of a culture is in the fact that it is thought to be shared, publicly recognised and accepted. As Tylor (1871, p. 1) notes in the definition of culture, any habits or knowledge acquired by man as a result of being a member of a group identifies a culture. So, the relatively lower emphasis placed on the individual seems to be consistent with the assumption that there is usually no contestation of his culture. However, Geertz's anthropological views also recognise the fact that man plays an active role in creating webs of social ties around himself although the processes involved in constructing meanings and the role of individuals in this regard are imprecise. Similar perspectives have also been emphasised in sociological thinking around the active and reflective role of humans (agency) within the mechanisms underpinning social relations / contexts (Archer, 2004). The identity of significant actors in culture is important to know because it allows for an exploration of the basis of harmony and cohesion within a society.

The assumed passive acceptance by members of a society gives Kroeber's argument on education the source of its power and as a result, cultural elements are able to persist over time. However, extending this analysis to include rational adults is likely to give different results because adults have the potential and intellectual capacity to engage

with and challenge what they are taught, except where force, physical or otherwise is used to ensure compliance. Not all anthropologists address the processes involved in learning the meanings and rules behind culture. For example, the ideas of Levi-Strauss (Leach 1974) on culture appear to rest on the assumption that it already exists without addressing processes involved in the transmission of meanings in culture. As such, individuals are assumed to be pre-socialised beings.

But to appreciate how a pattern emerges, it is helpful to explore a micro level of analysis. If we investigate the heart of patterns of social interaction, there are likely to be individual actions and responses which may or may not serve a recognised purpose but which provide important learning opportunities. As a result, interacting entities within a society recognise their interactions and identify with its outcome. As these interactions gain acceptance, there is sufficient incentive for repeat interactions. For example, within most social units (which I understand to be human groups consisting of at least two people), greeting is an activity which is expressed as recurring patterns of action and response which members recognise as part of everyday social life. Over time, as the practice gains acceptance, it more easily can transition to a behavioural norm. This represents a socially motivated approach to understanding behavioural patterns and indicates how it is that human beings are able to socially influence one another. A social unit is likely to be more cohesive as a result of meaningful and purposeful interaction rather than chance occurrences. The strength of cohesion in this view would be linked to memories of prior meaningful interactions which provide a platform for future interactions. Over time, it can be expected that these series of actions and responses may become predictable and as such begin to take shape as habits and patterns of interaction (Giddens, 2001, p. 67). A simplistic view would be to assume that these patterns of interaction are stable once they become widespread. However, social norms such as greetings can evolve as social actors introduce new practices. Without the existence of formal institutions of enforcement, social norms may be open to amendments via social interaction between individuals and become established through repetition. In this context, a practice becomes a pattern where there is consensus at unit levels of interaction. Whether or not interaction serves a purpose, interpersonal interaction can be conditioned such that repetition is encouraged or mandated depending on the surrounding political conditions. Where there are already established social patterns of interaction, individual-level influences may not be

immediate or effective drivers of changes because they would require the factor of time and consensus. As such, a major change, such as a conflict situation may be a more potent source of disruption to established patterns of interaction.

#### **2.4.4 Structural Patterns - Culture as a picture of how society is related**

Against the background of the role of processes in culture, patterns of interaction can be understood as describing regularly occurring forms of interaction. Due to regularity in occurrence, interaction can become recognisable, identifiable, and sometimes more easily predictable. This explanation not only presupposes that patterns are observable phenomena but also suggests that patterns are perceived through the physical senses of sight, hearing, touch etc. The structuralist<sup>1</sup> model of culture (Levi-Strauss, 1963) underscores the view that patterns are linked to human categorisations. Patterns are thus structures which reflect the relationship between interacting elements of a culture. According to Levi-Strauss, patterns reflect interpretations of categories created by the human mind as it tries to make sense of interacting aspects of a culture. Levi-Strauss does not appear to attach much importance to the origins of culture; he is more interested in a static image of how society is structurally related. According to structuralist anthropological views, human beings create categories for observed natural phenomena and through these emerge patterns of social structure. For man, all aspects of communal life such as kinship, language, myths or symbolism have a fundamental structure.

Levi-Strauss is the leading exponent of structuralism. He argues that both primitive and modern man have similar structures in their ways of thinking and creating categories for observations therefore, both have equivalent mental potential. Structuralism is a way of classifying products of culture such that they have a structure that parallels the structural understanding of natural phenomena in the human mind. In other words, the human mind interprets relations which exist between natural phenomena as a specific structured relationship and transposes this into cultural products which are visible. As

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<sup>1</sup> Structuralism is a method of understanding cultures by identifying categories created by man from his observations of natural phenomena and how social patterns or structures are modelled after these categories. Strauss seeks to establish universal facts about human beings across cultures using this approach (Levi-Strauss, 1963).

Leach (1974) discusses, the emphasis is on the interconnectedness of different cultural facts which provide meaning not in isolation, but in relation to other facts. For instance, traffic lights have meaning not as single isolated colours but within the context of the transportation system as red changes to green. The meaning is decoded as the human mind recognises each colour, its meaning and the obligation it places on human behaviour.

#### **2.4.5 Patterns of Meaning - Symbolism**

The focus of anthropology on meaning as an important component of culture gained popularity through the work of Clifford Geertz (1973). His emphasis was on the reality behind the visible aspects of culture, suggesting that a deeper understanding of cultural actions is made possible only through an interpretive approach to observed practices. In Geertz's definition of culture, patterns of meaning are 'inherited conceptions' (p. 89) encapsulated in symbols which then become a more concrete representation of social views on life. These conceptions would include what is valued as well as what is not including collective attitudes towards a range of issues such as rights and obligations in social relationships, conceptions of good or virtues, justice, freedom, equality, conduct and wellbeing (Blackburn, 2001, p. 6). As a result, moral positions are inherent in a meaning system and are expressed through elements of that meaning system.

Meanings are not physically observable however they can be communicated through language which is a necessary platform for social interaction. This shows that meanings can be conveyed as they are taught and learnt through the medium of language. They are not isolated constructs but are embedded in social processes, symbols, activities and patterns, thereby providing a cohesive quality to culture. In many cases, meanings exist as a set beliefs or explanations linked to observed social practices or activities which are expressions of commonly recognised values and orientations. In other cases, they are tied to constructed explanations of social reality i.e. myths. Meanings, unlike observed practices are interpretations, explanations and values (significance) given to experiences, events and social constructions of reality. These interpretations could be subjectively or inter-subjectively determined from internal sources such as interpersonal experiences or from external sources i.e. myths, religion, rituals or laws. Individuals



and groups play important roles in the development of culture through inter-subjective exchanges of ideas. However, social construction of meaning suggests that it could also be open to different interpretations.

The socially-embedded nature of the sources of meaning systems suggests that in order to be able to understand a meaning system, it is necessary to get onto the platform of social interaction through language and be involved in the social processes and activities through which those meanings are conveyed.

Geertz differentiates between a cultural and a social system, viewing a cultural system as an ordered system of meanings and symbols, and a social system as patterns (ordered systems) of interaction within the context of various human roles in society (p. 144). Many societies make use of symbols as part of their cultural heritage because they are strong representations of meanings. Symbols are powerful means of embodying ideas and values because they can communicate to the human mind in a concise but potent way. Where symbols are thoughtfully chosen, they can evoke strong feelings. Through the process of socialisation, symbols and meanings can be taught, learned and internalised. However, it should be recognised that symbols could be understood differently by people due to variations arising from different meaning systems.

Levi-Strauss' (1969) ideas on meaning in culture acknowledge that meanings are codified in symbols. However, Strauss' main preoccupation is on categories created by man, with language being the medium through which the formed categories are expressed. For example, categories of social status or kinship groups can be distinguished and expressed through language. The ability to engage with symbols as representations of meanings is thought to distinguish man from animals. The reasoning behind this is that a sign is different from the trigger which is symbolic thought. Man, not animals, can differentiate between the two and can also see how they are interdependent. For example, animals can observe the colours changing from green to amber to red in traffic lights, but human beings understand what each colour signifies and the corresponding social behaviour which is expected of them. Symbolic interpretation therefore understands symbols as signifiers of something else. For Geertz, cultural analysis would be incomplete without giving attention to symbolic forms and meaning systems and so an organised system of significant symbols defines a culture pattern (Geertz, 1973, p. 46). These symbols embody meanings which are publicly

recognised, however, they may not always be shared. It is important to note however that generally, systems of meaning can give guidance for human interaction.

Patterns of meaning exist within culture and reveal structured connections in diverse phenomena. Geertz is interested in systematic relationships between these phenomena and views them as 'a set of control mechanisms - ...rules...for the governing of behaviour' (Geertz, 1973, p. 44). The underlying assumption is that a wide range of what are considered as cultural expressions are actually signifiers of separate meanings or values. For example, use of language (words), gifts, clothing, gait or posture are aspects of culture which when taken together can define the parameters of a person's social identity. They communicate non-verbal information about individuals in society and can be signifiers of other facts such as social class, grooming and economic status. Because meaning is subjectively and intersubjectively determined, a single symbol may be interpreted in multiple ways by different observers. While it is accepted that meaning exists primarily as an intangible component of culture, an attempt could be made to map out patterns in meaning deriving from intersubjective processes either by understanding the ordered set of significant symbols or by looking to expressions through language which are established through repetition and education. Meanings can be consciously or unconsciously disseminated to establish patterns. Through a systematic transmission mechanism, stability can be introduced into patterns of meaning. However, this is not to say that once patterns of meaning are established, they are fixed. The framework which the pattern provides may not always be able to explain new experiences and where it is no longer serves as a reliable reference point, then meanings are likely to lose their intrinsic value and the meaning system becomes potentially less stable. Without this compass, there may be cognitive confusion or chaos.

A socially established meaning system suggests a participatory process in the construction of meanings where individuals and groups play important roles in the development of culture. Although Geertz's conception of culture has been criticised as not accounting for individual meaning-making processes (Leach, 1974), it is plausible to have inter-subjective meaning-making which accommodates diverse contributions, social learning and shared understandings (Jacobs and Coghlan, 2005, p. 123; Cunliffe, 2011, p. 653). It is also possible that there may be a disproportionate influence of some views over others .i.e where there is a small group whose views determine culture but

are not necessarily representative of all members of the community<sup>2</sup>. Despite this, there is an enduring quality in the nature of culture that prevents individuals and groups from arbitrarily making adjustments to it at will. A possible explanation for persistence in cultural meaning systems is the role of the time factor in the process of idea diffusion, habit development and voluntary acceptance and through these the emergence of patterns. To offer an additional explanation, culture can be viewed as a socially embedded and socially recognised phenomenon, but this is not to say that all aspects of culture are shared. For example, ideologies about culture can be imposed on a group with some agreeing and others disagreeing.

The ideas of symbolic thought and interpretation have been employed in a number of conceptual and empirical studies (Barley, 1983; Smircich, 1983; Meyerson, 1994; Staw, 1985; Feldman, 1986; Prasad, 1993; Short and Toffel, 2010) to investigate how symbolic thinking influences behaviour in different settings. Using symbols and language, people are able to interpret their social world and through this patterns of meaning and social interaction can be mapped out within an organisation.

#### **2.4.6 Contributions of Strauss and Geertz to ideas of Symbols and Myths**

Various examples of symbols abound in a culture; they are found as representations of myths and religion, they are found in rituals, as artefacts or as symbolic customs and practices. These are elements of culture that take on their meaning when viewed in relation to other elements. For example, Geertz views religion as a symbolic cultural system because it makes use of structured sacred symbols and meanings. He defines religion as:

‘A system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 90).

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<sup>2</sup> This will be examined in more detail in the section on socio-political perspectives on culture which emphasise the role of elites.

The definition suggests that the religious conceptions of existence reinforced by sacred symbols are compelling hence, their ability to elicit enduring moods and motivations in people. When viewed in this light, it can explain why there is less concern with the processes behind internalising the symbols and ethos, the historical aspects of symbols as well as the key actors behind their emergence.

Geertz also highlights rituals as a symbolic part of culture which reinforces basic social ties. Rituals are able to strengthen social ties because they are not isolated individual actions but involve interaction between groups of people. For example, social conventions such as types of greetings, gift-giving, naming ceremonies, burial ceremonies, marriages, festivals etc. are formal and informal events or procedures which are symbolic activities signifying underlying cultural values.

For Geertz, emphasis seems to be given to the causal role of meanings and symbols in determining social interaction. Whether or not interpretations are distilled from internal or external sources, they appear to form the basis for social interaction patterns. With subjectivity or inter-subjectivity<sup>3</sup> of experiences as internal sources of meaning, there is the possibility that the meaning system may conceal an inherent problem of reliability. For instance, one could question the reliability of the experience of a minority as the defining philosophy for a group. Similarly, for external sources of meaning systems such as myths, religion, rituals or folklore, there is a potential problem of validity due to the predominantly oral modes of transmission of myths for example, and the resultant risk of inconsistent versions.

Uncertainty about validity can result in alienation, apathy or indifference and a lack of commitment to values embedded within the meaning system's framework of values. In extension, this could result in a weakness in the meaning system as it would then lose its power to influence members of a culture. Secondly, if a cultural meaning system is built around a myth, it is reasonable to expect that such culture may someday be faced with events or challenges which the meaning system has not anticipated or does not explain. Similarly, if people cannot find guidance from their meaning systems during times of confusion, it becomes easy for them to become disconnected and cut off from a sense of affiliation to the group.

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<sup>3</sup> Inter-subjectivity: meanings exist in on-going, negotiated relationships between human minds (Gillespie and Cornish, 2010, p19).

Levi-Strauss applies his structuralist method to understand myths. He views myths as events that occurred, without attributing any importance to the sequence in which they occurred as historians would. Myths by nature tend to have several different but related versions and so by juxtaposing different versions, according to Strauss, the central theme from each myth can be reconstructed. Since each variant of a myth reveals only a part of the whole picture, the best way to understand the complete message is to classify the different myths according to the central message of each and from this will emerge a pattern. Each is then interpreted in relation to the message of others. Although structuralism provides a method for interpreting myths, an inherent problem is that Levi-Strauss does not appear to be concerned with the authenticity of myths. It would be practically challenging to find and ascertain the validity of an exhaustive set of different accounts of a myth; as such the value of the central message could be in doubt, irrespective of which method enables a reconstruction of the message.

The previous sections so far have examined the historical evolution of thought on culture as a phenomenon and the varying concerns of the selected influential authors in the anthropological literature. Their contributions offer a view of culture as consisting of patterns and processes in terms of structure, social interaction and underlying symbolic meaning. Although individual areas of focus vary from one to another, anthropologists recognise that social patterns are important elements of cultural studies and both patterns of social interaction and patterns of meaning have been identified as being defining factors for cultures (Geertz, 1973). The next section will examine more closely the relationship between patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction in culture.

#### **2.4.7 Relationship between Patterns of Interaction and Patterns of Meaning**

From the foregoing discussions, there is a general assumption that patterns of interaction are often related to patterns of meaning (Geertz, 1973). Where there is some homogeneity which has developed over time such as exists in families, meaning systems are intangible reference points which are tied to social interaction. For example, a family group is one with closer ties and more intense interaction, and as a group, gradually takes on a homogenous form. Homogeneity develops in a family

through frequent face-to-face interactions which give opportunities for deeper communication and continuous interpretation and ratification of verbal and non-verbal messages through intersubjective processes of meaning making. These interactions give rise to trust-based reciprocal expectations and obligations which develop and become established over time. Although family relations tend to reflect common meaning systems, and some social practices could be symbolic expressions of deeply-held values (Geertz, 1973), it would be inaccurate to assume that all types of social interaction are driven by the same set of shared values, especially when considering interactions outside the family unit. Other contexts of patterned interactions such as purely economic or transactional relationships may not necessarily spring from commonly held family values but may be based on more market-related systems of values and meaning. In which case, patterns of interaction exist within a diverse context of meaning systems.

From the earlier<sup>4</sup> analysis of patterns of meaning, we can expect distortions to a meaning system to produce cognitive confusion and be a potential source of conflict (Kroeber, 1963). Where there is a system of meaning, it presupposes that there are underlying social ties amongst participants. It is compelling to attribute strong influence to meaning systems, but it should be acknowledged that socially constructed meanings are also open to diverse interpretations which may be incompatible and inconsistent, thereby weakening the influence-power of the meaning system and providing potential grounds for conflict. This possibility necessitates a discussion on the idea of cultural conflict from an anthropological perspective.

#### **2.4.8 An Anthropological Perspective on Cultural Conflict**

The explanation of Geertz on conflict leans towards incongruity between patterns of social interaction and patterns of meaning, rather than separate inconsistencies within either. For Geertz, where there is a mismatch between two or more patterns, there is social conflict (Geertz, 1973, p. 164). It is essential to examine this assertion closely. While in a fairly homogenous group like a family, meaning systems are logically coherent with patterns of interaction, in other circumstances, divergence between meaning systems and patterns of interaction can exist without resulting in conflict. This

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<sup>4</sup> Sub-section 2.1.5

can happen where the two are unrelated; in which case, first, it is likely that there are multiple cultures and multiple meaning systems that have little bearing on social interaction patterns. An example was described in section 2.4.7 regarding transactional interactions based on commercial meaning systems which exist outside the context of family meaning systems. This describes what obtains in a multicultural, multi-value society (Kymlicka, 1989). Secondly, people can actively find ways to engage with others without sharing meaning systems, such that where patterns of interaction are dictated or changed by other factors such as technology, proximity or economic relations, the end result is not necessarily conflict. For example in transactional or market relationships, the regulating factors are market rules or transactional laws. These regulations in addition to technological impact can change the way in which people relate; transforming face-to-face interaction to more detached forms i.e. emails, telephones and letters. Consequently, to the extent that a driver of changes in social relations can leave patterns of meaning unaffected, the explanation of Geertz is open to contestation.

A disruption to patterns of social interaction can create an environment for conflict to emerge (Geertz, 1973) but by itself may not bring about conflict. In addition, there could be different degrees of masked conflict that groups can put up with without disrupting existing patterns of meaning or social interaction (Barry, 2001). Thus, social interaction patterns can be affected by factors such as: proximity, technology, language, time and trust and where any of these are altered, there is a corresponding effect on patterns of social interaction. For example, drivers such as: relocation, a change of language or adoption of new technology can alter interaction patterns of work groups in an organisation. However, what brings about conflict may not be a change in the drivers but distortions created in the process of communication.

Geertz's (1973) view that conflict arises from asymmetry between patterns of meaning and social interaction leaves unexplained other conditions that have an influence on how social conflict emerges other than these two variables. For example, extreme conditions of scarcity and insufficient resources such as situations of war, famine and drought can bring about conflict as individuals and groups pursue self-interests for survival. In such situations, meaning systems are unlikely to be drivers of social interaction; rather, actions will be defined by their contribution to survival. However, understanding the role of meaning systems in social interaction become significant

where the entity in focus is a related group of people as will be examined subsequently under kinship and social relations.

#### **2.4.9 Kinship and Social Relations**

Anthropological traditions treat the concept of kinship as central to the study of culture although there have been debates about the ontological status of the concept (Schneider, 1984, p. 4). Kinship is a term which describes the sense of affiliation as well as the network of relationships within a specific grouping, usually a family. The kinship configuration is made visible to anthropologists through the role of language which classifies people into different groups. The debates surrounding the concept of kinship revolve around whether or not it exists, since it is an expression coined by anthropologists to describe observed social relationship patterns between specific sets of people. Observations are made accessible after they have been filtered through the subjective experience and knowledge-base of anthropologists, hence the grounds for arguments against the concrete nature given to the concept (Schneider, 1984, p. 4). Despite these, there is a general agreement amongst anthropologists (Levi-Strauss, 1969; Leach, 1974; Geertz, 1973; Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, 1950) about the role of the family and marriage as building blocks and determinants of kinship ties.

Through filiation and siblingship, a group of individuals can be said to be related; filiation is a term which describes a child's relationship with its parents (Leach 1974, p. 9) and siblingship describes the relationship between brothers and sisters born of the same mother (Leach, 1974, p. 9). Similarly, through marriage, other groups are brought into a close and distinct relationship. As argued by Leach (1974, p. 95), these expressions of kinship are social constructions which reflect to a large extent, social organisation patterns. They can also be viewed as a representation of the structural relationships between people; demonstrating the structuralist idea of Levi-Strauss (1969) used to make sense of observations about close-knit human relationships through a snap-shot view of social networks. Levi-Strauss is a French sociological theorist whose unique method for studying culture studies the patterns of structures created by man through categorisations of natural phenomena. Anthropologists are interested in studying both categorisations and behavioural patterns and how these two



are connected. For Levi-Strauss, the two primary institutions of society are family and marriage and from these, all other relationships are defined. In other words, for kinship structure to exist, three basic relations must exist: relations of descent or filiation (the kinship link of parent-child), consanguinity (relations by blood e.g. brother), and affinity (relationship with the relatives of a spouse, e.g. mother-in-law) (Leach, 1974). Because relationships are defined, patterns of expected / acceptable behaviour are also defined. The assumption behind categorisations such as father, mother, brother, mother-in-law, cousin or sister is that first, these categories of individuals are related in a specific way; and secondly, there are certain behaviours that are viewed as appropriate amongst them. These relationships and associated behaviours are fundamentally socially contrived and so, there are a set of informal roles and expectations about rights and duties within kinship groups. The informal system of rules tends to be reinforced by social customs and ceremonies, both public and private. Conventionally, a kinship group is viewed as bounded by a combination of blood ties and marriage ties. But traditionally, anthropological concerns with kinship tend to be more with social behaviours rather than biological facts (Leach, 1974, p. 96).

However, it is important to recognise that blood and marriage ties may not be exclusive determinants of kinship ties. Kinship can equally exist and be evidenced by a sense of affiliation between people who are not members of a kinship group by marriage or descent. A sense of affiliation can be facilitated sometimes by long-standing social interaction over a common geographical area. For example, we can expect to find some affiliation amongst academics, students, as well as members of similar occupations in traditional societies such as trading, fishing or farming (Holland, 2004, p. 219). Affinity in such work groups could be attributable to common interests shared over a period of time. Also, there could be ties arising from socially defined roles which resemble filial kinship ties. Where such roles carry elements of dependence and kinship responsibility, they provide opportunity for kinship ties to develop. For example, in the Christian tradition, kinship ties are created through appointing a godfather or godmother for a child at baptism. Again, we can find a parallel of the filial relationship between a mentor and his protégé. Fundamentally, kinship would be driven by sustained social interaction (Leach, 1974, p. 111); this presupposes that somehow, social conflicts are managed such that on the whole, relationships are sustained. Kinship can thus be extended to non-conventional relationships. Similarly, borrowing from the metaphor of

motherly care and nurturing, the expression nurture-kinship describes the bond between people who have a sense of affinity based on the fact that they regularly provide and care for one another (Holland, 2004, p. 231). Nurture kinship is used metaphorically to depict the relationship between a nurturing mother and her dependent child (Holland, 2004, p. 221-232). Examples include the bond between soldiers, or nuns in a convent.

Detaching the criterion of biological factors allows for a conception of kinship in an artificial or symbolic form. This view rests on the assumption that within a societal context, kinship terminology used, associated behaviours, as well as a system of shared expectations about rights and duties are all socially constructed. The basis of kinship ties in this sense will be primarily on social relationships and a shared understanding of reciprocal rights and obligations. Social and cultural bases for structuring kinship groups was advocated by Schneider (1984) as a challenge to the conventional approaches by anthropologists (Levi-Strauss, 1969; Kroeber 1963, p. 89) of viewing kinship ties by blood and marriage. Additional examples of artificial kinship ties are: the relationship between a god-parent and a god-child, closeness amongst adopted children, children in foster care and feminist groups, brotherhood sentiments amongst soldiers, sisterhood affiliations amongst female religious groups or female / male social clubs. These examples are described as fictive kinship groups (Schneider, 1984, p. 99). Fictive kinship is based on the notion of fictitious relationship between people unrelated by blood or marriage.

Kinship ties have been used in anthropology as the basis for understanding social organisation. For example, in Kroeber's studies of Native Americans, he identifies a unique social organisation and formulated the term 'tribelet' to describe a socio-political unit which was smaller than a tribe and less-hierarchically organised (Kroeber, 1932). A tribelet is a subset of a tribe which is a small close-knit community organised on the basis of kinship ties. In structure, membership of a tribelet could either be based on descent or co-residence. The important political unit within a tribelet was composed of kinship groups which are related by blood. The idea of kinship has been used in several empirical studies to demonstrate the strength of kinship group claims over members (Collier and Garg, 1999; Child, 2001) and to explain how kinship patterns can be a structural barrier to changes in organisational patterns or barriers to economic development (Rotblat, 1975; Branco, 2007). These studies implicitly assume that there is a significant cohesive element in kinship groupings which give the groups a concrete

form but are silent on sources of threats to kinship ties. It is useful to consider factors which can facilitate or if absent, threaten kinship cohesion. Sources of cohesion will subsequently be identified.

Generally, cohesion tends to reflect the solidity of a group as a result of a sense of affinity derived from shared history, shared purpose or shared meaning systems. Sources of cohesion have been attributed to social recognition of kinship' (Radcliffe-Brown, 1950, p. 43) as well as to the 'bonds of blood relationship' (Trautmann, 1987, p. 85). Recognition of kinship and blood relations are facts that usually are not disputed, therefore members of a kinship grouping are aware of their common identity. Cohesion can also derive from a common religion where a kinship group has its own religious beliefs connected to ancestors or a sacred shrine (Radcliffe-Brown, 1950, p. 43). With religion, what connects kinship group members is a common ancestor or belief system usually involving symbolic objects or ideas. Similarly, myths can function as a source of cohesion in a culture because they represent a shared and significant history though they are sometimes associated with fallacy (Leach 1974, p. 54). Generally, the significance of social recognition, blood ties, religion and myths as sources of cohesion is that they jointly reinforce one another to create web-like boundaries for kinship groups. As a result, kinship ties are able to overcome effects of isolated differences in meaning systems. Geertz, (1973, p. 89) metaphorically describes cultures as webs of significance spun by man. This views culture as a real network of relationships held delicately together as if by fine threads; cohesion can in this light be explained as a result of layers of reinforcing kinship ties. But it must also be remembered that the web is only a symbol of something else, according to Geertz. This underlying signified element is the real essence of culture as it consists of "socially established structures of meaning" (Geertz 1973, p. 12). As a result, the study of culture requires an *interpretive methodology* in order to uncover the meanings behind the symbols.

## 2.5 Critiques on anthropological perspectives on culture

The anthropological understanding of culture has been largely influenced by the works of Geertz (1973), Kroeber, (1963) and Levi-Strauss (1969) and is concerned with structure, processes and symbolism which characterise culture. The authors make significant contributions which have provided foundations for the understanding of cultural phenomena. There are however some implications of their perspectives which suggest that premises supporting their arguments may have ignored or taken for granted other aspects relevant to understanding culture.

Kroeber (1963) for example is recognised for promoting the understanding of patterns and cultural processes. While patterns can be observed in tangible expressions of culture, it is less easy to identify patterns in subjective interpretations of experiences. Kroeber identifies cultural processes as significant in showing the emergence and transmission of patterns and suggests that culture can be dynamic as a result. Education and socialisation are highlighted as factors which facilitate stabilisation or modification of culture (Kroeber 1963, p. 152). Kroeber however recognises that despite the dominance of one culture through assimilation, it may mask the existence of a minority culture. This suggests that there could be barriers to genuine diffusion or facilitating conditions for the existence of dual cultures. Assumptions about the strength of education in facilitating cultural diffusion appears to apply to young members of society who are again assumed to be unable to interrogate what they are taught and so are likely to be passive receptors of education (Archer, 2004). Geertzian conceptions also echo similar assumptions about culture as undisputed and members of a society (amongst which are expectedly adults) as passive conductors rather than change-agents. Symbols in culture are assumed as fixed and pre-constructed and there is no account for how they are constructed or who the significant actors are (Bottomore, 1973). Anthropological perspectives therefore suggest that symbols and meanings are transmitted to members who simply internalise them without question. Although Geertzian anthropological views recognise the role of man in creating webs of social ties around himself, the processes involved and the role of members of a culture in constructing meanings in this regard are imprecise (Archer, 2004).

The identity of significant actors is important to know because it allows for exploring the foundations of harmony or cohesion within a society. Kroeber's argument on education and persistence in culture is powered by the assumption of passive acceptance of cultural influences. However, the argument is weakened if the agency of adult participants is factored in because agency would introduce elements of unpredictability to the outcomes of engagement and intersubjective interpretations of experiences. Adult members of a social group can be reasonably assumed to have the potential and intellectual capacity engage at different levels with the content of such education, except where force is used to ensure compliance.

The ideas of Levi-Strauss (Leach 1974) on culture also reflect assumptions about processes involved in learning meanings in culture, starting analysis from the position that culture already exists and individuals are pre-socialised beings. Straussian contributions are concerned with a static image of how society is structurally related, acknowledging that the human mind actively interprets relations between cultural phenomena but only in relation to establishing structural relationships and transposing them to visible artefacts. Understanding structure in culture therefore directs attention to the basis of the interwoven and interconnected system of meanings and artefacts (Leach, 1974). Geertz building on these ideas popularised symbolism in culture, particularly the significance of interpretive methods of enquiry to understand culture. Emphasising key components of culture to be patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction, he identifies symbolic inherited conceptions as being central to meaning systems. These conceptions are made up of values which are inherently underpinned by moral standpoints (Blackburn 2001, p. 6).

The structured connections in meaning systems are strong enough such that they are able to act as 'a set of control mechanisms - ...rules...for the governing of behaviour' (Geertz, 1973, p. 44). You can understand a meaning system by looking at the structured connections between significant symbols, ideas or practices. Anthropological conceptions of culture suggest that construction of meaning is through a participatory process. However there is less precision about the role of members of a culture nor does it account for disproportionate influence of some views over others (Archer, 2004), which can uncover to what extent meanings are shared. In spite of this, the layered and interconnected nature of culture is able to withstand arbitrary changes, subject to the

role to time in diffusion of new cultural elements, development of habits (Giddens, 2001, p. 67) and voluntary acceptance by members of a social group.

The ideas of the various authors suggest that homogeneity supported by face-to-face interactions contribute to cohesion within a social group. Cohesion is facilitated by a sense of affinity as a result of enduring social interactions. Patterns of interaction potentially have a much more dynamic relationship with patterns of meaning than Geertz's conception of culture suggests. Interactions play a role in culture, not only as symbolic expressions in some cases (such as rituals or ceremonies) but also because they provide an important context within which intersubjective interpretation and ratification of the meaning system take place. Again, patterns of interaction may exist within an external context of economic or transactional relations, in which case, there may not necessarily be direct links to the cultural system of meaning. The authors examined are in general in agreement that meaningful social interaction as opposed to chance encounters is relevant for the development of patterns as well as cohesion in social groups. Given the layered and interrelated structure of culture which is reinforced by established social patterns of interaction, it is questionable the extent to which individual-level influences can successfully change culture due to the role of time and consensus in developing meaning systems. A major conflict situation, in contrast, can be expected to be a stronger source of disruption to established patterns of interaction. A system of meaning presupposes underlying social ties. However, given the possibility of variations in interpretations and the extent to which these are shared, it becomes necessary to consider the emergence of conflict or incompatibility in a meaning system.

Stability in culture as Geertz suggests is related to congruence between patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction because meanings are embedded in interconnected processes, symbols and practices. There is recognition that meanings are interpretations and significance given to values, and both individuals and groups play important roles in intersubjective exchange of ideas. Although the authors are in agreement that symbolic interpretation is an ongoing part of the cultural experience, the social construction of meaning however suggests that meaning could be open to diverse interpretations of experiences. The stability therefore alluded to in culture cannot be entirely insulated from the surrounding context within which the meaning system exists, which can be significantly altered by independent events. In which case, the mechanism of the meaning system may be unable to explain new experiences and as a result, there

may be a disconnection between the external experiences and the meaning system, assuming that the intrinsic value of the meaning system remains as an internal compass for the social group. In extreme conditions where the group is forced to alter its interpretation or understanding of its symbolic structures, then meanings become eroded and are no longer able to serve as a reliable reference point for interpreting experiences. As intrinsic values are eroded, the meaning system becomes potentially less stable and without this compass, there may be cognitive confusion or chaos.

The anthropological ideas on cohesion in groups, particularly kinship ties have been influential in empirical studies, emphasising the strength of the kinship relationship in resisting external influence (Rotblat, 1975; Blanco, 2007). However, there is an absence of identification of possible threats to such cohesion in these literatures. From the anthropological perspective, cohesion in groups can be attributed to a sense of affinity from shared history, purpose or meaning systems, suggesting jointly reinforcing sources (Schneider, 1984).

Reviewing the selected anthropological contributions on culture reveal the complexity associated with the concept of culture. The ideas of the authors show how the identified salient aspects of culture are interwoven and indicate focus on different aspects of culture. However, a richer picture is given through an integrated view where patterns of meaning, patterns of interaction and kinship ties characterise culture. What is significant is that taken together, these elements give culture its cohesive nature, even though there may be individual variations in each component. Furthermore, the factor of time contributes to the enduring nature of culture as over time, people are able to work through processes, conscious and unconscious voluntary adaptation mechanisms to internalise meanings, symbols and practices. The ideas in the anthropological literature in spite of inadequate attention to the key critiques raised have been relevant for illuminating the concept of organisational culture in the management discipline.

## 2.6 Summary of the review of relevant literatures

Given the different contributions of scholars to thinking around organizational culture, various perspectives can be identified in the definitions of organisational culture which reflect different philosophical assumptions about culture. The anthropological literature provides several definitions of culture by twentieth-century scholars such as Clifford Geertz, Alfred Kroeber and Edward Tylor. The definitions describe culture as structures of socially established systems of meaning and emphasise learned attributes, capabilities and habits acquired by man in his social environment. These definitions have influenced later scholars such as Ouchi (1981), Smircich (1983), Hofstede (1980) and Schein (1990) - whose definition of culture has been popular with management scholars, emphasising that culture is composed of artefacts, espoused beliefs and underlying assumptions and rooted in learning from previous practices. Schein's definition echoes ideas on social modes of transmission from the anthropological theorists, but it also places much emphasis on the role of culture in resolving challenges for a given group over time. This suggests that culture is viewed as a regulatory mechanism for problem solving within groups in an organisation and indicates a functionalist orientation to understanding culture. The weakness of Schein's definition is in its silence on important background issues of origin and limits of culture, as well as a premise that people are pre-socialised. It also tacitly suggests that culture is uncontested and patterns in assumptions can always be observed. The definition indicates that the implied philosophical assumption about culture is positivist; a concrete reality which can be discovered, invented or developed. Many organisational studies on culture have been influenced by the ideas of Schein and appear to reflect a similar orientation towards a positivist view of the concept. The anthropological literature helps to provide a balance by establishing that the understanding of culture requires an interpretive approach because of its symbolic components. For this study, the perspectives from both the anthropological and the socio-political literature enrich and inform the understanding of organisational culture often seen as a management tool, which is dominant in cultural studies within the management literature. Specifically, the dimensions of culture presented by Geertz (1973) as patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction will form the basis for this study's empirical investigation of culture after a merger or acquisition process. Culture will be explored



in its intangible (informal practices, espoused values, language, beliefs, sagas, attitudes, rituals, underlying assumptions) and tangible (artefacts, architecture, symbols, written policies) forms, while integrating socio-political perspectives of Lukes, (1974) and Bottomore, (1973) in order to illuminate embedded aspects of organisational culture. Figure 2.4 summarises the key concepts in the theoretical framework guiding this study.

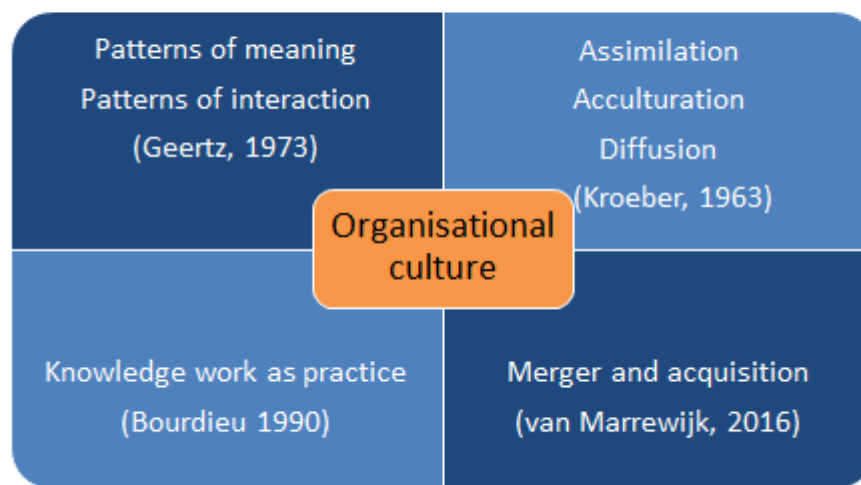


Figure 2.5 Key concepts in theoretical framework for study of post-acquisition organisational culture of knowledge workers.

## 2.7 Relating reviewed literatures with research questions.

The key perspectives on the phenomenon of culture reviewed from the anthropological, socio-political and management literatures reveal the multidimensional nature of culture and these perspectives have been influential on many other studies on culture. However, the review of the key literatures suggests that there are nuanced relationships between the different aspects of culture which come to light when assumptions underpinning the perspectives are challenged. As discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, a critical examination of Geertzian views on culture as well as Kroeber's ideas on cultural processes reveals the importance of symbolic thinking and meaning making in the theory of culture. It also points to the importance of social interaction. However, in

examining issues around the nature, origins and dynamics of culture and the multidisciplinary perspectives which can help to illuminate thinking regarding the dimensions of culture, it is evident that a tacit assumption about the nature of persons within a culture underpin the theoretical ideas. In addition, particular views on culture have been applied to organizational contexts in ways that are useful for research and organizational purposes but which take for granted or ignore the reality of mechanisms working to preserve or erode culture. An in-depth view of culture is important to understanding the target population of knowledge workers in this study who have been described in the literature as having a culture closely connected to their work. Contexts of cultural diversity such as a post-merger or acquisition organization thus present additional challenges for such a population, particularly where values are being imposed on the population of knowledge workers.

In the management literature for example, many studies on M&As implicitly suggest that the acquiring organization takes a dominant role in the merger relationship (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988; Larsson and Lubatkin, 2001; Vazirani and Mohapatra, 2012; Cartwright and Cooper, 1993b; Buono and Bowditch, 1989; Chatterjee et al., 1992), where persistence in culture can be attributed to overt or political forms of domination. Anthropological contributions on processes in culture also recognize the existence of cultural dominance through assimilation (Kroeber, 1963) however Kroeber acknowledges that dominance of one culture may mask the existence of another. Many studies in the management literature mirror this view and confirm the existence of subcultures in organizational contexts (Duncan, 1989; Sackman, 1992; Sinclair, 1993; Martin, 2002; Marks and Mirvis, 2011; Spicer, 2011; van Marrewijk, 2016). The post-merger or acquisition organizational context therefore presents an opportunity to investigate the interactions of cultures particularly where the focal acquired population is a group of professional knowledge workers. Given the gaps indicated by the areas of nuances and assumptions unaddressed in the theoretical perspectives on culture across the management and anthropological literatures, there is a need to examine from an ethnographic perspective the nature of culture in a diverse organizational context. In particular, where cultural differences are due to the interrelatedness of work practice and work identity in a meaning system within an organisational culture which emphasises more commercially-driven values.

The context of an M&A provides opportunity to investigate diversity in culture when viewed in the light of Smircich's perspective of organisations as cultural entities. Organisational studies on M&As which suggest that the acquirer is the dominant partner in the alliance make assumptions about the workings and effects of over forms of power (Bottomore, 1973) in the relationship. Cultural studies of M&As also allude to the dominance of the acquirer while largely ignoring the voice of the less-dominant partner. In contrast to dominant perspective on M&A studies, this study focuses on the acquired population in order to give voice to conventionally less-emphasised cultural realities in a post-merger context. Given Smircich's view of organisations as cultures, an M&A can be seen as a site of cultural interaction. From the cultural analysis, it is of interest to examine the resultant dynamics which reveal emergent ethical challenges in relations between groups with incompatible systems of meaning.

Socio-political perspectives on culture suggest that there are significant actors involved in the creation of culture (Bottomore 1973; Lukes, 1974; Hobsbawm, 1983). Studies in the management literature on organisational culture also emphasise the role of key actors in decision making. Anthropological perspectives tacitly make assumptions regarding the nature of meaning systems, where symbolic aspects of culture are assumed to be fixed and pre-constructed, particularly where cultural analysis is mainly concerned with a static image of society (Levi Strauss, 1969). These different views rest on the assumption of passivity characterizing members of a culture who are assumed to be unquestioning about what they are told or given. The post-merger organizational context is explored in order to interrogate the taken-for-granted assumptions about cultural conditions and relations following an M&A process. While some of these assumptions have to do with the passivity of the less-dominant entity in the relationship, others relate to the tacit assumption of a unitary notion of culture taken to characterize the organization following the merger which often characterises M&A research.

Through a cultural analysis, this study seeks to answer questions on the nature and sources of meaning systems in the merged community, identifying areas of incongruence in meaning and also uncovering responses to incongruence in meaning. Specifically, the study draws on Geertzian ideas about culture which emphasise patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction as central to culture. Meanings are particularly underlying features of culture, being made up of values and inherent moral standpoints. Given that a key critique of cultural interactions is the diversity of interpretation that is

made possible by intersubjective processes of meaning making, meaning systems which are important aspects of culture (Geertz, 1973) cannot then be assumed to exist in a unitary sense. A context of cultural diversity such as one provided by an M&A process gives opportunity to explore differences or incongruence in meaning within organisational culture and responses to such incongruence. From the contributions of authors in the anthropological and socio-political literatures, the view of culture which emerges is that of a complex, interwoven and layered system of meanings and interactions. An organisational context which 'houses' different cultures thus becomes a site of potential cultural complexity and diversity.

This research primarily examines such an organizational context by adopting the anthropological approach of ethnography to studying culture in the case of a merger and acquisition involving two culturally different organisations. From the cultural analysis, emergent ethical dimensions and challenges are uncovered which reveal inextricable links between ethics and culture which show that ethical issues are not separate from cultural issues but underpin them.

## **2.8 Research questions**

There are two main research questions guiding this study and they are as follows:

- (1) What is the nature and what are the sources of meaning systems in the merged Alpha-D and Brownfield workgroup community? Can areas of incongruence in meaning be identified?
- (2) What were the Brownfield work groups' responses to incongruence in meaning regarding the nature and ethics of work?

The next chapter discusses the methodology for the empirical component of this study. It shows how the review of relevant literature and the philosophical orientations of the researcher regarding the nature of the reality of culture inform the research design, the approach to gaining knowledge about the phenomenon through the selected data collection methods and the approach to data analysis.

## 3 CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

As indicated in the previous chapter, the focus of this study is to understand cultural interactions within the context of a merger and acquisition. Cultural methods of enquiry are well known in the anthropological literature and emphasise the investigation of communities and societies from direct contact with the context of interest. The aim of focusing on experiential knowledge is to achieve an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. The layered, interwoven and multifaceted nature of culture as discussed in the literature review chapter suggests that the study of culture would require that the researcher is immersed in the context of interest in order to sufficiently experience first-hand the relationships between the observed and the symbolic meanings underpinning them. In this way, the researcher can *see* through the eyes of the studied population and thereby reach an in-depth understanding of the culture. A qualitative research approach is considered appropriate to the study of culture and within this approach, an ethnographic research design allows for a first-hand, experiential study of culture in the chosen context.

This chapter describes in detail the ethnographic methodology adopted in the study, addressing issues relating to the qualitative approach taken and the research philosophy underpinning the study. The chapter also gives a historical background to ethnographic research as well as a justification for the research strategy. A description and justification for the case study research design within the broader ethnographic strategy is given and details of the participants, target population, sampling approach and unit of analysis are explained, supported by relevant methodological texts. The different sources of data are represented in a tabular summary and details of the ethnographic data collection are explained for each source. The analytic strategy employed is also described, showing how issues of credibility in data collection and analysis are addressed. The chapter in addition considers limitations with respect to the research design in terms of access, following which the criteria for the conclusion of the study are presented. Details of research protocol and administration from entry to exit phases

of fieldwork are given and a subsection addresses reflexivity employed in the research process.

### **3.2 Research Philosophy and Qualitative enquiry**

Qualitative inquiry is concerned with achieving an understanding of the phenomenon of interest, rather than in making causal explanations for observed phenomena. The premise is that social phenomena are different from the objects of study in the natural sciences and therefore require a different epistemological approach. In particular, a key difference is in the capacity of social actors i.e. people to attribute meaning to social events in their environment (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 402). As a result, qualitative research is influenced by interpretivism. To achieve a understanding of meanings attributed to social phenomena, a range of data types are the objects of analysis and include interviews, direct observations and written documents (Patton, 2002). These data sets usually emerge from fieldwork where the researcher spends time within the setting which is considered important to the study. Methodological skill, integrity and sensitivity are important for the researcher before, during and after fieldwork and impact on the quality of qualitative data. Given this, systematic and rigorous research procedures are necessary to demonstrate the credibility of research findings, by showing clear alignment between the underlying research philosophy and the research design.

The philosophical assumption guiding my literature review and which underpins the ontological status of culture adopted for this study is that culture is a socially constructed and complex phenomenon involving multiple actors and made up of symbolic and non-symbolic aspects (Geertz, 1973, Alvesson, 1993; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). To get at the meaning behind the symbols, culture needs to be accessed in its natural form through an experiential method which allows for expressions interpreted through non-predetermined categories (Schein, 1996). The epistemological approach which aligns with constructivism is one which emphasises qualitative and interpretive approaches to culture studies, whilst considering current and historically anchored influences on culture (Alvesson, 1993, p. 78; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Bryman and Bell, 2011).

These requirements suggest that organisational ethnography best yields richness and depth of understanding (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 8; Flores- Pereira et al., 2008). Ethnography is a research methodology in which the researcher plays a more active role in direct observation of the research setting and participants, in addition to obtaining data from interviews and documents which can be historical, archival, operational or from electronic media e.g. websites. (Silverman, 2011; Cassell and Symon, 2004, p. 313).

Ethnography has often been viewed as both a philosophical paradigm as well as a methodological practice by researchers. It is different from traditional ethnology which relies on secondary sources, sometimes considered as anthropological desk research and is concerned with a comparison of different cultures through their material artefacts rather than from direct observation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Ethnography is anchored on the philosophical approach of interactionism which prioritises reliance on fieldwork and direct contact with social actors in order to have a first-hand experience and understanding of their views. Procedural rigour and rules for the interactionist approach to research was introduced by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Silverman, 2011, p. 21) and provide support for the systematic approach to the conduct of ethnographic work. Ethnographic methodology thus became organised into different phases of information gathering, classification and analysis. An important aspect of the ethnographic research is the critical analysis of the researcher's own positioning and its impact on the research process. Awareness of the dynamics of the relationship with research participants in the setting and an explicit consideration of the researcher's positioning was introduced by William Foote Whyte (Silverman, 2011, p. 22) and introduced what is known as *reflexivity* into ethnographic research. Reflexivity thus becomes a recurring aspect of data gathering and analysis and improves the reliability of the data, given that the researcher is the primary research instrument.

### **3.3 Historical background to Ethnography**

Having over a hundred years of history, ethnography arose as a way of gaining knowledge and deeper understanding about distant cultures by Western scholars. It was made popular through the work of two English anthropologists in the late nineteenth

and early twentieth century: Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown. Malinowski is credited with developing a systematic approach to conducting ethnographic research. His work amongst the Kula people of the Trobriand islands resulted in an emic perspective of their culture- a view from within as opposed to an etic view, which is from outside the culture and more important for the interest of the analyst than the studied population. After the 1920s the ethnographic methodology was adopted by sociologists in the Chicago School and from there it moved into psychology and political science and later found its way into organisational research, employed by notable scholars of organisations (Dalton, 1959; van Maanen, 1988; van Maanen and Barley, 1984; Cassell and Symon, 2004, p. 313; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 2). Other variants of ethnographic methods which have been used in research are commercial, global, visual and feminist ethnography (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 449) as well as virtual and autoethnography (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 204; Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 707).

### **3.4 Justification for ethnographic research strategy**

The methodology of ethnography is relevant for guiding the ethnographer in transitioning from a stranger to becoming embedded in the context as a participant-member of the community in order to be able to experience the culture to a large extent, first-hand. Conventional anthropological assumptions underpinning ethnographic work suggest that uncertainty is an integral challenging aspect of ethnography faced by researchers given the emphasis on exploring unknown cultures and a ‘learning by doing’ ethic (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 79; van Maanen, 1975). Despite this, unfamiliarity with the setting is particularly advocated because it allows for more critical engagement with the taken-for-granted aspects of social life. While some ethnographic studies of organisations leverage on the familiarity of the researcher with the setting as useful for overcoming problems of access or facilitating understanding (Garthwaite, 2016; van Marrewijk, 2016), in contrast other studies incorporate critical distance by selecting unfamiliar home country contexts (Latour & Woolgar, 1986, p. 28-29; Ager, 2011).



Many studies have employed ethnography in understanding culture in organisations (Latour, and Woolgar, 1986; Schwartzman, 1993; van Maanen, 1975; Ager, 2011; Frandsen, 2015; van Marrewijk, 2016; Garthwaite, 2016;). However, a merger and acquisition (M&A) organisational context is relevant to study given issues around trust and change which present a more nuanced problem of differences in meanings, uncertainty and cultural complexity than in a single organisation (Ager, 2011, p. 201; Marrewijk, 2016). Marrewijk (2016) and Cartwright et al. (2012) particularly identify the dearth of ethnographic studies on mergers and acquisitions in the literature and my research adds to this body of studies.

Some case studies (Sackmann, 1992; Pettigrew 1979) on cultural subgroups in organisations have attempted to make use of research approaches similar to anthropological techniques for data collection. The combination of interviews, observations and written documents allow for an inductive approach to the case studies and reveal cultural subgroups along functional or hierarchical lines. The study by Jermier et al. (1991) also identified the existence of subcultures in organisations however the study made use of quantitative approaches to measure the more visible components of organisational subcultures, leaving out the less visible but significant aspects of culture which ethnographic methods are able to uncover.

The ethnographic approach is considered relevant in organisational research because of its unique consideration of routine, everyday actions in addition to symbolic organisational activity (Alvesson, 1993, Martin and Meyerson, 1988; Trice and Beyer, 1984). Furthermore, it allows for closer encounters with the non-observable aspects of culture and probing of the taken-for-granted aspects of organisational life to reveal context specific insights, increased depth and detail (Martin, 2002). Cartwright (2012) acknowledged the need for an insider lens to M&A studies where the researcher's observation of the merger transaction plays a key role. However, beyond observations of the financial side of the M&A transaction, it is essential to include observation during the integration phase in order to achieve understanding about the interaction of cultures and meaning systems in a post-acquisition context. The ethnographic approach is therefore considered necessary for getting behind the observable and accessing layers of meaning embedded in a culturally diverse organisational context of relations such as we have in a merger and acquisition.

### 3.5 Research Design

The case study design is most appropriate to answer my particular research questions because it gives rich insight into details of perceptions, interpretations and meanings given by employees to their environment (Yin, 1989). In addition, it enables an in-depth understanding of the specific organisational context of interest in order to explore the different dimensions of the concept of culture. Eliciting information about values, attitudes and meanings requires an interpretive methodology and as a result, cultural research often adopts a case study approach because of the importance of context. Cultural phenomena are best studied in the context within which they occur because each context is unique and therefore each organisation would give distinctive information on its characteristics i.e. values, assumptions or practices.

This research was therefore designed as an ethnographic case study and consistent with anthropological methods of conducting cultural research, an open-ended approach was taken to the research design such that it was able to support exploration of embedded aspects of cultural interactions in the selected case; a post-merger context of relations. The research questions initially motivating the study were refined over the course of the research and collection of data became more strategic as the inquiry became more focused (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 4). Given that the research was conducted in a naturally occurring setting, the design was kept flexible so as to accommodate changes that might occur in the course of field work. The case study approach has been frequently used in the management literature to study social phenomena such as social structure, discipline, punishment and culture in organisations (Foucault, 1977; Goffman, 1961; van Maanen, 1975; Chen, 1999; Sackman 1992; Kunda, 2006; Jermier et al., 1991 and van Marrewijk, 2016). A case study approach allows for a focused and in-depth exploration of interactions between communities in an organisation and the emphasis is on understanding the complex nature of interactions in the particular case (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p.59). While it is acknowledged that results from case studies are often less generalizable, the strength of case study research lies in the richness of the insights that can be generated towards theory building (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 59). In addition, the case study approach affords the ability to provide analytical generalisability. The level of understanding possible in a case study is further deepened

by adopting an anthropological research strategy such as an ethnographic approach to case study research.

Within the ethnographic methodology, several research strategies are employed such as: participant observation, interviewing, analysis of documentary sources and archival material, retrospective historical analysis and audio visual materials which provide ancillary sources of information (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 3; Silverman, 2011, p. 17, Ager, 2011). The multiple sources of data are integrated in order to achieve a richer understanding and interpretation of culture. In addition, triangulating between data sources enables the researcher to get behind the façade that members of the cultural community may present to an outsider. In this way, the researcher can overcome social desirability biases and data targeted at impression management (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 226).

Due to the richness of insights made possible from triangulation of data sources, ethnographic approaches to qualitative research have been adopted by researchers in diverse ways. Some studies triangulate between different sources of data, particularly interviews, short observations and documentary analysis, while others employ innovative approaches to the methodology (Duncan, 1989; Witmer, 1997; Wilson, 2000). For example, Witmer (1997) applied Giddens's theory of structuration to the analysis of ethnographic data, using an interpretive, interactionist methodology. Wilson (2000) combined a 'repertory grid method' of repeated interviewing with group discussions, supplemented by analysis of company documents, observation and reflection by the author to incorporate reflexivity into the research. Duncan (1989) chose to combine obtrusive observation with self-administered questionnaires and personal interviews. These approaches show variations in research methodologies used in the studies. There have been disagreements amongst ethnographers regarding how best to facilitate in-depth understanding, particularly critiques of short-term interviews as 'smash and grab' ethnographies (Martin et al., 2004). Some researchers take the position that the longitudinal aspect of ethnography is fundamental to uncovering the most truthful account from an insider's perspective, differentiating it from shorter studies which would be considered as exploratory pilot tests (Pettigrew 1990).

Despite the differences in views, what is essential is that the researcher is able to achieve in-depth understanding and interpretation of the culture studied through a first-hand experience as a participant in the community (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

This study employed the techniques of participant observation combined with semi-structured interviews and analysis of documentary and historical texts which facilitated the establishment of a direct relationship with the actors in the setting of interest (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Triangulation between the different sources of data was done iteratively in order to achieve a holistic picture of the organisation's culture and also as a means to cross check findings (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 397). Continuous observation was conducted for a period of six months however overall contact was maintained with the field site over a period of two years. During the continuous period of observation, the researcher participated in the daily rituals and activities of the social actors which include daily meetings, adhoc briefing or strategic sessions, social events outside the field site, on-site lunch, informal mini-celebrations and casual conversations. The continuous period of observation was useful for exposing the underworkings of organisational life which may not have been easily accessible or observable from interview sessions or documentary texts alone.

### **3.6 Participants**

The research is set in the context of an organisational merger and acquisition process (MAP) within the industrial manufacturing industry. The participants for this study were drawn from the population of merged employees from both the acquiring organisation, Alpha-D (the pseudonym of Alpha-D was given to protect anonymity of organisation) and the acquired organisation, Brownfield (also a pseudonym). The population was made up of interacting workgroups within a division named as the Dora Division. The workgroups that are the focus of the study are those which are connected by their functional work on the same product line, which are highly complex and specialised image capturing products such as cameras and scanners. The workgroups were classified into core and project-based workgroups. While core workgroups had fairly stable membership, project-based workgroups were more dynamic in composition

and membership depended on relevance to the current project. Formal interactions took place within meetings which varied in frequency and duration across the workgroups. Informal interactions however occurred both during and outside formal workgroup meetings.

Both formal and informal settings are studied as both are important for providing opportunity to observe behaviours under different conditions.

### **3.6.1 Population**

The study population is drawn from employees in an organisation which has experienced a MAP. The acquired population is located within a particular division known as the Dora Division and has been spread out across different teams but with the majority being within the research and development group. Figure 3.1 shows the embedded position of the acquired group. The acquired population consists of back-office and customer-facing teams. The back-office roles are mainly development-type roles and are carried out by six sub-units known collectively as the Lab. Employees in the Lab are software and hardware developers. The other non-lab teams include customer service, technical support and marketing / sales teams. In terms of demographics, there were more males than females as shown in table 3.1. Also, observation revealed that the setting was made up of a mix of different nationalities. For example, employees were observed to be British, European, Indian, Asian, American and African, reflecting a multicultural grouping. In terms of work status, about two-thirds of the employees in the Lab were fulltime while almost one-third were hired as contract or support staff as shown in table 3.1.

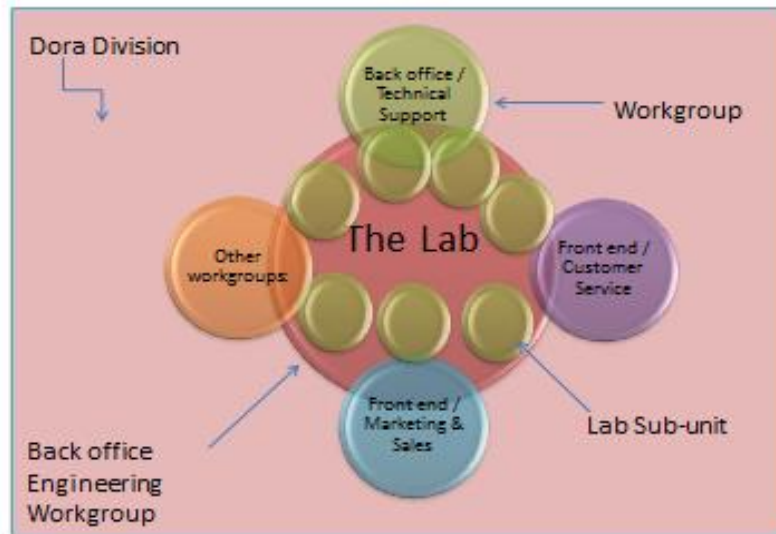


Figure 3.1 The embedded position of the acquired engineering population

Table 3.1: Statistical details of the target population.

S/N	Team	Size	Gender		Employee status		
			Male	Female	FTE <sup>5</sup>	Contract	
1	Lab	23	20	3	17	6	
2	Technical support	5	5	0	5	0	
3	Customer Service	3	0	3	2	1	
4	Manufacturing	6	4	2	6	0	
5	Business (Marketing/sales)	7	5	2	7	0	
6	Total	44	34	10	37	7	

<sup>5</sup> FTE- Full Time Employee

### 3.6.2 Unit of analysis and sampling

The unit of analysis which was the focus of the investigation was the culture in the engineering Lab, and was studied through observations and interviews conducted with middle management and operational level employees. Middle managers are in a relatively higher position in the organisational hierarchy and given their experience, it is anticipated that their decisions would be more considered. Lower-level employees on the other hand tend to be associated with relatively less years of experience and it is anticipated that their decisions will be more knee-jerk or immediate. These two groups will provide opportunities to compare responses across hierarchical as well as functional lines on the different kinds of issues that arise with respect to cultural integration. The primary focus of data collection was therefore on the events, structure, interactions and meanings within the sample of acquired employees (Patton, 2002, p. 228).

A non-probability sampling approach was adopted in two stages for the study; first a purposive sampling approach and secondly a heterogeneous sampling approach (Patton, 2002, p. 230; Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 441) in terms of the selected case as well as the participants within the case respectively. The organisation which provided the context for the study was purposefully selected because of its relevance to the purpose of the research questions and potential for allowing in-depth research into understanding the phenomenon of culture in a diverse context (Patton, 2002, p. 230). The organisation had experienced a MAP two and a half years before the field work study began. The time period of two and a half years was considered in conjunction with advice from my academic supervisors as suitable for providing sufficient opportunities to investigate diverse cultural interactions following the merger, ahead of possible disappearance of important cultural nuances.

The second stage of the sampling was to adopt a heterogeneous sampling approach which is useful for capturing a wide variation such that central themes can be elicited (Patton, 2002, p. 234). The sample of participants for observations and interviews was drawn from functionally different work groups within the division which had ‘acquired’ the new employees in order to facilitate an in-depth study. The number of interview participants stood at twenty-four, based on the statistics of available information of the

target population. This number falls within the normal range of participants within Organisation and Workplace research which considers between 15 and 60 participants as the broad norm for practice (Saunders and Townsend, 2016, p. 845; van Marrewijk, 2016, p. 343). Many of these were accessed through snowball sampling which provided links to participants known to have relevant and rich information (Patton, 2002, p. 243). Sample participants were selected to allow for adequate representation in terms of key characteristics (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 442) based on a number of researcher-identified considerations such as functional differentiation, company of origin pre-merger, gender and rank in order to identify common patterns and core experiences that emerge across the different criteria (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 38). Thinking around developing a representative sample was recorded during data collection. (Field Journal 1, p. 134). In addition, interview participants were selected drawing on the typology of Dean et al. (1967, p. 285, cross referenced in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) which underlines choosing participants who are either considerably sensitive to the research area or who are more willing to reveal information. As the research progressed, participants were also selected based on their relevance to providing data supporting emerging categories and ideas. The purposive sampling rationale as a whole accounted for variations in characteristics of the target population in the following ways:

1. Relevance to the population of study. The study sample was drawn from the target population of the Division which is a mix of legacy Alpha-D and legacy Brownfield employees as well as additional employees recruited after the acquisition. These three groups existed in the same division and were spread out in different work groups, interacting at different levels of collaboration.
2. Inclusive work group set: The study sample was selected from all available workgroups within the population, to ensure that there was adequate representation of workgroups as sources of data (See figure 3.1).
3. Percentage of membership interviewed: For each work group studied, more than 50% of the members were interviewed.
4. Gender representation: Despite a significantly higher proportion of males than females in the total target population, both genders were accounted for as interview participants (please see Table 3.1).



5. Hierarchical representation: Within individual work groups, middle managers and team members were interviewed. Middle managers and team members were included in the sample in order to achieve a balance of views and perceptions about organisational culture, irrespective of work experience, work status or company origin (pre-merger) which could influence the type of responses obtained from participants. These two groups allowed for a comparison of responses across hierarchical as well as functional lines regarding individual or intersubjective perceptions of the dimensions of culture as well as identification of common patterns.
6. Employment status: Workgroups studied were made up of both full time employees and contractors to allow for a comparison of perspectives based on work status.
7. Age representation: The sample of interview participants was made up of those within a wide age-range. They were selected such that observable age differences and how these might influence perspectives could be taken into account.

Sampling was also done with time considerations in mind in order to access data during different time periods in the organisation and provide adequate coverage of any variations in data due to time of collection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 35). With respect to timing, workgroups were studied based on three time considerations:

1. Scheduled meetings: Groups were observed within structured meetings which occurred on a regular basis. For example, observation of team leaders' weekly meetings. These meetings took place in a pre-arranged location (meeting room) on an agreed date and time.
2. In unscheduled situations: In semi-structured contexts such as when informal meetings took place around the work area. Several instances of unplanned meetings were observed where most of the participants stood together around the work area. For example, after a virtual meeting, participants who dialled in often congregated immediately after to discuss about the meeting. These informal discussions were relatively short and lasted for periods ranging from 5 – 25 minutes.

3. In unstructured contexts: Work groups were observed while they were working at their desks, oblivious to being observed. These observations were conducted at random times during the work day.
4. Continuously: Following an initial 4-5 week period of building rapport with members of the population of study, observations of scheduled and unscheduled meetings, as well as random observations were conducted throughout the rest of the six month ethnographic study up until exiting the field site.

### **3.6.3 Tabular summary of data types**

As indicated in the opening section of this chapter, ethnographic approaches to the study of culture emphasise participant observation as a primary method of data collection and combine it with other sources of data such as interviews, documents and informal conversations (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2011; Schwartzman, 1993; Evans, 2012). The specific sources of data for this study are participant observation, interviews, informal conversations, documents and field notes which reflect both observations and analytical memos. The participant observation covered 53 events which include meetings and informal gatherings in both structured and unstructured contexts. The different settings provided a way to become acquainted with routine and symbolic activities in the setting as well as a means of eliciting patterns in meaning, interaction and cohesion emerging from the observations. Casual conversations were spontaneous and informal, occurring several times throughout the day on the field. They provided opportunity to access different participants, build rapport, develop relationships and thereby be in a position to clarify or confirm previously observed data. Interviews were conducted with a total of 24 participants out of which 18 transcripts were utilised during data analysis. The criteria for selection are discussed in section 3.6.2. The interviews provided a strong opportunity to both access data and simultaneously build trust with the participants, through assuring them of confidentiality and anonymity. The close interpersonal exchange also made it possible to access participants' thoughts regarding their systems of meaning and to identify

patterns across several participants. It was also possible to identify contradictions and tensions in data as well as an understanding of cohesive ties within the setting as a result of comparisons between data from different participants. The documents provided access to written and audio-visual data from the company's records in the form of historical contextual data, financial reports, video material and public relations documents. These were a more static representation of data and were useful as complements to the more dynamic and real-life observations. Analytical memos were the researcher's documentation of initial sense-making of the data as they emerged during field work. The provided a way to represent early stages of understanding of the data and formed the basis of initial sensitising concepts used to code the data. These concepts also guided further data collection or clarification as field work progressed. The data sources are summarised below in table 3.2.

**Table 3.2: Summary of data sources, participants, types and purpose.**

S/N	Source of data	Frequency	Type / purpose of data	Participants
1	Participant Observation:  -Structured (meetings)  -Unstructured (gatherings in work and non- work spaces):	50 events       3 events	Patterns of meaning (POM), patterns of interaction (POI - role- based and non-role based), cohesive (fictive kinship) ties, collaboration, tensions.	Lab workgroup team leads  Business workgroup team leads  Members of 6 Lab subgroups  Customer service team  Technical service team  Cross-functional Project team  Cross-functional strategy team

2	Casual conversations	Target population - 44 participants;  Lab population – 20 participants	Access building, rapport development, clarification, additional information for confirmation purposes, spontaneity.	
3	Interviews	24	Trust building (NDA, anonymity, confidentiality, further probing of POM, POI, confirmation of cohesive ties, collaborations and tensions.	-Customer service  -Business  -6 Lab sub-units  -Technical support  -Administrative support
4	Documents	4 categories	-Annual reports  -Background organisational information (accessed on-line)  -Excerpts of confidential company documents  -Company publication (historical), audio-visual material.	Historical data and context, data confirmation, triangulation.
5	Analytical memos		Developing understanding, initial categories, researcher sense-making, and reliability of research instrument.	

### **3.7 Ethnographic Data Collection**

Guided by the theoretical framework of the study and research questions, observations of the relevant population of interest were carried out in different contexts as described in the preceding sections. Participant observation covered a total of 90 events within which 51 were observed meetings across different workgroups and others ranged from informal conversations with individuals and groups to informal events. Data from participant observations were recorded in a research diary as quickly as possible after occurrence and re-written more clearly in descriptive prose form after the day's field work had ended.

#### **3.7.1 Data collection: Participant Observation**

Participant observation in the field will be described with respect to three stages: Passive observation stage, which drew on unstructured as well as focused observations, an engaging passive observation stage and lastly, a participant observation stage.

I began my fieldwork in an unstructured way to allow me to build relationships and develop rapport with the members of the population. This enabled me to observe and understand the unit's norms, routines and cultural background. Along the row of desk hubs, I was assigned a desk within the hub next to the lab leader's hub. The positioning may have signalled the importance of my role to the team, given the proximity to the lab leader's desk. However, I could not help wondering if I had been purposely positioned where my activities could easily be seen. In the early days, I had noticed quite a few glances in my direction which indicated that as I observed passively, I was also being observed by those sitting around me. Resisting the urge to constantly check if I was being observed, I gradually learnt to overcome the initial discomfort of being the centre of attention and relax while being watched. After some time, I identified a friendly face, a participant with whom I was able to develop rapport due to my perception of similarity in our ages. I gently approached the participant who then became my first informal informant. During our early informal conversations, I actively listened, watching out for clues about sensitive areas or issues within the team. I made a mental note of them so as to guard against triggering them and avoiding social blunders

in my early days on the field. Having established some level of rapport with the first participant, I asked for a formal introduction to others who would be happy to speak with me informally about their work. I was then introduced to a few other employees outside the lab but within the division who appeared to also be young colleagues. Snowballing method of sampling was employed in accessing participants for informal conversations.

In conversing with subsequent participants, two techniques of unstructured and focused conversations were used. With respect to unstructured casual conversations, free flowing conversations were employed throughout the period of the research and were primarily useful for building relationships with members of the population. Casual conversations opened up opportunity for participants to conduct a closer examination of me as a person and as a researcher. Over a period of 4 weeks, initial barriers encountered in the early days on the field site such as a lack of trust and suspicion due to newness in the environment were lowered in a non-threatening way. The use of focused casual conversations was drawn on where a participant had been interacted with sufficiently and a level of comfort had been attained with me as the researcher. I began to ask more specific questions to obtain information on current events, daily routines, technical language or aspects of the participant's work. I became aware of growing comfort with me as participants began to share more personal details with me and we engaged in more non-work conversations. I used the opportunity to also respond to their enquiries about myself as a student, sharing some background information.

In the engaging passive-observation stage, emphasis was on achieving social integration with sufficient differentiation of my identity as a researcher. Whilst not wanting to be totally conventional, I made efforts to blend in with the observable culture of the Brownfield team, for example, dressing to mirror the relaxed business casual dress style, working independently and quietly on my assigned desk as well as using a low voice when speaking. Gradually, I developed my blended yet unconventional identity. As I had no strict formal structure for making enquiries and was aware of the need to ease in gently into relationships, I leveraged on current events as springboards for discussions and asked questions about those events e.g. staff baking competition, exclusive trainings, meetings etc. Also, there were many acronyms used in the organisation and so I employed this same strategy to frequently ask for clarification,

emphasising my student-learner role. Participants were generally happy to provide explanations and as a result of this opening, I was able to break the ice with them and position myself for a subsequent encounter. This was particularly used in meetings in which I was an observer.

In the participant - observation stage, I became more involved in the routine activities in the target population's context. The lab leader was instrumental to helping with securing access to meetings of the business and manufacturing workgroups. He sent out e-mails to the key leaders of the groups introducing me and highlighting that a non-disclosure agreement between me and the organisation was in place. Other participants with whom I had developed rapport facilitated my access to observe other work group meetings. Of the six workgroups in the division, I was able to observe meetings in four groups. The other 2 groups operated on a more informal basis and were not seen to hold any formal meetings during the period of study. In total, 51 meetings were observed across the different workgroups in the division. Out of these, two were informal social events which held in pubs outside the premises of the company.

Given the specialist, technical and confidential nature of the lab engineering work, I was not allocated any formal role in the team despite my repeated enquiries about how I could be of help in the team. The lab leader later made a comment about the sensitive nature of the lab work, particularly with the organisation's sensitivity to its intellectual property, data, security and access. These would make it difficult to find a formal role for me during the period of my research. However, participants who attended weekly meetings had been made aware of my role as a student researcher and I accordingly assumed the status of a student-learner (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 71). This was an attempt to find a balance in a role which would be non-threatening and would enable me to access information easily.

During meetings, I mirrored the actions of participants as they made notes, making my own observation notes as they wrote. In the earlier meetings, I was conscious of being watched. To reduce the discomfort posed by my presence and note taking, I wrote scantily and legibly, putting down only key words, while focusing more on relying on memory and transcribing the notes on my desk immediately after the meeting. In subsequent meetings and as the participants relaxed more, I wrote more copious notes

and simultaneously reduced the size of my writing. Participants gradually became comfortable with my presence and less concerned with my note taking. I also observed that they were more relaxed in posture and became more vocal in talking about their dissatisfaction with Alpha-D processes and resulting frustrations for their work. I noted that contrary to my observations during my first meeting with each work group where they seemed to avoid eye contact with me, as they became more comfortable, they made more eye contact with me during open discussions which indicated some measure of inclusion for me as a member of the team. In most of the groups, I was formally asked if I had any comments during the meeting. I used the opportunity to break the ice further by asking for clarification on the many acronyms used or explanations of Alpha-D processes. They were usually happy to oblige and attended to my questions. On one occasion, I made a suggestion about resource allocation in one of the sub unit meetings which was later on adopted, although the team leader was silent about the source of the idea. I was pleased to see that in some way, I had contributed to adding value to the team's activities albeit in a non-technical capacity. After attending several meetings, I began to ask formally for interviews with participants.

### **3.7.2 Data collection: Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 participants in total as indicated earlier using an interview guide shown in Appendix D (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p. 16). Out of these, 18 were selected for analysis. The sample of participants was drawn based on the following criteria:

1. The relevance and importance of the data the participants generate in relation the research questions.
2. The representative nature of the participants' roles, particularly functionally different roles with potentially conflicting relations in the post-merger environment. This allows for exploring the range of possible conflict areas in the interaction of different meaning systems.
3. Gender: Male and female participants are included in the interview sample so as to account for a balance of gender perspectives amongst participants.



The interviews also reflect perspectives from participants coming from different company backgrounds as a way to incorporate possible differences in diverse legacy cultures. The participants can be classified under those from Brownfield, existing Alpha-D employees, those from a separate acquisition which occurred before Brownfield's or new employees who joined after the Brownfield acquisition and relocation to site.

After duly obtaining consent of interviewees, some interviews were recorded manually as notes inside research field diaries or recorded digitally with the aid of a digital recorder and all were subsequently transcribed. Files created for interview recordings and transcriptions were stored in secure locations on the University storage system. Participants were selected within the framework of constraints of available time, organisational routines and activities, relevance of emerging data to the research interests. Initial interviews were unrecorded and short in duration as shown in Appendix D and served as pilot tests for the research questions in order to open up conversation, build rapport and elicit issues of relevance to the participants. The strategy of piloting questions about emerging areas of inquiry was useful throughout data collection and interviewing, given the flexible approach which ethnographic methods offer. Interview participants were recruited in two ways; first, access to a core group in the target population was facilitated by a gatekeeper and key informant. Secondly, through snowballing method, interview participants acted as bridges in introducing their colleagues who they believed had rich and relevant experience, useful for the study. Table 3 in appendix 1 shows the schedule of interviews during the fieldwork period.

From the interview guide, initial questions surrounding previous work experience and current experiences since the acquisition were used to obtain general background information from against which specific concerns could be further probed. In general, the initial pilot interviews enabled me to build familiarity with the participant as well as get accustomed to posing questions and probing answers in a flexible, unstructured manner. The sample of the interview guide is in appendix F. The actual articulation of questions varied from participant to participant but the general line of enquiry was the same. i.e. questions about the participant's self, work history, recollections of work culture, recollections of thoughts and feelings about acquisition, descriptions of observations and perceptions, thoughts about current organisation, perceptions about the culture and sometimes, comparisons between previous organisation and Alpha-D.

While general opening questions were used to build rapport and sometimes areas of commonality with the participant, probing questions which followed were used as a follow up question or to seek clarification usually because of the data's relevance to revealing information about the research agenda. Questions were adjusted where participant responses suggested that they were not well understood. The initial pilot interviews were not recorded, in line with the participant's preference. Notes made were therefore transcribed and analysed before subsequent interviews were conducted.

### **3.7.3 Data collection: Documents**

A number of documents provided sources of both contextual and additional data in the study. These include: operational documents encountered during routine daily observations and activities such as e-mails, reports and other documents generated on an adhoc basis, historical material from the archives of the organisation such as books, press print outs, audio-visual material and public relations documents, documents specifically requested from the intranet website of the organisation which illuminate its structural characteristics and policies, as well as publicly accessible websites showing information on the organisation and the industrial context. These documents were complemented by the researcher's field notes and reflexive analytical memos documenting observations and preliminary sense-making and analytical thinking.

## **3.8 Analysis of the study**

Consistent with ethnographic methods of analysis, this study uses an iterative process of data analysis throughout the data collection stage through to after exiting the field site. Data is analysed using the approach of thematic analysis (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 158; Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 572) which identifies themes built up from codes which explain the field note and interview data as indicated in Appendix H and I respectively. The analysis of data covers contextual and participant observation as well as interview data as explained subsequently.

### 3.8.1 Analysis of context and participant observation data

Contextual, documentary and participant observation data are integrated into a descriptive narrative of the background to the study in chapter four. The description covers the observed culture in the setting amongst the different workgroups in the division, paying attention to values, symbols, language, practices, norms, rules, rituals, beliefs and meanings. From the analysis of the context, preliminary sensitising concepts are generated to identify patterns in the data. The aim is also to look for anything that stands out, is unexpected or surprising, inconsistent or contradictory among views expressed (Silverman, 2011, p. 277).

The description of observations reveals where the conceptual labels emerge from as shown in Appendix H (Silverman, 2011, p. 276). Some concepts were self-developed, some were identified by participants while others draw on the literature and common sense knowledge (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 163). The conceptual descriptions form the basis of the derived themes. Concepts with similar attributes were grouped under a more specific category of definitive concepts which then become subsets of broader thematic labels. Figure 3.2 shows an example of the relationship between initial concepts, categories and the emergent theme. A recurrent process of coding was used to check consistency between new categories which emerge and evidence of such in previously coded data. Subsequently and following several readings of field notes, key themes emerging from analysis of descriptive contextual data are developed. These are presented in the first section of the findings chapter, summarised in Table 4.1.

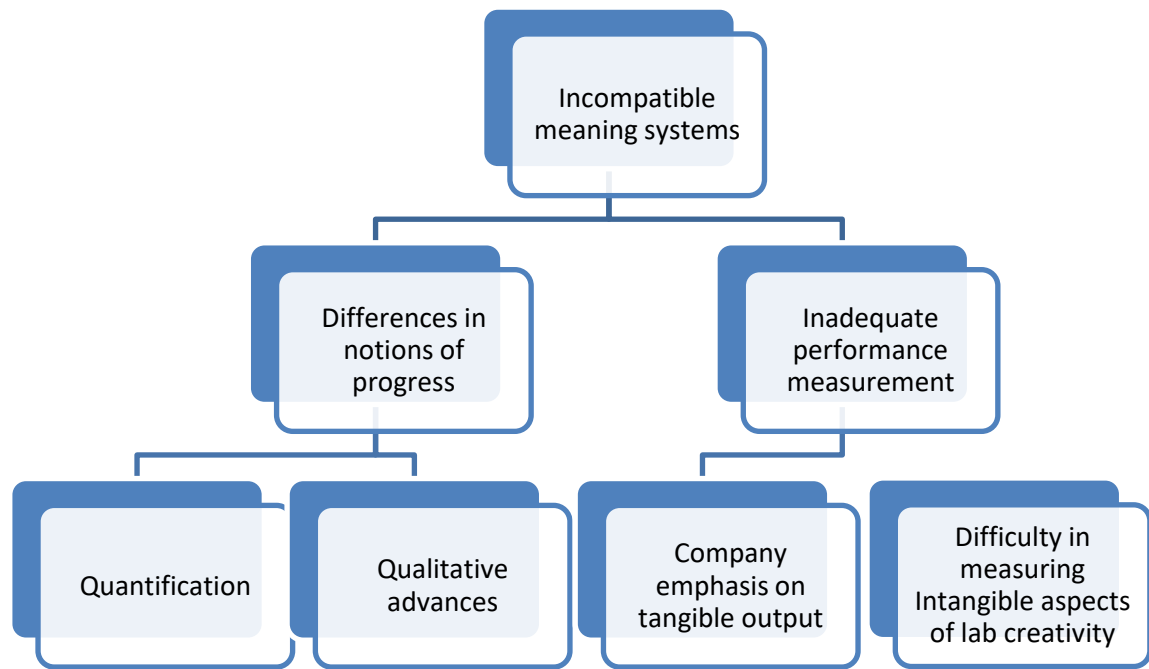


Figure 3.2 A representation of the analytic process.

### 3.8.2 Analysis of interviews

The interview transcripts are thematically analysed through an initial process of looking for patterns in the content to determine what is of significance. Conceptual labels are given to sections of data as shown in Appendix I, indicating initial notions about the data and its possible use, paying attention to values, symbols, language, practices, norms, rules, rituals, beliefs and meanings. These are summarised in Appendix G as the initial sensitising concepts which were generated to identify any patterns in the data. Similar to the analytic strategy for the participant observation data, the concepts were developed from diverse sources such as: research participants, the literature and common sense knowledge (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) and other concepts which were self-developed. The conceptual labels help in making sense of the interview data as a whole and reveal not only patterns but inconsistencies in the data (Silverman, 2011, p. 277). Further analysis and subsequent readings of the interview data was used to organise the concepts formally in a systematic way. Concepts which have comparable characteristics are clustered into specific themes. The process of coding was repetitive

in order to check for consistency between data previously coded under existing themes and emerging new themes.

Themes emerging from the analysis of interviews are presented in the second section of the findings chapter, summarised in table 4.2. Following a similar analytic strategy, the themes are drawn from the analysis of both digital and manual recordings of interview data which are transcribed as soon after collection as possible.<sup>6</sup> Transcripts are re-read several times to ensure consistency between alternative explanations of the data (new categories) and previously coded data (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 174). Thereafter, conceptual labels which help to make sense of the data are identified and organised into categories, which are further aggregated into themes.

The thematic analysis confirms the patterns from the contextual data as well as reveals the meanings behind the emerging patterns, further deepening understanding of earlier identified themes. In the third section of the findings chapter, I attempt to draw linkages and propose relationships between the different themes emerging from the data. The analytic strategy as a whole was guided by well-known approaches as referenced (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 163; Silverman, 2011, p. 277, 276) to enable a critical analysis, interpretation and discussion of data, uninfluenced by cultural preconceptions from the researcher.

### **3.8.3 Credibility of data collection and analysis**

In order to improve the credibility of the data collected, a triangulation of data collection methods as well as sources was built into the research (Patton, 2002, p. 556). As depicted in table 3.1, the sources of data include participant observation, interviews, informal conversations, documents and historical data publicly available on the internet regarding the merging organisations. Data from observations were triangulated with direct questioning of specific observations during some interviews and also investigating such data in documents reviewed.

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<sup>6</sup> Manual records are transcribed on the same day. Digital records which take much longer to transcribe are transcribed as soon as possible after collection.

Within each method, care was taken to also triangulate between sources of data to guard against bias in data collected (Patton, 2002, p. 556). For example, to overcome bias in observations, events were sampled on the basis of different time periods to account for any interesting patterns that emerge across the different times of observation. For example, routine activities such as meetings were observed on core days<sup>7</sup> as well as occasional odd days. Similarly, observation was conducted across different contexts on-site and off-site. Within the body of interview data, the strategy was to triangulate between perspectives of participants from interviews with a representative sample from the target population as discussed earlier under this chapter's subsection on purposive and heterogeneous sampling. To address bias in documentary material analysis, the strategy used was to explore the origins of the document to be aware of and consider possible agendas built into the social production of the document at origin (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 130) and then complement with data from other documentary sources such as publicly available data, media material and operational documents generated in the course of daily work.

Given that I was the primary researcher / observer in the study, it was not possible to triangulate between observers. However, regular review sessions during the period of field work were organised with my academic supervisors as a way to bring in independent views on the analysis of the emerging data collected. In addition, discussions with key informants and gatekeepers from time to time during and after the field-work provided on-going opportunities to check emerging conceptual labels and categories as well as interpretations of observations with participants and have them confirm or react to findings (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 396; Patton, 2002, p. 560).

#### **3.8.4 Researcher credibility and preparation for field work**

As established by relevant academic texts on the conduct of qualitative research, the researcher is the research instrument in ethnographic research (Sanday, 1979; Patton, 2002, p. 566) and given the need to improve reliability in ethnographic data collection, it was necessary to be prepared. To this end, several relevant courses on ethnographic

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<sup>7</sup>Core days in the target population referred to three work days in a week.

research were attended within and outside the University such as: Anthropological Research Methods course (with theoretical and practical components), advanced qualitative research course, a number of seminars on research design and research methods. In addition, the philosophical perspective taken by the researcher is one which recognises subjectivist approaches as relevant to understanding social phenomena. In terms of epistemological considerations, as emphasised in the earlier paragraphs of this chapter, an interpretivist approach was adopted for analysing the study's findings.

In terms of other relevant preparation, the researcher brought a prior knowledge of culture theory, qualitative research methods and experiential understanding of mergers and acquisitions to the research and field site. In the research setting, the researcher's background characteristics of a non-Caucasian<sup>8</sup>, female and middle-aged participant observer are relevant to report because they are recognised as being able to potentially affect initial reception or perceptions and subsequent data gathered from participants who are predominantly Caucasian and male. To counter the effects of sharp contrasts in researcher-researched demographics, the early phase of overt observations were used to build up some predictability in mutual observations (between the researcher and participants) of daily patterns which then facilitated initial conversations preceding interviews. This became useful for counteracting the effects of the reactivity problem which could distort data and the findings of the study.

The research was independently carried out without external funding or any form of financial arrangement with the case study organisation. Access was gained to the field site through independently and personally approaching gatekeepers after attending a keynote speech organised for University alumni which was held at the organisation's site. Personal reviews of publicly available information on the historical background of the organisation revealed it to be a suitable context, abounding with mergers and acquisitions. Further examination indicated that the most recent acquisition fell within the time-frame of interest and was a strong motivator in the decision to approach the gatekeepers. There were no personal connections to the people studied, however, the topic is of personal interest given that the researcher has previously been an employee and middle manager respectively in previous contexts of a merger and acquisition.

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<sup>8</sup> Sub-Saharan African

### **3.9 Limitations of the study regarding access, conduct, sampling and data collection.**

Research results of qualitative case studies are by design dependent on and sensitive to the characteristics of the case (Patton, 2002). Design decisions put boundaries around data available or accessible. i.e. due to purposive sampling, and so design constraints may impact on the analysis. In this study, the sampling approach was purposive to enable engagement with the relevant population of interest. In conducting participant observations, there is a natural limitation in the sense that the researcher is unable to observe all events simultaneously. Had I the luxury of some process of triangulation between observers, while fully noting its relevance for reducing potential single-observer bias but also issues with inter-observer consistency (Patton, 2002, p. 560; Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 279), additional richness in my ethnographic experience would have been welcome. However, this would be a costly, cumbersome and perhaps more lengthy research choice which is not so much in line with the realities of original PhD research. Due to the physical limitations of the researcher, observation was limited largely to days of the week when the population of interest worked on site. Occasionally, days outside this band were included. Within the available time, there were also limitations as to the breadth of activities that could be engaged in, which is expected in ethnographic research. The real-life nature of the organisation meant that choices needed to be made about what data collection strategy to adopt based on the availability of participants and factoring in of any unscheduled occurrences. To address this limitation, an understanding of routine patterns was obtained in the early phase of field work and based on the predictability observed, key routines were systematically observed which then gave sufficient confidence in observing non-routine incidents and planning interviews or documentary analysis around the identified routines of participants. Also, communication lines were kept open with former interview participants as a way of ensuring continuous flow of data and comparing previous data with emerging ones. Limitations are also associated with selection of participants in the purposive sample. For a few who indicated a lack of interest in being interviewed, members of their workgroups as well as other workgroups were interviewed as a means of triangulating data on both the workgroups and the unavailable participants. Representation was built into the sample through the selection of both interview and observation participants across criteria of functional area, employee category, gender,



merger position, which refers to the organisation of origin; acquirer or acquired, length of work experience and work status (middle manager/ operational/senior manager).

There were also limitations to the time available for continuous fieldwork given boundaries around the available time for completing a full-time PhD programme, which is three years (in the UK). This constraint made it necessary to allocate six months of ethnographic field work to the research, as against the traditional anthropological tradition of two years. To address this limitation, contact was maintained with key participants after the end of formal field work. The research site was visited five times following fieldwork completion to allow for some reactions to the description of the data during feedback and review by some research participants as well as further data gathering for confirmation of emergent themes. The total period of contact with the field site thus extended to just over twenty-six months. As consistent with case study research, the sample is purposive because the research was designed to study the case in detail to achieve depth of understanding. Purposive sampling is conventionally not aimed at generalising sample results to other populations, times or situations (Patton, 2002, p. 563), given that its strength is to enable in-depth insights into the studied population. Consequently, the results of this ethnographic case study have relevance for the context studied however, broader implications are discussed in the discussion and concluding chapters.

### **3.10 Criteria for the completion of study**

The field work was carried out over a period of six months. There have been different views regarding the length of time appropriate for ethnographic field work (Patton, 2002, p. 273-274) as these tend to vary with type of research and peculiarities of the field site. For example, Action or evaluation research would require a shorter period than an ongoing evaluation research. For this study, a six month period, divided into two three-month periods of continuous presence and embeddedness in the context was considered appropriate for data gathering in order to allow the researcher to be immersed in the natural context and access underlying meanings while experiencing the culture first-hand in an intimate way (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p. 313; Hammersley

and Atkinson, 2011, p. 3). The six month period provided the benefit of allowing sufficient time for the researcher to build interpersonal relationships, trust and rapport with participants and leverage on these to follow through participant observations with in-depth interviews and analysis of various documents generated by the organisation.

As data collection and analysis progressed, emerging conceptual labels confirmed initial labels identified in earlier stages of my fieldwork or those uncovered- in previous interviews and observations, leaving few new themes coming up by the end of the 6-month time period. As such, the 6-month period was considered a useful cut off point for field work. Further data gathering regarding seeking or obtaining clarifications or filling in the gaps with non-observational data as required was conducted from outside the field site via e-mails, telephone conversations and web searches for publicly available information online. Additional data was collected during 5 post-exit visits to the organisation. These formed opportunities to obtain validation of emerging themes from the analysis of data. The first visit was to participate in a social event which was attended by most of the engineering population and provided further opportunities to observe and confirm earlier interpretations of observations. The second visit was to participate in a workshop organised for the acquired team which was aimed at getting the team members to review their post-acquisition experience in Alpha-D. The third and fourth visits were meetings to present emerging and relevant findings to gate keepers and were additional opportunities to continue with observations. The fifth meeting was to share initial findings with the lab leader (a key participant) and was an opportunity to gain immediate feedback and confirmation regarding interpretations emerging from analysis and themes identified in the data.

### **3.11 Research Protocol and Administration**

Ethical approval - Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Management through a formal approval procedure. The research was considered suitable for approval by the departmental ethics committee which included my research supervisor and the head of postgraduate research in School of Leadership Organisations and Behaviour.

Consent forms - As is the ethical practice in ethnographic field work (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 210), informed consent was obtained from the organisation in the first instance, as well as from participants. An information sheet and a consent form as shown in appendix A were given to the organisation for signing before the start of fieldwork. Consent forms explaining the purpose of the research, giving assurances of ethical standards to be maintained such as anonymity and confidentiality as well as freedom to withdraw from participation were also signed by each interview participant. This was accompanied by verbal assurances during and outside interviews of anonymity, confidentiality and safeguarding of participants' data. Gatekeepers were also informed about the ethical approval obtained from the University ethics committee (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 225) prior to the commencement of the field work.

Digital Audio Recording - A digital audio recorder was used to record in-depth interviews after obtaining permission of the volunteer participant and giving verbal reassurance of anonymity and confidentiality (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 212). The recording device was also used to record data collected during periods where it was considered inappropriate or disruptive to write in the field notebook.

Ethics in research process - Due to the focus of this study on human subjects, there was a dilemma around revealing too little or too much when describing the research aims to participants. The approach taken was to reveal just enough broad information to indicate the area of interest but less of specific details that may introduce prejudice or bias from the participants. In sharing about the research during fieldwork and taking notes in field diaries, I considered implications of my research on those who could be affected by its results, or those who would be interested in the findings as it could be useful for them and ensured that participants were adequately anonymised and protected. (Silverman, 2011)

Non-Disclosure Agreement - A non-disclosure agreement was executed with the organisation of interest which represented compliance with the highest standards of ethical practice in academic research. Gatekeepers were given written and verbal assurances of confidentiality and anonymity for the organisation and all participants in

the research. On an individual level, verbal reassurances of anonymity and confidentiality continued to be given to participants during conversations and interviews as a way to ethically secure on-going access to them.

Access was secured to the field site after substantial planning and consent processes. Following a formal meeting to explain my research and benefit to the organisation, I was granted permission to carry out the research in the organisation. With regard to accessing groups and other social spaces, formal introduction by the gatekeepers facilitated initial access to the population of interest. I had some unstructured informal conversations, usually in the early days of developing a relationship with a new person. This was primarily used as a relationship building tool and was useful for giving me a sense of what mattered and what was priority to the participant. It was also useful for indicating new lines of enquiry for me to pursue subsequently. After having a better sense of what I was interested in, I began to redraft my interview questions to cover specific areas. As such, I was able to investigate a variety of views on a number of subjects.

Once permission was obtained for interviews, I agreed with the relevant participant on the date, time and venue. Early sets of interviews took place in the open break out areas along the corridors of the building's first floor. I observed that the setting provided little privacy as passers-by could see the interview occurring. I noticed also that the participants appeared to be somewhat uncomfortable with the distractions of people walking past, frequently glancing around before speaking or lowering their voices when talking about sensitive subjects. Subsequently, I engaged the help of the administrative assistant in booking meeting rooms. I also leveraged on the lab leader's help in getting a number of lab engineers to provide support to my research project by granting interviews. On other occasions, I relied on the senior gatekeepers to help in facilitating access to other interviewees.

### 3.11.1 Data administration strategy

For data collection, four A4 notebooks were used for journal entries during field work and contain:

1. Handwritten field notes
2. Notes made during interviews or participant observation,
3. Expanded transcription of unrecorded-interviews
4. Same day development of field notes into more detailed and concrete descriptions or preliminary analysis
5. Reflective analytical memos

In the early phase of fieldwork, information on possible meetings to observe emerged in unexpected and unplanned ways which sensitised me to the fact that my field work may well take this form. As a result, I made a mental (and written) note to incorporate a reasonable amount of flexibility in my data collection as I moved from group to group. This way, I could ensure adequate exposure to the different work groups or persons of interest.

### 3.11.2 Interview protocol

Volunteer participants (VP) were informally profiled before being approached for interviews. Each VP had a particular-profile which influenced the kind of questions I posed to them. The profile was determined by the strength of my rapport with them, the person who introduced me to them, their length of stay in the organisation, their personal characteristics, their previous work experience and their current function. Participants outside the focal population based on the merger and acquisition were useful as sources of different perspectives and linking with other work groups.

At the actual interview, the purpose of research was explained to the participant. Verbal assurances of anonymity and confidentiality were given to each interviewee and permission to record the interview was sought in line with ethical standards. Where permitted, I then switched on the recorder and began the interview using a semi-structured interview guide format (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 467; Patton, 2002, p. 343) and allowing the discussion to flow in a natural and conversational style. The interview

guide<sup>9</sup> allowed participants to be interviewed in a systematic way within the limits of the time available such that the key topics were covered (Patton, 2002, p. 343). Opportunity was given for the participant to ask any questions during and after the interview and such questions were answered. The participant was thanked at the end of the interview and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were again re-emphasised<sup>10</sup>. To prevent the interview from being a formal cut-off point for data gathering from the volunteer participant, an informal agreement was reached about the availability of the participant for subsequent confirmatory or clarifying chats.

Interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after taking place. Where participants indicated discomfort with being recorded using a digital equipment, I sought permission to write notes which was usually granted. The notes were transcribed immediately after the meeting on the desk allocated to me and initial analysis began as I reflected on the salient themes from the transcript. Consent to digitally audio record interviews were obtained from interviewees before recording began. On average, interviews lasted for about an hour. Permission to make notes was also obtained during recorded interviews. Off site, transcribing a one-hour interview took on average seven hours which was split into three sets of twenty minute transcription activity to prevent fatigue. Transcripts were re-read to correct for typographical errors and account for unclear or inaudible sections of interviewee comments.

### **3.11.3 Informal conversations**

Informal conversations provided additional sources of supplementary data to the interview data. They were useful for triangulation purposes but also for getting to the embedded aspects of organisational life which indicated what the underlying meaning systems were. It was important to gain access to observe social spaces considered as safe and stable enough for the expression or reinforcing of meaning systems. Conventional work groups in the engineering population studied appeared to be suitable spaces for genuine intersubjective processes of meaning making because of the absence of any state of flux with respect to employee turnover and the absence of instability

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<sup>9</sup> See Appendix D

associated with project-based teams which were relatively temporary work groups which were disbanded upon completion of projects. In addition, being former colleagues in the acquired organisation, there was sufficient familiarity amongst workgroup members to support comfortable discussions on their experiences since the acquisition.

### **3.12 Reflexivity in ethnographic research**

Qualitative research and in particular, ethnographic practice requires that the researcher recognises his / her own involvement as an active participant in the context of study; shaping the process of the research and the knowledge produced from it (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p. 20). This involves acknowledging personal presuppositions and biases which the researcher brings to the research, subjective responses or reactions during the research process and possible effects of the knowledge produced on the context (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 15). This inward focus is aimed at developing critical awareness of engagement with research participants and the research process (Cassell and Symon, 2004, p. 20). As consistent with good research practice, attention was given to reflexivity throughout the period of data collection and accordingly, reflective analytical memos were documented in field notes. Interactions in a new and strange environment during field work heightened the awareness of the researcher's background dispositions which formed a key part of my understanding around social relations. Cultural differences in particular regarding notions of acceptable social behaviour were brought to the fore during frequent reflections before, during and after interactions on the field site. The differences existed between the researcher's ethnic (minority) culture and more 'Western' notions of social conventions. These differences are relevant to acknowledge given the population was made up of predominantly Caucasian participants as well as a mix of different nationalities as previously noted in section 3.5.1. The predominantly white and multicultural composition of the setting's participants had a significant influence on the researcher's approaches to engagement and social interaction as well as the process of data collection.

### 3.12.1 Reflexivity in the approach to data collection

Given the sharp contrasts in observable characteristics between the participants in the context and myself, in particular that I was a black female researcher in a predominantly white and male dominated work context, I was keenly aware of potential impacts of these on the process of data collection particularly observations and interviews. My ethnographic experience was characterised by filtering my interpretations of events happening around me and particularly my planned responses to them through a dual lens. The first lens was that of what could be termed as acceptable Western or English social conduct / culture. Ethnographic texts offer broad-based suggestions about how to interact on the field (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 63) and specifically provide guidance with respect to methodological imperatives which include negotiating access, paying attention to legal and ethical issues around research design, sampling and data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Schwartzman, 1993). There are ethnographic studies which acknowledge the challenges of uncertainty in ethnographic research however the descriptions of the individual researcher's experience are silent on the aspect of uncertainty especially in the early phase of field work and as such offer little prescriptions for new researchers to ethnographic practice (Ramshaw, 2012; Phakathi, 2013; Frandsen (2015). Largely as a result of the 'learning by doing' ethic of ethnographic practice, the researcher is faced with a situation where practical challenges around uncertainty have to be dealt with in a way that is appropriate within the specific context. When viewed in this light, it is difficult to fully anticipate the peculiarities of each setting and the researcher's experience is likely to be uniquely personal.

Expectedly, certain elements of interactions on the field site were difficult to pre-plan such as possible perceptions and reactions to my presence as a stranger and the implications of these for the process of data collection and the nature of emerging data. Even though assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were necessary and recognised approaches to 'Western' academic practice, they were insufficient to guarantee a smooth working relationship throughout the duration of fieldwork. Also,



due to the frequent changes in the organisation, it was difficult to predict with certainty how participants (or indeed myself) would respond to the changes and to one another<sup>11</sup>.

As a result of the ambiguity and uncertainty into which I was plunged particularly in the early days of field work, it was necessary to find a way to navigate unforeseen changes which could have potential impact on my ability to collect relevant data. The second lens was therefore through the lens of my non-western native culture, a language group in sub-Saharan West Africa known as the Yoruba (Bascom, 1969). The Yoruba constitute one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria and are found in the Southwestern part of the country. The Yoruba culture is highly philosophical and many elements of the Yoruba philosophy are enshrined in its oral traditions. One aspect of such oral traditions is the usage of proverbial saying or proverbs as a key component of communication. Proverbs in the Yoruba culture are philosophical sayings often used to convey a deeper message to the hearer by providing opportunity to compare the material representation of ideas in grammatical form with the current situation at hand (Adeeko, 2007). This comparison allows the hearer to navigate tricky situations and make appropriate decisions. Such decisions are based on reflective thought and as such are seen as considered and appropriate virtuous responses. Appropriateness, balance, modesty and adequacy are central to the concept of virtuous behaviour amongst the Yoruba (Abimbola, 1975; Owomoyela, 2005, p. 41; Adeeko, 2007) and many proverbs emphasise principles which are expected to guide virtuous conduct.

Proverbs have been known to precede explanatory sentences in conversations amongst the Yoruba, and this has been the experience of the researcher gleaned from numerous participant observation contexts as a Yoruba person. In some cases however, proverbs are sufficient as communication tools in themselves and require no further explanation, particularly in contexts where the hearer has adequate knowledge of the culture or is (assumed to be) sufficiently immersed in the culture to understand the contextual meaning of the saying (Adeeko, 2007). The oral nature of the tradition suggests that members of the Yoruba culture are exposed to proverb-laden conversations (Adeeko, 2007) during the process of socialisation from infancy to adulthood. As a result, the experience of being a member of the Yoruba culture naturally predisposes a person to

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<sup>11</sup> Some participants were unpredictable and a few 'off' days were observed.

exposure and often assimilation of the philosophies embedded in the proverbs. The preceding paragraph describes the cultural background of the researcher which was brought to the field and indicates an embedded awareness of the philosophical compass with which to navigate uncertain social conditions, one of which was how to relate in an acceptable way in a predominantly Causasian setting, as described earlier under sections 3.5.1 and 3.11. During times of doubt regarding appropriate responses to events, I was keenly aware of strong influences from my ethnic Yoruba identity and values which I considered as relatively stable as a social compass. Specifically, the principles of virtuous conduct associated with the highly esteemed concept of ‘Omoluabi’ (Abimbola, 1975; Owomoyela, 2005) which is translated as a ‘Master of character’ as I understood it provided a moral compass for my interactions. I drew guidance from proverbial sayings in the Yoruba language (Owomoyela, 2005, p. 41; Adéèkó, 2007) as resources to guide my approach to prospective participants, interaction with them, reflections on encounters and adjustments I needed to make following interactions within the ambiguous and unpredictable context.

For example, with respect to how to approach a prospective participant, the options I considered as available ranged from actions that could be interpreted as politely introductory, disturbing or full on. In the absence of any specific guidelines from ethnographic texts, I drew on proverbial principles which advocated balance and an absence of brashness - which could indicate a lack of self-control. According to Faleti (2011 p. 75), “*Oju ni agba nya, agba kii ya enu*” (The elder should be quick to see and not quick to speak). Similarly, Owomoyela (2005, p. 42) suggests – “*A ki i dake ka siwi; a ki i wo sun-un ka daran*” (One does not keep quiet and yet mis-speak; one does not silently contemplate the world and yet get into trouble). This is an admonishment to be quick to perceive and decipher one’s environment and be restrained in deploying the mouth to speak as a careful and cautious person would seldom get into trouble. As a result, I approached prospective participants with caution, focusing more on observing them in the early days of fieldwork and noting key patterns in actions and habits in my research diary. My self-reflexive comments are facilitated by the systematic entries I made in the field diary, alongside my observation notes as shown in appendix H. Consistent with ethnographic research practice and also encouraged by my supervisors, I kept and systematically updated my critical reflections on my experience, which

helped me to maintain reflexivity as a participant, rather than a third-person observer who was detached from social interactions.

With respect to interaction, principles guiding my actions were drawn from the need to be patient, wait for and gradually respond to cues. Faleti (2011, p. 53) also expresses a similar principle in the proverb – “*omo ti o ba si apa ni iya e n gbe*” (It is the child who opens out the arms that the mother will carry). Examples of such cues during fieldwork include lunch and coffee offers from participants as I observed them, leaving me with the decision to accept or reject. With regard to offers of hospitality, my natural cultural inclination was to first of all, decline the offer as a sign of self-control, which in the Yoruba culture is valued as a virtue over gluttony or greed. However, this proved to be a source of personal conflict as I struggled with thoughts of what the potential ‘Western’ interpretation of my rejection could mean for the rapport I was working hard to build. Upon further reflection, I reasoned that a beneficial overriding consideration would be to promote whatever would help my settling in within the group or facilitate the group’s sense of comfort with me. The following day, I accepted another offer, requesting for a bag of chips freely given. Subsequently, it became easier to join in having cakes during a birthday celebration around the unit I was currently observing and to begin to reciprocate the gestures by bringing in small items to share with them. The noticeable effect was a relaxed sense of community around me which was observed in the unit, evidenced by more open sharing of personal information with me.

My cultural filter was also useful during times of daily reflections as I reflected on my perspectives regarding the authenticity of my interactions, considering whether they aligned with the tenets of virtuous action. My recognition of the conflict that being an ethnographer brings particularly with sensitive handling of research information was unable to prevent me from trying to find points of consistency between my actions and my cultural identity. Thoughts of being ‘untrue’ versus the need to be cautious when dealing with superficial friendships in the organisation constantly came to the fore. As a guide, Faleti’s (2011, p. 104) principle suggests one errs on the side of caution – “*Oju ni a ri, ore ko de inu*” (We can only look into the eyes, the friendship may not reach deep into the mind). This was particularly helpful when applied to those who declined or avoided interviews or those who did not want to have interviews audio recorded.

The personal struggle with decisions over appropriate approaches to social encounters also concerned decisions to make additional effort at gaining cooperation or walking away, decisions about the need to show authenticity versus coming to terms with the struggles of appearing to have loyalty to ‘opposing’ persons or groups as I spent time visibly observing them. There were also concerns about how I would be perceived and what would be the appropriate posture to take as an ethnographer in the ‘Western’ tradition, being aware that suspicion and labelling can be expected in an unfamiliar context (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 63). Faleti (2011, p. 94) offered guidance for recognising the limits of one’s ability over another – “*Eni ti o sun ni a nji, a kii ji eni ti o piroro*” translated as ‘You can only wake up someone who is truly asleep; you cannot wake up a person pretending to be asleep’. My decision was to ‘let sleeping dogs lie’ and respect the wishes of the unwilling participant. While the proverbial cultural principles provided guidance for my interactions with different persons and groups under conditions of uncertainty, reaffirming my researcher role to myself provided a way to rationalise the normality of such struggles.

I was keenly aware that my struggles to proactively position myself for every social encounter with new participants were at best futile. This brought on added frustrations to the daily experiences on the field. Trying to anticipate or predict potential actions of participants or their perceptions of me and my possible responses to these was similar to playing a game of mental chess with myself and unsurprisingly, was intensely tiring. When it became evident to me that this approach was not sustainable, I made a decision to simply be myself, dealing with issues one at a time, a day at a time and this helped me to manage being overwhelmed by ‘it all’. In being authentic, I became free to act and react genuinely, without worrying about social configurations memorised from previous interactions or planned encounters. Authenticity within the context of my roles as a student-learner on site and an observer provided a way out of unpredictable or uncertain contexts of interaction.

Cultural principles also provided a way to appraise my approaches to social interactions in fieldwork, particularly with regard to reflecting on motives for my actions and dealing with the effects of such reflections. Specifically, I adopted an approach which focused on giving relationships time to crystallise without worrying too much about other reactions. This was useful in answering the question of how to interpret verbal

and non-verbal cues from participants and the need for sensitivity to what is observed per time. For example, the saying - '*Bi eye ba se fo l'a se nso oko e*' (translated as '*The flight trajectory of the bird determines the force needed to throw the stone to bring it down*') suggests that the way in which one is dealt with determines one's response, thus connecting actions to reactions (Faleti, 2011, p. 74).

Reflexivity during fieldwork also concerned the fluctuating nature of my role as a student-apprentice and simultaneously, a researcher-observer and how these could impact on the data collection and analysis aspects of the research. In addition, situations conferred other roles upon me such as confidante, friend and in some cases a quasi-pastoral role in interviews where I focused on listening without judgement. The multiple roles and the fluidity involved in transitioning from one role to another often left me with a need to 'find myself' in order to reconnect with a stable sense of identity. I found this in my ethnic meaning system, particularly, the values of virtue which helped to guide my interactions and ratify my dealings with others from day to day. An indication of an external perception of my actions was given during a meeting post-exit from the field site where my key informant remarked about how the research could have gone differently, but my natural ability to interact, friendly disposition and the fact that the team was comfortable with me around was a testimony to the authentic feel he got from me as a person'. (paraphrased).

“He commented on my natural ability to get along with everyone. 'The team loved having you around', he said. Thoughtfully he had remarked, 'the research could have gone differently, but you as a person were easy to be around and your friendly nature was well suited to the cultural researcher role' ” (Field journal 4, p. 39).

At a previous post-exit visit to the company, he had commented to the team that my role was almost 'pastoral' and 'maybe we need someone like this here ...' His comment was a refreshing compliment to hear as it reminded me that staying true to myself had yielded its benefits. In addition, however, it sharply directed my attention to my initial perceptions of how guarded he must have been when I first arrived. I recalled my first conversation with him where he was intent on eliciting specific information from me regarding my research. My initial perception was of a person who wanted to 'get to the

root of why I was really there, needing to check if I was trustworthy and uncertain about my identity’.

### **3.13 Exit from field site**

Exit from field work was approached with sensitivity given the warm relationships that had been built up over the preceding months (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 95). My leaving the field site after daily observations many times still involved feelings of mental tiredness and a sense of being thought-laden. However, I also felt emotionally relieved; a sense of mild celebration for getting through another day without making social blunders. Four weeks to the scheduled end of the field work phase, I began to sensitise participants to my planned departure to give them time to get used to the idea of the new change. It was important to smoothen the process of departure as much as possible in order to retain friendly contact with key participants which is useful for post-exit interactions that help with confirming or validating findings. In the next chapter, a detailed description of the findings from the data in relation to the research questions is given which provides insight into the nature of culture in the post-merger context.

## **4 CHAPTER FOUR – THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the context and background for the study and gives a description of the sector of the economy within which the focal organisation operates, a description of the organisations that merged and the history of the merger including a description of the fieldwork setting in Alpha-D, highlighting artefacts that can easily be observed. Thereafter, a description is given of the composition of the target population known as the Lab and the construction of the different workgroups within it post-acquisition, highlighting the Lab's activities, historical priorities and interaction patterns within and across workgroups. The data on which the contextual information is based is obtained from external and internal sources to the organisation such as: information publicly available on the company website and other industry-related websites, from archival documents accessed in the organisation such as books, publications, historical public relations documents and the organisation's internal information network website. Other sources of data are conventional operational documents the researcher was privy to such as e-mails and presentations, informal conversations with participants which provided retrospective accounts of experiences as well as observations of routines and events during fieldwork. Through a description of the integrated data across different sources, I reveal the context for the organisation of work in the setting, interaction patterns between workgroups and key elements that define relationships and meanings in the organisation.

### **4.2 Sectoral background**

The organisation studied operates as a multinational company within the industrial manufacturing sector, converting raw materials or intermediate products on a large scale into finished goods for industrial and home use. Industrial manufacturing typically entails large scale production of goods, usually done in a manufacturing facility large

enough to accommodate heavy duty equipment as well as warehousing of produced goods. A manufacturing facility is usually complemented by a warehousing facility in which goods or components are stored pending customer orders or shipment. There is also an administrative component to the business which interfaces between the different sections of the business. All components of the manufacturing business may exist within the same location or country or may be more geographically spread out. Multinational companies tend to have more geographically spread operations facilities as they take advantage of location-based resources. There is also a logistics component involved in moving products from the manufacturing facility to the warehouse and shipping products from the warehouse to the customers' site. The industrial manufacturing business model is thus characterised by interactions between operations such as manufacturing, warehousing, shipping, and administrative or support services.

As part of growth strategies aimed at taking advantage of resources across various geographical locations, several options are open to multinational organisations some of which include mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, outsourcing of research and development work and other forms of strategic alliances. This is particularly relevant for industrial manufacturing given that assets such as land, plant / warehousing facilities and large-scale heavy-duty equipment may not easily be moved across locations. The organisation for this study fits the described profile of a multinational industrial manufacturing company with manufacturing and R&D facilities geographically spread out across the globe. The company leverages on research and development as a strategic tool to create several technology platforms based on which thousands of products exist for both industrial and personal use. Research and Development in the company is at the heart of product innovation and through this, the development of products and new industries. The company grew over the years through mergers and acquisitions and this study is designed around one of such acquisitions. The acquired company is a smaller high technology organisation well known in the image processing industry in the UK. For the purpose of this study, the acquiring company will be known as Alpha-D with global headquarters known as Alpha-D Global while the acquired company will be known as Brownfield. These pseudonyms are used to preserve the anonymity of the merging companies.



### 4.3 The history of the merging organisations

Alpha-D Global is a multinational company with global corporate headquarters in the USA. The company has been in existence for over 100 years and has grown in size and business scope since its inception. It operates independent subsidiary companies in different continents. In the UK, its businesses are organised around three principal operating companies with UK headquarters known as Alpha-D UK Plc. (subsequently referred to as Alpha-D). Historically, Alpha-D specialises in the manufacture and marketing of a range of coated materials, using adhesives and abrasives. Alpha-D is a large organisation which operates a business to business model, making products for industrial manufacturing, businesses and households. The main functional areas of the company include manufacturing, research and development (R&D) sales and marketing as well as support departments such as information technology, legal and compliance, human resources/corporate communications, business processes and customer service. Other support functions such as site security services, cleaning, reception administration and some specialised technical support functions are outsourced to agencies or contractors who supply their services on contract basis.

Underpinning the company's business is a strong research and development (R&D) component. Across its subsidiaries, R&D is carried out by specialised teams known as labs. The concept of the lab as the engine of creativity and growth was established 14 years after the inception of the parent company, Alpha-D Global. It took twelve years of shaky start-up operations before the company was able to develop its first profitable product. Continuously pursuing development of ideas for more than a decade with the hope that some would become successful commercially drew on the young company's resources and so the first product to reach this milestone was celebrated. However, the company soon found itself in a vulnerable position following a legal challenge by a competitor over patent infringement. An intellectual property group was subsequently set up in Alpha-D Global and five years after the lab was established, the company registered its first patented product. An important priority for the company became not only ensuring that products were commercially profitably but also protecting the products and the creative processes which led to them. These significant events in the early life of Alpha-D Global triggered the company's sensitivity to profitability and intellectual property, making it want to be efficient with channelling resources to

development work and also protect every technology or idea. It gave rise to a long standing practice of patent protection as a way to keep competition at bay, preserve the company's market share and profit margins. Patent protection as well as intellectual property audits gave the company time to improve on its products. Securing competitive advantage underscored the company's emphasis on enforcing its own patent rights aggressively locally and internationally.

Closely linked to its aggressive and costly enforcement of patent rights was the company's sensitivity to its integrity and reputation. It was forced to pay closer attention to how far it could exploit the limits of intellectual property following anti-trust issues which came up in the local business environment. The company instituted its compliance programme in response to specific government requirements and thereby developed key corporate values of integrity, a strong emphasis on ethical business dealings and maintaining a positive reputation. This revealed an organisation with a mix of research-based ethos aimed at mastering innovation through intellectual property mining, ethical approach to conducting business and commercial aggressiveness to ensure survival and profitability.

Initially, new products were introduced every five years. Subsequently, new product launches occurred at various intervals; some closer together, others further apart. The labs in Alpha-D were expected to generate new products and report their work in the form of creativity reports. Lab employees traditionally worked for many years, attempting several trials before succeeding at creating innovative products. Many employees had been known to put in decades of long service to the company, often changing roles over the years as required by the company or as initiated by the employees. It was often the case that key positions of leadership were associated with employees who had a record of long service in the company, having gained significant experience over the years. Outstanding employees were also honoured and given recognition for their creativity in coming up with innovative products. Such recognition ranged from e-mail commendations, presentation of gift vouchers or cash awards to formal ceremonies which admitted the beneficiary into the prestigious circle of exceptional innovators in the company's history. Creativity and innovation were facilitated by the technological interconnectivity of R&D employees around the globe and which made virtual collaboration a common occurrence. Alpha-D's technology labs

traditionally had catered to the needs of the company's business sectors but over the years evolved into technology centres. The technology centres focused on specific technologies which could potentially be useful across divisions in the entire company. About six decades earlier, labs used to be part of manufacturing and their main role was to check the quality of local raw materials. The International division of the company was established around this period to take advantage of business opportunities around the world. The company also had a strong belief in sharing knowledge and problems with the global technical community to facilitate learning, synergy and creativity. The growth of the company coupled with its strong belief in sharing knowledge resulted in collaboration between technology centres. A senior technical leader used to travel around the world, stimulating employees to apply the different technologies available globally in their specific technical centres. The variety of technology platforms therefore formed the basis of experiments and collaboration across different business areas of the company. By the turn of the century in year 2000, Alpha-D had developed world class expertise in 30 technologies and strong grounding in about 100 additional technologies.

Alpha-D operates a matrix organisational structure in the UK. At its core is a UK organisational structure but alongside this are European and global reporting lines. While the UK structure is designed to drive and support businesses important to the UK market, global priorities for business (of which the UK is a part) are determined by senior management executives in the USA who draw up a list of top ten global projects. R&D projects approved by the USA are considered as global priority projects which have been viewed as having the potential to contribute significantly to global profits. As a result, R&D work on such projects tends to receive expedited approval and funding. The company also promotes the development of new ideas from employees across roles or divisions. It does this through its 15% policy. The policy stipulates that employees can spend 15% of their working hours on pet projects which have commercial potential. To support development work on the projects, there is a grant scheme which approves finance based on applications. Requests for such finance were approved by relevant departments. Given the matrix structure of the company and the key role of US-led prioritisation of projects, employee work involved taking into consideration sometimes competing obligations to both USA and UK. The matrix structure resulted in different reporting lines for employees. As a result, there was communication across the different

relationships created by the matrix. The multiple reporting lines and communication points often brought a flurry of activities which then resulted in an intense pace of work. The more senior staff often worked beyond the average expectation of 37 working hours weekly in order to keep up with the pace of work issues arising from different communication points. They tended to put in up to 60 hours weekly as they struggled to keep up with the multiple communications, often only able to react to issues as they came up.

The matrix structure also slowed down decision making on new ideas or initiatives because several persons needed to be carried along. Frequent role changes in key positions brought complexity into decision making as occupiers of new roles needed to be briefed on a continuous basis. The company did not discourage role changes as it offered not just a job but a varied career to employees and this was expected to translate into lower employee turnover overall. Given this dynamic, securing necessary buy-in for decision making could take several months or a few years. The more junior staff also faced the complications of the matrix system given that the MD of Alpha-D UK emphasised the primary importance of UK business over European or Global obligations. Despite the complexity in the structure, R&D work appeared positioned to benefit from the matrix structure as information could flow freely across the globe, giving the company the advantage of a seamless knowledge database.

In September 2012, Alpha-D acquired Brownfield, a technology company well known for its expertise in traffic technology, particularly automated number plate recognition systems. Prior to 2012, Brownfield had previously acquired five specialist businesses and so had a mix of technology expertise across different business areas and applications such as traffic technology in electronic toll collection, journey time measurement, hardware and software services for access control and parking management, road user charging, traffic monitoring, police and automated site security. One of Brownfield's subsidiaries was renowned for developing Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)<sup>12</sup> systems which operated on integrated traffic cameras. This subsidiary had been a part of a US-headquartered multinational company owned by the same investor. The employees in the UK and USA had worked historically as remote

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<sup>12</sup> ANPR- Automated Number Plate Recognition.

colleagues in developing the ANPR business. Embedded with unique capabilities, the ANPR camera automatically reads and recognises number plates every second and these can then be crosschecked against databases held by different organisational entities. Given the complementarity of parking, tolling and vehicle recognition products as well as their functionalities, Brownfield's main customers were local authorities, the police, the government and commercial customers.

After the acquisition, only three out of the five prior Brownfield businesses were left to operate in the UK and collectively were known as the SPAR team in Alpha-D. Their main business dealt with systems which classified identified vehicles. The three groups together supported the ANPR business in the UK company. The UK manufacturing base of Brownfield was shut down during the acquisition and manufacturing activities were relocated to the USA. Alpha-D was experienced with supplying licence plates and roadside signage and other supplies to its existing customer base which includes government, local councils and commercial customers. Its acquisition of Brownfield was a move towards integration into manufacturing / development in related adjacent businesses. Alpha-D operations were organised around 5 broad business groups. Each business group was a well-structured entity responsible for the different activities surrounding a product line. Such activities include research and development in research labs, marketing, sales and customer service. The business groups focused on consumer, industrial, protection, electronics and healthcare products. The Protection business group became the home of the Brownfield business as it related to road safety. The broad business group was further divided into divisions focusing on several product lines. Within each product line were a number of products.

In terms of structure, the UK Managing Director has 14 direct reports who are directors and general managers. Below each is a hierarchy of positions and responsibilities. However in practice, there are interactions across regional, European and global levels. As a result, there are often multiple reporting lines for many workgroups. For example, the head of human resources has a direct reporting line to the MD but a dotted reporting line to a European boss and a Global head. Within the Protection business group is the Dora division into which the Brownfield group was integrated. The division has seven product lines known as DECTRA, HESS, VERN, REED, COD, TRP and SPAR. Research and development is an important component of Alpha-D's business strategy

hence the company's strong commitment to 'its core competency of new product development with increasing speed and agility in bringing these new products to market' in a bid to 'deliver continuous profitable sales growth in the growing and rooted segments in the UK' (Alpha-D Strategic Report for year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014).

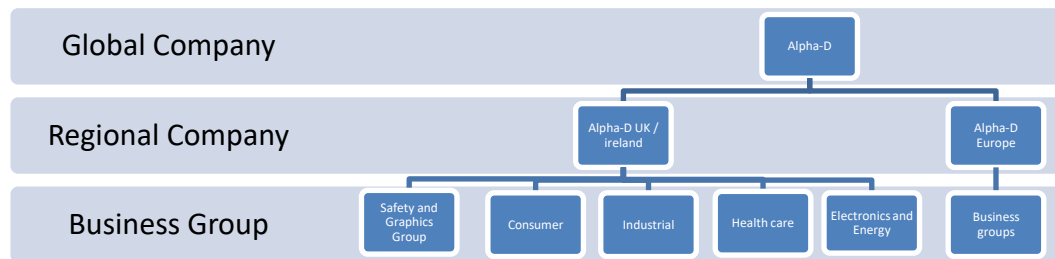


Figure 4.1 The Alpha-D business structure

#### 4.4 The physical setting and work context in Alpha-D UK

Alpha-D UK was the head office of the UK and Ireland businesses. Located on a large expanse of land, the anterior part of the building's long rectangular structure had glass windows and from within the building, vehicles driving into the car park as well as those exiting the premises could easily be seen. From the main gate, there was a clear view of rows of neatly arranged vehicles spread out across the front part of the building. However, the inside of the building was not visible. The reception was located on the ground floor of a spacious and brightly lit atrium at the main entrance into the building. There was a steady stream of people walking into the building every morning around 9.00 a.m. in smart casual dress code. Many were employees, some were contractors and a smaller number were visitors. There were strict company rules regarding visitors to Alpha-D. Visitors were required to be pre-registered 24 hours before their arrival and the company had the right to search individuals and vehicles. Family or friends of employees were not permitted on site except on company fun days for staff and their

families. Even then, access was guided and restricted to particular areas. All visitors to the company were greeted by friendly receptionists who had been hired through an agency. They attended to visitors by contacting the relevant employee over the phone, securing clearance and issuing the relevant colour-coded identity tags. The visitor's tag indicated to an employee that the wearer must be escorted constantly wherever they were in the building. Following tag issuance, the receptionist would show the visitor to the comfortable sitting area on the side. A set of comfortable sofas were neatly arranged around a coffee table on which several copies of the company's colourful profile were placed for easy reading. On the wall beside the sofas were colourful descriptions of Alpha-D's values of collaboration, creativity and innovation. Boldly written next to these were some of the core leadership attributes expected of its employees. There were also some statements which appeared to be highlights of value propositions for a few of the company's products. These phrases were easily seen by employees as they walked through the reception area or by visitors who sat on the side sofas, waiting for their contact in the office.

Depending on availability, the contacted employee eventually appeared to welcome the visitor and personally took them through the security barriers as they both scanned their identity tags and walked through. Employees, whether permanent or contract were easily identified by their passes. They were required to wear passes on colour-coded lanyards at all times and present these before entering the building. Overtime, the receptionists became familiar with employees and so a quick greeting replaced the formal need for presenting the staff identity tags. Different passes gave different levels of access to specific spaces in the building. Individuals who came into the building were categorised as permanent staff, visitors, contract staff and staff working from remote sites. There were also similar colour schemes for flooring, internal areas, furniture and stationery, as well as in meeting rooms.

Meetings took place in different locations within the building. Some employees met with their guests by the visitors' sitting area beside the reception while others went past the security barriers and had their meetings on the ground floor by an in-house café. Meetings could also be held in a colourful and spacious seating area adjacent to the café and designated for informal brainstorming sessions amongst employees. Some other employees had their meetings in the restaurant or deli opposite the collaboration area. The restaurant which served breakfast and lunch daily was also a site for more informal

lunch meetings. Formal meetings were held in any of the numerous meeting rooms on either of the two floors of the building. After a meeting was over, the employee escorted the visitor back to the reception as he or she walked through the barriers to hand over the identity tag back to the receptionists. The reception often worked collaboratively with the security staff manning the main gate to authorise or stall entry or exit of visitors using automated barriers or number plate recognition systems for registered employee vehicles.

The ground floor of the head office was occupied by several labs, meeting rooms of different sizes and conveniences. There was also a special room in which notable Alpha-D products were artistically displayed for visitors to see. Behind the reception were cash points, a first aid room and the security office. Not far from these was the in-house shop which stocked a few household or office products for the convenience of employees. At the far end of the ground floor was a fitness centre with changing rooms and showers. Employees were encouraged to join the gym and utilise the facilities during the day if they so desired. Some employees came to work with extra pairs of shoes for the occasional quick run or jog during lunch breaks. These shoes could be spotted tucked under the owner's desk. Occasionally, approved vendors came in on designated days and times to display wares for sale ranging from fashion items to stationery or confectionery. In effect, employees could work within the building all day yet have access to a variety of services such as shopping, the gym, cash machines, breakfast and lunch or coffee/ tea.

Above the ground floor were two floors similar in layout and appearance. Two elevators were located behind the reception desk and were often used to access the two floors. The elevator sides had initially been transparent where occupants could see the reception area as well as be seen by observers. After some weeks, the transparent sides were covered and occupants were no longer visible.

The open plan seating arrangement along each floor gave the impression of a factory setting where workers clustered in different workgroups, manipulating their respective equipment. Over a decade before, enclosed administrative offices had been used in the company's former head office building. These had been a more traditional symbol of status in the company. The more technology oriented centres on the other hand were more open plan and were made up of cubicles partitioned by 5 feet high space dividers.



In the current setting, only the MD had an enclosed office while every other employee sat within the open plan arrangement. However, some senior employees could be spotted occupying seats by a window. Conversations during meetings held at desks could easily be heard by colleagues in surrounding desk hubs. The general rule in Alpha-D was that meetings were to be held in meeting rooms although less formal meetings were conducted in any of the office locations which suited the purpose as decided by employees. In addition, there were casual seating areas on every floor known as 'break out' areas where meetings could also be held, depending on the degree of confidentiality and privacy required. The purpose built meeting rooms were regularly used and occupants could be clearly seen through the glass walls of the room. Each meeting room was furnished with equipment to facilitate telephone conferences and visual displays. Many employees frequently had 'meetings' while using the room even though only one occupant was visible to an observer.

Alpha-D was a company with several divisions and each floor was home to workgroups in similar divisions. The first floor housed a few business groups as well as legal and corporate marketing departments. The Dora division occupied almost half of the entire first floor across its length and housed the Brownfield team which was allocated one side of the floor and also organised around an open seating plan. Within Brownfield, core engineering R&D staff were grouped together and known as the Lab. They sat separately from the rest of their Brownfield colleagues who ran the customer service and technical service workgroups. A thick wall lay between the R&D team and their Brownfield colleagues who sat much closer to other Alpha-D colleagues. The wall housed an enclosed workspace with floor to ceiling walls and access to this room was limited. Within the enclosure were displayed different models of cameras connected within a complex network of cables, gadgets and computer screens. The equipment also enabled live data feed from cameras mounted by the roadside outside the company premises which collated data and which the relevant engineers regularly assessed in their testing and development work. Inside this enclosure, lab tours and product demonstrations were regularly given to senior management staff who wanted to know about the team's technology.

In terms of people, the lab was made up of six engineering sub-units, each consisting of four or fewer team members. The teams were seated around six desk hubs arranged in a row along the R&D allocated section of the floor. From their hubs, there was a view of

the adjacent side of the floor where some other administrative departments were located. There was also a clear view of some glass-walled meeting rooms along main corridors on the floor. The desk hubs were the primary work stations of the engineers and were equipped with specialised computers as well as regular computers for their software and development work. It was important to the company that documents were not left on desks as they could easily be accessed by anyone. Alpha-D had a clear desk policy which required employees to keep essential documents out of sight. However, the engineers' desks varied in the amount of items on them. While some desks were clear, other desks were cluttered with a variety of items such as personal effects, documents, newly delivered work equipment, telephones, document trays and personal mails freshly delivered by the internal daily mail delivery service. The desk hubs also sometimes served as venues for informal, semi-formal or quick sub-unit meetings.

Employees were allowed to eat and drink at desks but in consideration of other colleagues. Phones were also allowed to be used but were required to be placed on silent or vibrate mode. This explained the relative absence of ringing mobiles in the building, except for the phones in the reception area. The marked silence in the work areas was also due to the fact that many employees participated in virtual meetings. While some used pre-booked meeting rooms, others used headphones and dialled in to virtual meetings from their desks. There was an organised system for booking meeting rooms through the company intranet. Sometimes, there were hitches with the booking system software and two sets of users could find themselves at the same meeting room simultaneously. Such glitches were amicably and informally resolved as one user / group deferred to the other. Alpha-D's policy specified the seating format which aimed to match the colour-code on identity tags to similar coloured chairs. However, employees often did not comply strictly with these rules and sat arbitrarily wherever they were comfortable.

Other conveniences such as rest rooms, vending machines, water dispensers as well as a fire assembly point were easily accessible on each floor. On a specific week day and time, a shrill fire alarm went off noisily but employees in engineering appeared unperturbed given that they were regularly pre-warned by the polite reception staff about the fire alarm test and so they continued with working as usual. The engineering lab was located directly above the café and as they worked, it was easy to hear the low

to medium level chatter coming from the floor above and the coffee shop and restaurant beneath.

#### **4.4.1 Work patterns and priorities in Alpha-D**

The context within which work took place was the Dora division. The division was made up of a number of workgroups looking after different products and responsibilities. The main products of the division were known as DECTRA, HESS, VERN, REED, COD, TRP and the newly acquired SPAR product. There were 5 employees who were responsible for marketing and sales of the various products in the division. The division's products were complementary to one another and were managed by dedicated sales and marketing staff that formed part of a business team. The products were sold as individual products or as a bundle of products to customers depending on need. Apart from the SPAR product (cameras), all other products once sold could be shipped to the customer without requiring continuous involvement of the company. Each transaction was complete once the products were shipped and an invoice was raised for payment. Evidence from Alpha-D's financial statement indicated that the company had a preference for generally holding little stock and cash. In the company balance sheet over the period 2012 - 2014, the current assets existed more in the form of debtors (invoices awaiting payment) and the financial statements revealed that short term debtors position was turned around (invoices are paid) within 2 months of invoicing. The SPAR technical unit was a back office unit involved in the design, development and maintenance of cameras and other ANPR systems. Once a deal on a SPAR product was made by the sales staff, the technical support team within the SPAR group would move to a customer's site. For other Alpha-D product lines, products were simply shipped once manufactured and invoices were raised for the expected payment.

Within the division, there were two types of workgroups: core workgroups and project-based workgroups constituted by the organisation. The core workgroups handled specific tasks and had fairly stable membership while the project-based groups were more dynamic in nature with membership depending on relevance to current projects. For the project-based groups, members were drawn from different core workgroups and the project group size expanded or contracted depending on project requirements. Usually, project-based groups met regularly as agreed. For example, the manufacturing

/ lab sub-unit was one of the workgroups observed and it held weekly meetings by telephone conference. Members comprised of three SPAR manufacturing team staff based remotely in the USA, a quality assurance staff member and hardware engineers. There was another cross functional project-based team which also met virtually and was observed through joining its telephone conferences. An example of fairly stable core workgroups would be the business team, customer service team, technical service team and the R&D team. Some teams had a mix of members from different organisational backgrounds for instance workers who were originally from Brownfield, legacy Alpha-D staff, employees from a different acquisition or new hires that joined the team after the Brownfield acquisition. The business team for example was made up of mainly legacy Alpha-D employees as well as a few members of the acquired population i.e. the unit heads for customer service and technical support respectively, who were originally from Brownfield. R&D (The Lab) was predominantly made up of former Brownfield employees supported by a few new hires post-acquisition.

#### **4.5 The Composition of the Lab**

From informal conversations with gatekeepers, the location of the lab and its employees in the Dora division were made evident. Conventional notions of a lab suggest that it is a facility which provides controlled conditions where scientific or technological experiments can be performed (Latour and Woolgar, 1979). The lab in the Dora division was more of a technological lab for research and development work in relation to image capturing and its various applications which constitutes the SPAR business of the acquired company, Brownfield. The main workgroups which interacted to support the SPAR product were the R&D Lab, SPAR Technical support, Customer Service, Business, and Manufacturing. With the exception of manufacturing which was relocated to the USA after Brownfield was acquired, all other workgroups were within the Alpha-D premises. The R&D lab was run by a team of experts: hardware and software engineers, testing technicians and administrative or support staff. The engineers made the integrated cameras and the software that ran on them. The hardware engineering team designed the physical look and mechanics of the cameras, using material that passed appropriate tests for durability in different environmental

conditions. The designs were sent to manufacturing in the USA which produced prototypes which were then tested. Software engineers designed and developed the programmes which ran on the cameras and were key members of the lab.

#### **4.5.1 The structure of the Engineering Lab**

The Brownfield SPAR Lab is described first because of its significance to the population of study. In the Protection business group, the SPAR business was run by the Brownfield lab and was the most recent addition to the Dora division. It was different in complexity and functionality from existing products. The lab was also different from the traditional research labs in Alpha-D which were more aligned with the company's industrial manufacturing operational model. The Brownfield Lab (SPAR Lab) was the research and development arm of the Brownfield team and was considered as the heart of the group. It was also known as the technical centre and had responsibility for generation of new ideas for competitive products. Informal conversations with some engineers about developing new ideas during their free 15% time indicated that they were too busy with regular work to devote 15% of their working hours to pet projects. In addition, many were unaware of the grant scheme which financed such projects. They continued to carry out routine engineering work and channelled requisitions for work materials through the formal hierarchy to obtain approvals. There were several labs located within each Alpha-D division and the labs historically had collaborated and shared knowledge for the benefit of the company. Globally, labs were able to benefit from information synergy supported by the company's technological platforms. The Lab was set up as a global centre of excellence and developed its products for a global market. As a result, it was frequently involved in projects in different parts of the world. Although the Lab was domiciled in the UK and within the Dora division, it was a global resource and had multiple relationships across the globe. There were multiple reporting lines through the UK, Western Europe, the Headquarters in the USA as well as a Technical (R&D) reporting line. As a result, the lab had a complex and delicate relationship with the UK office within which it was domiciled.

The SPAR Lab was made up of six sub-units which were involved in hardware and software engineering, computational intelligence, quality assurance, testing and control, and advanced applications. There were seventeen fulltime employees who were

supported by 6 contract staff. In terms of gender, there were three females and twenty males<sup>13</sup>. Amongst the three females, two were engineering graduates although only one worked as a software engineer. The third was the team's administrator, working as a contract staff supporting the lab leader. My presence in the lab brought the number of females to four. There were four teams of software engineers within the lab and they each carried out development work on different applications of the ANPR system. They were also responsible for fixing bugs which arose after a camera was sold to customers. Hence in addition to research and development, maintenance work was a major part of the responsibility of the team. There was a testing team in charge of subjecting products to defined test conditions and reporting results which formed the basis of further test-driven development work. The administrative support team was run by two employees who coordinated lab management meetings, tour schedules, formal and informal lab events, managed projects and drove the meeting of quality assurance and regulatory compliance obligations. The Lab with its interdependent sub-units represented the production centre for intellectual hardware and software work in the SPAR business.

**Table 4.1: Dora Division employee profile**

S/N	Team	Size	Gender		Employee status		
			Male	Female	FTE <sup>14</sup>	Contract	
1	Lab	23	20	3	17	6	
2	Technical support	5	5	0	5	0	
3	Customer Service	3	0	3	2	1	
4	Manufacturing	6	4	2	6	0	
5	Business (Marketing/sales)	7	5	2	7	0	
6	Total	44	34	10	37	7	

<sup>13</sup> Please see table 4.1.

<sup>14</sup> FTE- Full Time Employee

The process of production often began with specifying the requirements for the software to run on the product, usually through a series of meetings with the customer. The customer service team or the business workgroup receives the customer's order for a new product or amendments to functionalities and pass on the information to engineering. Crafting a new product could be customer-driven or engineering-driven. Where it was customer-driven, accurate descriptions of such requirements were important for developers, also known as software engineers because the nature of their work required close attention to detail and specification. Much of their work was not visible to an observer due to its intellectual form. After the first few days of observing the engineers silently working at their desks, it appeared that they were in a different world from me. They looked like people who were concentrating and needed no disturbance. The lab was quiet, a marked contrast from the sounds of laughter and conversations occasionally wafting across the floor from the other side of the wall. I observed a group of employees staring quietly at their computer screens for extended periods. Sometimes they put on headphones and spoke quietly but intermittently as they continued to gaze intently at their screens. My eyes followed them as they got up occasionally to visit the vending machine, toilets or descended to the floor beneath and returned with brown paper lunch bags in hand. Most returned from the restaurant to their desks and ate there as they resumed working. I felt out of place not because I was one of the very few females in the space but because *not* talking seemed to be the norm. I wondered how I would study people who for the most part appeared to speak very little. My determination to break through the social barriers grew as I braced myself to engage with the inhabitants of the engineering lab. My tentative smiles gradually paved the way for the development of nodding acquaintances. Eventually, my first steps in verbal communication were attempted as I positioned myself around communal objects such the photocopying machine, printer, vending machine, water dispenser or around the eating areas on the ground floor. I grew more comfortable with the silence of the lab as the days progressed having had brief conversations with some of the engineers.

The engineering team appeared to work independently but in reality, they relied on business information or specification of functionalities from customers, colleagues in the business workgroup or through senior managers who had such information. Within the Brownfield lab, the leader was Charlie and he served as the recognised interface with non-technical workgroups as well as with senior management. He brought

commercial information to the lab and translated business knowledge into potential opportunities for the team to explore new products or improvements in products. He also periodically briefed senior management staff members on how the lab was progressing on projects. On many occasions, some engineers were required to participate in cross-functional meetings with either business workgroups or teams which included the customer. New products could also be created where engineering identified a gap in the market and developed a product to fill the gap. In both cases, the developers needed to be business aware. Ideas also emerged as by-products of regular engineering work. For example, quality assurance testing or development work could throw up opportunities for improvements in products.

Within core engineering, the software design architect is a key member of the larger lab team and he is responsible for heading the production process for software. Based on the customer's specification, he is in charge of mapping out the key components of the software which need to 'talk' to one another in order for the final product to be effective and for functionalities to be able to solve specified problems. The different components are then allocated to different developers who are often subject specialists. With tasks distributed in this way, they all simultaneously work on different parts of one piece of software. Within the sub-teams, the main task was writing lines of code, which are a set of computer programming statements or language giving instructions for specific tasks to be carried out. In coding, relationships between objects are specified and the programmer tests to see whether the communication between the objects is effective. Writing and testing are iterative activities during programming work and require long periods of concentration and focused thinking. In the coding process, bugs, or errors may be discovered and thereafter fixed. Where fixing a bug impacts on other objects, these would again need to be adjusted. Once the coding work is completed and tested at the developer's level, it undergoes a more comprehensive quality assurance testing through the use of a test plan. The test plan for software is usually written by a software engineer.



#### 4.5.2 The interdependent nature of work within Engineering workgroups

The hardware engineers develop the physical aspect of the product on which the software runs. They work interdependently using specialised computers on their desks and design the look of the product. Their designs when finished are sent to manufacturing in the USA which then produces prototypes. The prototypes are shipped back to the UK and made to also undergo quality and stress testing. The testing sub-team in the lab are responsible for conducting tests on the products. The test plan specifies conditions for testing the product including temperature and stress tests. If the product fails the quality test, results are fed back to engineering for adjustments and bug fixes. This process continues until the product passes the test. Thereafter, the status of the product changes to indicate its general availability for release. At this stage, the technical support workgroup move over to the customer's site to install the product and get it up and running. Following this, feedback is again received from the customer about its performance and effectiveness. Bugs may again arise or the customer may request for an enhancement to functionalities. In response to this feedback from the field, the process again continues through coding work. Where a product has successfully been delivered to the customer, a sale contract is drawn up and payment is made. However there is a continuing maintenance contract. As bugs continue to emerge, the software engineers repair them and release updates which the customer installs for the product to continue to perform effectively.

Life in the Lab thus consisted of activities designed to move an idea from inception to functioning product. The days began to take on a more predictable form as I aligned with the patterns of working indicated by the engineering team so as to observe them. Flexible working had been negotiated during the Brownfield acquisition for all fulltime employees. As a result, they worked in the office three days a week and worked from home on the other two work days, with most in the office from Tuesday to Thursday. While off premises, the engineers were connected to the company's network and could access the computer systems on their desks and within the enclosed lab space. As such, being physically away from the office was not a barrier to working or continuing to engage with one another's work as needed. The company's technological platform made virtual communication and collaboration possible on or off-site. Non-lab ex-Brownfield employees also enjoyed the benefit of the flexible work arrangement.

Contract employees in the lab on the other hand were expected to be in the office every day. A contract employee supported the lab manager as an administrator while others filled in areas of skill gaps. Much of the lab work was independent but many times, engineers were involved in other meetings with employees from other units. Often, a representative of the Lab was expected to attend divisional business meetings but infrequently did so due to other competing meetings or urgent engineering work which needed to be done. Lab employees had little direct contact with customers and the existing structure of the division was designed to shield them from the pressures that arose due to direct dealings with customers. The structure was designed to allow them to focus without interruption on producing creative outputs and generating innovative products. The work of the engineers by nature required long periods of intense concentration in developing software, probing or troubleshooting and testing prototypes.

#### **4.5.3 Performance management within Engineering workgroups**

In addition to being in an environment which required their participation in a high number of formal collaborative meetings, lab employees were expected to be productive in coming up with competitive new products and show evidence of their creative work. They were given quotas for creative ideas and were required to write up *creativity reports* which were a type of document for the codification of their new ideas. Other research labs within the company were also required to meet similar quotas for creativity reports. A strict process guided the submission of such documents through an on-line completion of the relevant form which was then sent off for approval at various levels. At the end of the review process, some creativity reports progressed to becoming filed as patents, while others which did not successfully make it through the Alpha-D process and framework for introducing new ideas as products were kept as trade secrets.

The quotas for creativity reports to be submitted applied only to full-time R&D engineers. Annually, an engineer was expected to log in between one and two inventions. For the entire SPAR development group, a total of 34 creativity reports per year were expected. There was a lack of clarity about this requirement as lab employees had different understandings about the quota or no idea at all. Some believed that the

requirement was half a creativity report per person. The creativity reports were emphasised by Alpha-D as necessary for seeing the productivity and creativity of each engineer and the team as a whole. Attitudes to writing the reports varied amongst the engineers as some struggled with understanding its purpose and relevance while others chose to comply with the submission requirement. There was the belief that real creativity was in the programming work the engineers did and was a by-product rather than an intentional pursuit. Contractors were exempted from the quota requirement for generating new products. As a general rule, contractors were viewed as resources to fill skill gaps. As a result, they were excluded from participating in a number of organisational activities such as training sessions, appraisals and sensitive employee meetings or briefing sessions. Producing creativity reports could be classified as one of the sensitive areas which potentially gave an employee access to the company's intellectual property hence the exclusion of contract employees from the exercise.

Alpha-D prioritised new products creation and channelled resources to support areas of business considered as priority. The expectation for its new products was that they needed to be products which gave the company competitive advantage in the industry and made Alpha-D a market leader in defining new playing fields. The company having a highly collaborative ethos expected lab members to participate frequently in cross-unit meetings as well as attend training sessions, in addition to meeting their quotas for creativity reports. Alpha-D encouraged frequent collaboration and information sharing as a work culture. R&D employees attended collaboration meetings where possible but preferred to be left alone to work, shielded from 'outside' distractions. Observations of some lab team leader meetings revealed instances where reluctance was exhibited in relation to the need to attend yet another meeting outside the lab. This was seen as distracting to the core engineering work which was considered as more important.

#### **4.5.4 Activities and historical priorities in the Lab**

The Brownfield R&D team was made up of many colleagues who were familiar with each other as a result of many years of working together in Brownfield. After the acquisition and relocation to Alpha-D's site, the team were merged with a small group of workers from another previous acquisition by Alpha-D five years before. To fill up

gaps in some much-needed skill areas, some new hires were also added to the team over time. The needed skill areas included quality control, administration and engineering. The lab expanded to become a team of 22 individuals divided into 5 sub-units namely: the embedded software development team for cameras, the embedded hardware development team, the image processing and algorithm development team, an enterprise software development team, a quality assurance and test-driven development team and another embedded software development team for tolling technology. The different sub-units represented different aspects of the final image-capturing product and often worked independently and iteratively as they developed, tested and further developed their work.

Attributed by them to previous work interaction patterns where they had operated historically with flexibility and fairly informal processes, the lab team exhibited a flexible approach to work and interaction. In observed casual conversations, they recalled often stepping outside of their roles to take on any role which facilitated the progress of their work. Conversely, in Alpha-D they faced a different work system where there were strict rules about roles and employees were limited to acting within the confines of their formal roles. The rules also created distinctions between categories of staff members. In Alpha-D, an employee's work category defined his access to benefits from training, appraisals and performance reviews, as well as attendance at sensitive staff information dissemination meetings. Engineers employed as fulltime and permanent employees were allowed access to these while all other workers in support roles were hired as contractors and excluded. Despite these demarcations, interactions within the R&D team appeared generally cordial as employees went about their independent and interdependent work in the various sub-units.

Across the technical side of the entire company, there were various types of recognition available to R&D employees who distinguished themselves. These ranged from e-mail commendations and small cash awards to gifts of pens or shopping vouchers with specified amounts. Exceptional individual performance was recognised through a quarterly award scheme where employees could nominate eligible colleagues. Leaflets advertising the award scheme were placed on a display stand along the walkway to the cafeteria on the ground floor over a number of days. A close examination of a copy revealed a mix of cash and non-cash rewards to be awarded by the technical head in the company for technical employees who demonstrated initiative and risk-taking in

problem solving which resulted in improvements in the company. The employee was expected to have led a form of transformational change, converted an idea into reality or developed a collaborative culture. Ultimately, such an employee would have demonstrated being a game-changer in their role. A certificate of award would be presented alongside a cash cheque. In addition, the employee would automatically be eligible for entry into a draw to select a winner whose reward would be a visit to a prestigious global annual technological event. The Brownfield lab employees did not appear to be aware of this award programme when asked while others indicated that the general reward or recognition system was unimpressive. They continued to work interdependently and recognised any breakthroughs in their weekly lab management meetings.

Supporting the Lab was a technical team made up of former Brownfield employees and known as the SPAR Technical Support Workgroup. The technical Support team of five was responsible for installing products at customer sites and integrating the products with the customer's existing systems. The unit also carried out periodic maintenance of equipment and conducted training sessions for customers in the use of the equipment as needed. The training could be on Alpha-D's site or on the customer's site. Their work was mainly about customer service and aiming to achieve a faster turn-around-time in deploying equipment to customer sites. The unit members often had to travel to customer locations and so were periodically off Alpha-D premises. Communication was spontaneous and frequent between the team as they talked about work and made several jokes simultaneously. They sat together within a desk hub and simply looked up to initiate discussion on any issue or update themselves. They participated in formal meetings with colleagues from other non-Lab workgroups however as a team, they were not seen holding formal meetings. They went to lunch together, leaving behind their empty desk hub. On some occasions, they purchased their meals and returned to eat at their desk as they worked. At other times, they ate in the restaurant on the ground floor. They were located on the other side of the Lab wall and so sat in proximity to relatively more legacy Alpha-D colleagues as well as the customer service team which sat in the neighbouring desk hub.

The SPAR customer services workgroup of three were responsible for customer enquiries, bidding activities for contracts and maintaining appropriate records of customer transactions. They were the administrative arm for the SPAR product and

processed all customer requests. They sometimes acted as liaison between the customer and the lab, passing on useful information from customers or obtaining technical information to support customers. Their work was largely unstructured and mainly reactive as described by them in informal conversations and interviews. The team interacted more in informal ways and through frequent communication at their desks. Issues were discussed and clarified and resolved at their desks through frequent conversational exchanges. They did not hold formal customer service team meetings during the period of fieldwork, however, the members were often part of formal meetings with colleagues from different workgroups outside the SPAR business.

The business workgroup looked after the main products of the Dora division which were known as DECTRA, HESS, VERN, REED, COD, TRP and the newly acquired SPAR product. There were 5 employees who were responsible for marketing and sales of the various products in the division. For both SPAR and non-SPAR products, the general evaluative logic was that of commercial performance. Targets were set and evaluated on a monthly, quarterly, half year and annual basis. Actual performance was measured against set targets and reasons for variances were identified with measures to close the gaps. For monitoring, fortnightly meetings were held by the business team. The first meeting was a detailed 2-hour session where detailed presentations were given by the respective unit heads in charge of sales, marketing, technical support and in some cases a representative from the back office SPAR Lab. The meetings were presided over by the Head of business or a designated lead in his absence. Two weeks later, the second meeting was held and was a 30-minute catch up session to give members updates and resolve urgent issues. Again, each unit head gave a brief summary of current activities and raised any hot topics for consideration. The business team interacted more with customer service, technical support, occasionally with the Lab but infrequently with the manufacturing team.

The SPAR manufacturing workgroup was based in the USA. After the acquisition of Brownfield, the manufacturing facility for the SPAR product previously based in the UK was closed down and moved to the USA. Employees were made redundant, some left the company and the staff strength shrank. The ultimate parent company Alpha-D Global wanted to centralise all manufacturing activities into the USA and this prompted the decision to close the UK site. The acquired group considered this a poor decision because of the close relationship between all participants in the value chain such as

developers, manufacturing, technical support and customer service for their product. Close to three years afterwards (2015), the manufacturing business in the USA was contracted out to a separate company based in the USA. An SPAR lab engineer from the UK was commissioned to go over to the USA for two weeks and train the contractors in the significant areas for manufacturing the product. This decision brought much uncertainty to the lab staff, and worries about the safety of their jobs and roles.

## **4.6 People and interaction patterns within and across workgroups**

Informal observations revealed that the workgroups in the Dora division generally interacted in both formal and informal ways. However, they were required to act within the limits of their roles as defined by the company policy. The bureaucratic organisational structure was confirmed from operational documents reviewed while interview discussions with participants indicated frustrations around the imposed limitations in relation to roles. A review of archival documents, participant observation data and informal conversations indicated that formal meetings in the division consisted of conventional workgroup meetings and project based team meetings.

### **4.6.1 Conventional workgroup meetings**

The conventional workgroup meetings in the division were held by the various sub groups such as the R&D lab, the business team, the software unit and manufacturing. There were also project-based meetings which included special project team meetings and regional team meetings. Informally, groups of individuals got together during symbolic meetings such as the meet-and-greet tea to welcome new Lab leader replacing Charlie, a Christmas dinner organised by the R&D team, a lunchtime send-off ceremony for a longstanding Brownfield colleague who had resigned and a small leaving tea party organised for me on my last day in Alpha-D. There were other more formally organised informal gatherings for staff members such as a cake baking competition, the company-wide Christmas dinner, a family fun day and a fireworks

night. These activities were introduced to improve the atmosphere in the work place and to serve as avenues to improve employee morale and engagement.

Meetings of conventional or formal workgroups were characterised by formality in the approach to organising the meeting. There were pre-arranged meeting venues, e-mail meeting notifications to participants prior to the meeting which gave details of venue and time, and required participants to confirm attendance. There was also a clear agenda for the meeting. It was usual to see participants attending the meeting carrying their laptops and cups of coffee in hand. They often walked in pairs or groups towards the meeting venue which could vary from week to week depending on room availability. The meetings were presided over by a chair or nominated chair who facilitated discussions and also formally closed the meeting. The e-mail notification specified clear start and end times for the meeting however, in reality it varied across workgroups.

In the R&D Lab the leaders of each sub-unit held weekly meetings regularly every Tuesday morning. The meeting took place in one of the meeting rooms pre-booked by the administrative assistant and was scheduled to last for two hours. The meetings were often chaired by the Brownfield leader, Charlie and in his absence, one of the team leaders would be asked to chair the meeting. Charlie when chairing tended to dominate discussions and appeared to perform the task of articulating for the rest of the team what the issues and resolutions were. In the early phase of the field work, Charlie would spell out the agenda for the meeting though in an unstructured way. The agenda evolved during the meeting after each subunit leader was called on to give an initial highlight of issues within their sub-unit, known as 'hot topics'. Charlie listened to all hot topics as he manually drafted in his notebook a working agenda for the day's meeting. After announcing the agenda to all, each leader would then be asked in turn to make a more detailed presentation and as they spoke, issues were systematically attended to or resolved. Charlie on a number of occasions was observed to show empathy and a handholding style at supporting the sub-unit leaders during meetings. His communication with the team was observed as courteous, however it was often extremely detailed as Charlie took his time to probe with direct questions, rephrasing problems and articulating lines of action as he sought to obtain clarity on the issues brought up by team leaders. Where a follow up action was delegated to a team member, Charlie's input was unmistakably evident. For example, details of the content of e-mails to be sent out by team leaders were often verbally dictated by Charlie.



During discussions, there was regular usage of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’, to refer to the Brownfield population and demarcate it from Alpha-D which was referred to as ‘they’ and ‘them’. The process of discussing unit challenges was unhurried and detailed. Charlie made frequent eye contact with team leaders as he listened to the challenges they brought up, defining and restating the ramifications of the problems raised and agreeing on action plans to resolve or at least address each issue. There was no concern about the time it took to go through this process for resolving issues. As a result of the meticulous attention to each detail, the meetings tended to extend beyond the planned durations. On a number of occasions, a few team leaders left the meeting to attend another. Team members sometimes joked in Charlie’s absence about how lengthy meetings were because of Charlie’s overly detailed style of communication. The meetings on the whole appeared to be a forum for bringing up constraints to the work in the different subunits and these were often related to policies, processes or procedures.

The software sub unit of R&D was a core unit in the design of the team’s products. It was made up of four members led by a team leader. Two members had worked together as colleagues in Brownfield over the years. The third was from a different acquisition while the fourth joined as a contractor to support the team’s work. They operated fairly informally and communicated spontaneously since they sat within the same desk hub. It became evident that they hardly held formal meetings when I asked the leader for permission to observe them. He informed me that they usually communicated via the telephone on days when they worked from home. The arrangement appeared logical since it allowed the leader to be abreast of any issues before he came in the next day for the weekly team leaders’ meeting. The issues discussed during the software sub-unit meeting were highly technical in detail and so I was only able to follow to an extent. I sometimes asked questions about processes or acronyms unfamiliar to me and they were happy to explain. I participated mostly as an observer however, I constantly thought of how to be more involved in the team’s activities. When conversation became more puzzled about work, resource (personnel) allocation and justice issues, I stepped in constructively and my suggestion was taken on board, demonstrating my becoming accepted as a legitimate “participant”, beyond a mere observer-researcher role. I was pleased particularly because it strengthened my relationship with the software sub-unit.

Subsequently and at various times, I would approach the team members informally to ask questions, obtain further clarification or make small talk.

While observing the technical teams presented more challenges with respect to understanding technical language often used, it gave the opportunity to see the fit between the back office work in the Lab and the work of the business team. My exposure to the details of technicalities in the products during Lab meetings allowed me to quickly grasp issues being discussed by the sales and marketing employees. In addition, I was able to understand the reasons for areas of conflict regarding expectations about project time frames, customer requests for amendments in products and the overall fit with business goals and targets. The business team held meetings less frequently from the Lab and met twice a month. The first meeting was scheduled for 2 hours while the second was usually a brief catch-up session lasting for half an hour. The participants met in pre-booked meeting rooms and often had other participants who dialled in virtually. It was a high-level strategic meeting made up of leaders of business and non-business units across the division. I attended for the first time with Charlie who had facilitated my access to the meeting but thereafter attended on my own. The first meeting I attended was unplanned in my schedule as I only got to know of the meeting- called a communications session- that morning. There was a mix of genders although there were more males than females<sup>15</sup>. The pace of discussions on issues was relatively faster and there was often joint thinking about how to solve identified challenges. The current performance of each product leader/team was appraised using a quantitative metric system which compared quarterly targets with actual performance in terms of revenue. Reasons for the variance were spelt out and action plans to close the gaps were outlined. The overall emphasis was placed on achieving the numbers and pulling whatever resource was needed to ensure that they were on course to eventually meeting their annual targets. Visual displays of graphs, charts and presentation content formed a key part of each presentation, using the technology aids provided in the room. Power point and excel files were shared by presenters via technology platforms and projected onto the wall in front of the room. Participants generally appeared more vocal than in SPAR lab leaders' meetings and attention was paid to timing as each unit leader delivered their presentation. The few virtual participants who had logged in via telephone could be heard on the speakers in

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<sup>15</sup> See Table 4.1.

the room and were sometimes asked for their contributions. The team leader appeared supportive and regularly asked for contributions on issues from participants.

As a participant in the meetings of the Lab, software and business workgroups, I was physically present as an observer in the respective meeting rooms. For customer service and technical support which interacted more informally, no formal meetings were seen to hold although their interactions were physically observed. The manufacturing team meetings were conducted through a virtual medium and therefore observation was of a different form. The reason for the virtual meeting was because manufacturing was based outside the UK site of Alpha-D and telephone conferences were a cost-effective way of collaborating between the participants. Participants were drawn from manufacturing, software, quality control and hardware teams and they held meetings to address on a weekly basis any issues that arose between the R&D and Manufacturing. Participants from the Lab sat at their respective desks, placed headphones over their ears and dialled in to the meeting which was steered by the convener, based in the manufacturing team in the USA. The meeting was usually a short one which lasted for about half an hour. A lot of technical language was used during communications which made comprehension a challenge at the initial stages of observation. However, over time, individual voices of participants as well as acronym use became familiar as I sought for clarification of terms and issues from a few participants after meetings.

#### **4.6.2 Unconventional workgroups or Project-based meetings**

Meetings of conventional workgroups were complemented by project-based workgroup meetings. Project-based meetings were set up for specific or ad-hoc purposes. Membership was dependent on relevance of participants to the issue to be discussed. For example, Charlie had mentioned to me that he had been drafted into a small prestigious team of five individuals from different locations across the global company to spearhead the identification of high-performing individuals who had a mix of technical competence, entrepreneurial capabilities as well as business awareness. This initiative was expected to fast-track innovation and creativity in the organisation globally. Similar to conventional workgroup meetings, project-based meetings were facilitated by a chair or nominated chair. The details of meetings were included in

meeting invites sent out to all relevant participants. A review of several e-mail meeting invites which I received confirmed the protocol for meetings with respect to date, time, venue and agenda. In terms of regularity, the purpose of the team determined how often meetings would be held. As such, meetings could take place weekly over the life of a project or held over a few days or hours. Within the context of a particular project team meeting which I observed, I was able to see how the Alpha-D process-driven and measurement system began to directly impact on some of the core values of the engineering team's way of working, specifically how it affected working in a working in a flexible manner and with little concerns for strict time frames.

The project team meeting which I attended was a virtual dial-in one because participants were spread out within and beyond the UK office of Alpha-D. All participants dialled in from their desks and respective locations. During the discussion, the R&D engineer who was key to the success of the project appeared unable to commit to specific timeframes for delivering on different stages of the project. At different meetings, I had been informed that he had changed expected delivery times. He appeared to want to avoid committing to delivering on tasks, which was frustrating for the meeting's purpose. The project manager who chaired the meeting on the other hand needed to tie delivery of various stages of the project to a set time scale, in line with Alpha-D's policy. The meeting provided an opportunity to observe the strain caused by interaction between work values of flexibility in work timelines and Alpha-D's orientation to monitoring delivery within strict phases of project work. These appeared to be incompatible work values as they came up against each other.

Another type of special project meeting observed was a regional team meeting. The meeting took place over two days and was chaired by two senior European delegates and included participants from 6 workgroups in the Dora division. It was set up to bring technical and commercial workgroups together to have a conversation about how to fully integrate the Brownfield business into Alpha-D's business and translate the successful integration to subsidiaries in other continents. Twelve participants were in the room while three dialled in remotely via telephone. The convener indicated that the market perception was that Alpha-D had not commercialised a new product since the Brownfield acquisition. He appeared genuinely interested in knowing what was going on in the UK market regarding new products and resources being allocated to their development. Participants from the business side of the team also recognised that

getting information and understanding of current R&D projects was critical for the marketing team to be able to do the market positioning they needed. These indicated a need for information flows from business to R&D and vice versa which needed to be set in motion.

As the conversation developed momentum, concerns were expressed about a US-centred perspective which was being imposed on the UK / Europe business. Participants recognised Alpha-D's core competence in industrial manufacturing, particularly its preference for developing a low-cost product which could simply do the job. However, there was a general perception that the USA wielded enormous influence over decisions concerning non-US markets, without due attention to their local peculiarities. A participant had remarked, 'we can't really influence what is going on in the States'. Another participant expressed concern by saying, 'the US probably don't understand the nuts and bolts from a UK perspective. I fear for anything coming from the US because everyone seems to be taking a very US-centred view of the world, rather than what works for us in Europe.' (Participant observations transcript, page 46)

Other comments revealed the team's perception of industry competitors as 'flexible, hungry, aggressive' while Alpha-D was described as 'slow' and 'like a moving train' process-wise. The inflexibility of the Alpha-D process for introducing new products was identified as a major drawback. The meeting provided an opportunity to observe the perceptions of participants about the overarching influence of the US on decisions about non-US markets. In particular, the Alpha-D policy about prioritised projects to which resources would be committed was enacted by senior business officials in the US. However, in the European and UK markets, it did not make sense to close their eyes to other opportunities uncovered. The US prioritisation and resource allocation appeared to be driven purely by commercial logic. Whereas, the discussions in the meeting revealed that responsiveness to local customer needs was equally important in the discharge of duties, irrespective of whether such customer requests featured on the global priority lists or not.

## 4.7 Structural changes in Alpha-D

Meetings in Alpha-D could be an indicator of forthcoming events. Sometimes such meetings were semi-formal such as meet and greet gatherings or the going-away lunch get-together organised for a Lab staff member. They could be informal and ad-hoc such as when participants huddled together around desks and discussed in low tones. For example, in a casual conversation with some participants, concerns were expressed about the recent sale of an arm of Alpha-D's business which affected almost all employees working within that business. There were concerns expressed about the wellbeing of colleagues who would have to leave and about when next such a structural change would take place. Other times when meetings were planned, they took place in formal meeting rooms, such as when important announcements were to be made. The more formal meetings often indicated that structural events were imminent in the company. There were a number of structurally-related events or changes which took place after the acquisition of Brownfield and during the period of observation. These can be categorised into work-related, people-related, and form-related changes.

### 4.7.1 Work-related changes

The first type, work-related changes had to do with changes affecting the ways of working in the company. Alpha-D as a large multinational organisation had standardised processes for its operations. Its business was predominantly industrial manufacturing and its procedures were designed to support the industrial production model. Brownfield was described by former employees as having operated a flexible operational model more suited to its service flow offering to customers. Therefore, coming into Alpha-D required adapting to the new ways of working with respect to processes. In line with its widget-based model, Alpha-D had strict processes for introducing new products and these contrasted with the more fluid release system compatible with software products.

In the Dora division, there were specific processes relating to work in the various workgroups. Within the R&D team, new Alpha-D processes included testing procedures, procedures for submission of creativity reports, procedures for logging in

hours of work, processes for the introduction of new products, procedures for requesting engineering changes or development work and procedures for securing approvals for requisitions made. Within the customer service team, there were procedures for bidding for contracts, taking customer orders or re-orders and processes for checking for stock positions. The technical service team also had procedures to follow in installing and activating products on customer sites. For the administrative staff member in the lab, organising meetings also required specific procedures which included sending meeting invites by e-mail to all participants and receiving their confirmations and booking formal meeting rooms for specified time periods. The sales and marketing workgroups were made up of non-Brownfield employees and so were generally more familiar with the company processes and procedures.

Another type of work-related change which Brownfield group encountered was signified by the Alpha-D policy on prioritisation of projects and ensuing resource allocation. Whereas the engineers indicated that in Brownfield, they had enjoyed relative freedom to pursue creative projects alongside attending to customers' requirements, the current Alpha-D system prioritised global projects for development work and to which approvals for resources would be expedited. These projects were selected on the basis of their commercial viability and potential contribution to revenue given resources made available. As a result, while some engineers worked on prioritised projects, others continued to work on customer projects or routine maintenance work which was generally viewed as non-prioritised.

#### **4.7.2 People-related changes**

The second type of structural change is people-related. People -related changes had to do with complying with strict processes for conducting regular subordinate appraisals through meetings called one-on-ones where target and timelines would be agreed by both participants. Performance reviews took place twice a year; half-yearly and annually. In addition, employees were expected to participate in engagement surveys, periodic and compulsory training or compliance courses and to comply with Alpha-D policy regarding hiring additional employees for lab work. There were clear procedures which needed to be complied with in spite of any urgency in need for human resources.

A major change in the lab occurred when Charlie was given a new role in Alpha-D and the lab was assigned a new lab manager, Beth. Lab employees expressed uncertainty about what the new change in leadership would bring. However, they were open to leadership which could facilitate their being productive in terms of getting things out of the *system* quickly.

#### 4.7.3 Form-related changes

The third type of structural change had to do with alterations to organisational form. Thirteen weeks into the fieldwork and precisely almost three years after Brownfield was acquired, an arm of the Dora division's business was sold off to a rival company. The business was outside Brownfield's direct business however, some employees had over time made friends with some affected colleagues. A cautious informal conversation around a desk hub revealed the imminent change to the Dora divisional structure. The head office of Alpha-D Global took a decision to sell off the assets in the US site of the company. However, the global assets were already in the process of being sold off although the manufacturing employees and assets pertaining to the business were not expected to be affected. The timeline was in the last quarter of that current year and almost all the two dozen staff members who currently worked in that business area were expected to transition to the new company. The affected staff members were in effect now acquired by the rival company and the possibility of resigning and returning to Alpha-D was constrained by the Alpha-D policy of no return for the first twenty-four months after a sell-off of part of the company business. The informal news about the sale sparked feelings of suspicion, fear and worries about the long-term safety of the jobs of those huddled around the desk hub, discussing. Conversations with a gatekeeper, Dorothy revealed that although talks and negotiations to secure protection for the jobs of affected employees had preceded the business decision to sell off the unit, unfriendly and complaining e-mails and letters had been pouring in as the unhappy staff had no idea that this would happen to them. They were given no say in the discussions and also could not see the company's efforts. Dorothy felt the strain from the employees' reactions to decisions made on the deal, which were aimed at securing a win-win outcome for the company and affected employees.



Three weeks after the rumours about the sell-off, a casual conversation with a staff member in the Dora division suggested that another major change was happening. The conversation participant expressed concerns about continuing in the organisation because of the disruption the change would bring to work life as she knew it. This time, it was a widespread process change which was to take place globally but would be rolled out across regions sequentially. Subsequent conversations revealed that it was an expensive transformation programme intended to migrate all processes on to a single platform. It cost a huge amount not only financially but also in people terms because employees would be required to be trained in the use of the new software and processes. In effect people would have to be taken off their current job roles to participate in the transformation. Their work would thus get allocated to someone else. In addition, certain functions were being pooled together and located differently. For instance, administrative functions which had existed prior to the transformation within divisions were being moved to an Eastern European base from which all other units would be served. Previously, there was an administrative role in each of the five divisions of Alpha-D UK which served each division. With the new change, all administrative roles were pooled and moved to the new base. As a result, affected employees would have a narrower scope of work, becoming somewhat specialists in a single area whereas before, they had 'control' over a wider range of functions. The potential implications of such job role changes for affected employees were: a loss of job and identity, a possible move to a different location, stress from having to deal with another change, temporary separation from long-known work groups and a narrowing of span in work role. For employees, a job loss could be worsened by the requirement in some cases, to train the persons who would take over their roles. These planned changes had implications for employee morale and it was unclear whether the senior management of Alpha-D were aware of them.

A second form-related change was the closure of the manufacturing facility for the lab's products in the USA. This change had been rumoured within close circles and did not affect the lab work directly. It was eventually announced during a meeting of the entire lab, during which contractors were excluded. A senior management staff chaired the meeting and gave business justifications for the closure of the facility. He placed value on several indices: the profit and loss account of Alpha-D, the company's competitive position in the market, the company's financials, diversification strategy of Alpha-D

and a focus on cost. As such, the decision to close down the manufacturing facility was driven by financial considerations. The convener mentioned that there were remedial efforts in place to provide options for the close to two dozen affected employees who knew about the planned closure ahead of its implementation and jobs would be advertised for them to consider. The lab members were familiar with their USA colleagues whom they had worked with over the years. Still, the convener urged the team to demonstrate empathy in relating with their affected colleagues. While some affected staff members had decided to stay and assist with training, integration and handing over before the 6-month time-frame for full implementation, some others had decided to exit the organisation.

The convener stressed that fixing the profit and loss account took priority in the closure decision. Secondly, the plan was to create synergy across all products. According to the convener, Alpha-D as an organisation saw the occurrence as a huge positive because of prior challenges with suppliers. Following this change, Alpha-D could now focus on the areas in which it had competitive advantage. The convener gave reassurances to the R&D team and stressed that the intention was not to *'pull apart your organisation'*. The lab employees did not appear to be convinced by this explanation. Later conversations with Charlie and some individual engineers revealed that what was on their minds was the fear of the same thing happening to their team. Although the lab development work was not immediately impacted, the direct impact of the announcement was fear, concern and suspicion. One of the immediately visible effects on the R&D team was a halt in the weekly troubleshooting meetings between manufacturing and the lab as the manufacturing participants were unavailable. With the manufacturing part of production now planned to be outsourced to a company in the USA, a hardware engineer was expected to travel to the US and over a two-week period conduct some formal training for the relevant members of the new company which would enable them understand the intricacies of the camera products. Following the briefing session, informal conversations in the lab were characterised by references to the impending closure.

The combined effect of these overlapping changes was a sense of instability in the acquired group expressed through fears about the security of their business. Charlie identified systematic changes in their work environment which posed a risk for who they were as professionals. He had in his own way tried to preserve the lab's identity in

order to shield them from being changed as a result of the acquisition. He believed that their identity was central to how they worked in the past and the resultant success they had experienced.

## 5 CHAPTER FIVE – FINDINGS

### 5.1 Thematic findings from contextual and participant observation data

From analysing the contextual and participant observation data, three broad themes emerge as indicated in Table 4.2. First, the data indicates that there are strong company values which emphasise concerns with image and reputation, measurement and commercial valuation of work and individualisation of contribution. Secondly, there are structural bureaucratic characteristics underpinning the company culture which have effects on work life. These are:

- Rule following.
- Complexity in organisational structure.
- Stratified employee structure.
- Employees caught between UK, EU and Global obligations.
- Tension between control over access and transparency.
- Structured operational processes which are compatible with the tangible and material form of the object being produced.

Thirdly, interactions between the structure of Alpha-D and the culture of the acquired Brownfield group indicate that there is a lack of fit in the ways that Alpha-D and the Brownfield Lab understand key aspects of work. Specifically, there is incongruence in understanding of core values of collaboration via frequent meetings, creativity and productivity. Summarised in Table 4.2 are the three themes and indicative concepts from the contextual and observation data in relation to the studied organisation. The three themes i.e. strong company values, bureaucratic characteristics and incongruent understanding will be discussed subsequently.

**Table 5.1: Summary table of context and observational themes with indicative concepts**

<b>Themes emerging from contextual and observation data</b>		
<b>(i) Company Values</b>	<b>(ii) Structural features underpinning Alpha-D culture</b>	<b>(iii) Post-Acquisition Structure-culture interaction</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Sensitivity to Image and reputation</li> <li>-Commercial returns and profitability</li> <li>-Quantification and performance measurement</li> <li>- Individualisation of contribution</li> <li>-Commodification of labour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Rule following</li> <li>-Complexity in structure of organisation</li> <li>-Stratified organisational structure</li> <li>-Employees caught between competing obligations to US/UK</li> <li>-Tension between control and transparency</li> <li>- Industrial production model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enabling/disabling effect of formal meetings</li> <li>-Incongruence in understanding about creativity &amp; productivity</li> <li>-Incongruence in understanding about notions of quality and real work.</li> </ul>

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### **5.1.1 Theme 1: Prevalence of strong company values**

The first theme is the prevalence of strong company values. Alpha-D shows strong concerns with image and reputation, particularly in projecting a specific image of itself to the public. For example, in a prominent public relations document available for visitors to peruse in the reception area, it projects values such as being committed to R&D, as being an ethical company and as being a legally compliant organisation. It puts forward its commitment to R&D in financial terms, detailing this in printed material as well as on the company's website. The company has historically been sensitive to matters of intellectual property and ownership as well as compliance, as

recorded in printed documents from its archives such as books, newspaper records and organisational intranet web pages. These values are entrenched in its culture in the form of compliance-driven operations, a structured organisation and appraisal of creative work, as well as values of compliance with and upholding ethical processes. Also part of its image management is the clear desk policy. With respect to measurement and commercial valuation of work, the company places emphasis on commercial returns. Profitability is a core value which drives business decisions, structural changes and policies. The business workgroup for example constantly tracks sales and projected profits from respective products on a regular basis in its meetings. These are monitored monthly, quarterly and annually. The back office R&D team on the other hand is tasked with generating innovative products which are projected to define the market. The company also demonstrates its commercial orientation by tracking the market performance of products created in the preceding 5 years, expecting its contribution to be a certain percentage of total sales revenue.

Alpha-D sets benchmarks for accountability in various areas particularly in performance measurement. For products, performance is measured in terms of actual revenues, profits and costs on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis and compared with targets as well as the previous year's performance. For employees, regular performance appraisals track contributions against set targets. In relation to R&D work, Alpha-D accounts for the number of patents issued, which technologies have the highest growth potential and how quickly a product moves from idea phase to commercialisation phase. These measures are seen as a way to gauge return on the company's investment.

The observation data indicates that Alpha-D's processes appraise individual contributions to results whilst simultaneously valuing highly collaboration and strong team work. The collaboration value is evident in the heavy meeting culture across the division. Many daily meetings were observed and indicate the strong value attached to sharing of information within and across workgroups to inspire creativity. The appraisal system of the company which individualises and tracks employee contributions shows a striking impact in the R&D team which traditionally worked collaboratively in developing its products. For example, software engineers carried out development work together on the same piece of software even though they were individual subject experts. The final product was thus a result of the combined efforts across different specialist areas. However, in Alpha-D, lab employees were expected to contribute on an

individual basis to populating the bank of fresh innovative ideas which had potential to become commercially successful. In addition, they were expected to meet their given annual quotas for writing up creativity reports. The company had a general standard expected for quality work from its R&D employees. Its notion of quality was one which emphasised process compliance as well as legal and documentary compliance for products sold. Products were expected to deliver on the promise of the company's brand with respect to performance. However, this notion of quality excluded the development process for the specialist lab work. While test plans and country-based compliance checks were compulsory parts of lab quality control processes, ensuring quality in software or hardware development was a responsibility taken on by individual engineers as practising members of their professional community. The lab team worked collaboratively as experts across a range of specialist areas and there was an absence of ranking or perceptions of status across subject areas. There was a general sense of mutual respect for one another's area of expertise. Amongst software engineers, the level of rigour in their creative work was embedded in lines of code and could only be appreciated by another software engineer. Expectedly, such rigour would not be visible to Alpha-D in documented creativity reports. Furthermore, the likelihood that an idea would eventually progress to becoming a patent was based on its commercial viability rather than on the complexity of the intellectual work involved. As a result, Alpha-D's idea of quality differed from that of the Brownfield engineers. In general, the engineers considered it unrealistic to give production quotas to their type of creative work, believing that rather, ideas flourish where a conducive atmosphere exists.

In addition to core engineering work targets with time frames which were expected to be met with respect to assigned projects and maintenance work, the engineering team had annual development plans which they were expected to achieve through compulsory and relevant training sessions such as technical meetings, leadership training or ethical compliance courses. For those in leadership positions, they were expected to also perform managerial activities such as regular subordinate performance appraisals, one-to-one sessions for task reviews, on-the-job training as well as oversight functions to support their team members. Some employees were expected to participate in collaborative meetings outside the lab, facilitate customer training sessions and also participate in lab demonstration sessions for senior management colleagues or customers. For exceptional performance on the job, both managers and employees

could nominate deserving colleagues for cash based vouchers or recognition awards. The more prestigious quarterly technical award was designed to stimulate creativity, productivity and collaborative culture and its criteria specified qualifying individual and team-based behaviours. The award had both financial and reputational benefits and offered the beneficiary high visibility not only in the UK but at global level. Many engineers seemed to be unaware or unimpressed with the types of awards available and continue to work, while any emerging breakthroughs were highlighted and recognised during lab management meetings. Although the achievement criteria for the technical award suggested that exceptional performance could not occur in isolation of the beneficiary's work community, the award system signified the encouragement and reinforcement of attention to how the self is seen within an R&D group. It potentially promoted recognition to the high performer in isolation of the community from which he or she emerged.

#### **5.1.2 Theme 2: Salience of Alpha-D's bureaucratic characteristics on its observable organisational culture.**

The second theme emerging from the data has to do with the salience of structural bureaucratic characteristics underpinning Alpha-D's culture. First, there is evidence of strict rule following in the organisation and as a result of this, predictability. The company operates like a machine given its emphasis on employees strictly following rules, processes and procedures. Alpha-D was described as 'a moving train process-wise' during an observed meeting. With rule following, there is greater potential for predictability. However, there is also the simultaneous effect of rigidity that following rules strictly establishes in the company's operations. In terms of work interactions, effects of strict rule following is evident in work processes i.e. requisitions, compliance procedures, training etc. It is also prominent in attitudes to work. For example, employees are constrained from informally taking on additional responsibilities by the defined boundaries around their formal roles. In the engineering team, the formal constraints represented a clear change in social interaction patterns across workgroups, reported as what had characterised their pre-acquisition relations.



A second bureaucratic characteristic of Alpha-D is a complex organisational structure. The company operates as a strong bureaucratic entity with clear hierarchical structures, functional specialisation in workgroups but also project-based teams which draw membership from multiple functional areas. In addition to direct reporting lines in the UK, there are dotted reporting lines across regional (Europe) and global levels. Underpinning the company's matrix structure are its values of knowledge sharing, free information flow and collaboration. However, the matrix structure also has the effects of facilitating complications in communication across the different levels, a slowing down of decision making and necessitating multiple meetings. Such additional meetings have a disruptive effect on the Brownfield R&D team who prefer to be left alone to concentrate on working. Related to the complex bureaucratic organisational structure is a stratified employee system. When placed alongside an organisational emphasis on collaboration, openness and transparency, maintaining structural boundaries which underpin not only how employees interact but which also restrict information access further complicates social relations. Contractors are excluded from a number of activities in the organisation such as training, appraisals and company information dissemination meetings. However, Brownfield R&D contractors are closely involved with the technical details of the team's work in production process. As such, excluding them from important meetings, professional development or trainings at best could delay but often only weakly prevented information from eventually being disseminated to them. However, the visibly strict implementation of the policy influences social relations between full time workers and contractors. While full time workers exercise caution in conversations with their contractor colleagues, exclusions from meetings leaves contractors with a sense of being in the dark, wondering what important issues were being discussed and sometimes pondering about the security of their jobs.

The complex bureaucratic structure of Alpha-D also places employees in a situation where they are caught between UK, Europe and Global obligations. Across the different locations and levels in the company, there are information requirements. In a bid to attend to the information requirements and multiple lines of communication, there is an increase in the volume and pace of work for employees. Furthermore, the matrix structure puts employees in a position which makes them open to tensions from being faced with conflicting demands and priorities from UK, Europe and Global (USA) businesses. For example, employees located in the UK understandably may focus on

attending to UK business issues. However, instructions also come from regional and global locations which require attention. There is the potential for employees to put in more hours of work as they attempt to keep up with the increase in pace of communication. Conventionally, the more senior employees are known to work considerably longer hours beyond their contracts and this practice has become acceptable as a norm.

Alpha-D's bureaucratic structure also reveals contradictions. This is the tension between access control and transparency. Alpha-D demonstrates in its policies, procedures and structure, a high level of sensitivity to issues of security, transparency and access. The company is sensitive about access to information and its policies emphasise this orientation. Alpha-D is known internally for emphasising secrecy and confidentiality. Exclusion of contractors from full staff meetings, strict policies about clear desks, widespread use of privacy filters for computer screens and physical control of access to spaces within the premises are some indicators of this value. To an external observer, the heavy use of acronyms to describe processes, workgroups, customers, projects or products also creates boundaries around information being shared because the terms are incomprehensible. On the other hand, there is a sense that Alpha-D values and promotes openness and transparency given its physical structural design, the open plan seating, the glass walls which reveal occupants of meeting rooms and an ethos which encourages collaborative meetings etc.

In a highly structured bureaucratic organisation organised around an industrial production business model characterised by mass production of standardised units of products, an orientation to unit-based measurements of value can be expected. Given its competency in managing resources for industrial production, Alpha-D exhibits a similar expectation of consistent and measurable per unit productivity from R&D employees across the company (Deal and Kennedy, 1982, p15), reviewed in time periods such as quarterly, half-yearly and annually. However, this expectation overlooks the peculiarities of the engineering craft in the Brownfield lab. While the more traditional chemical labs can attempt to churn out new products within relatively shorter time frames, the engineering lab conventionally takes longer to come up with a new product. An important feature of the Brownfield lab is the mental nature of much of creative engineering work which requires long periods of intense concentration and detailed thinking. The mental work and period of tinkering needs to occur before testable

prototypes are made and the duration of these activities is sometimes unpredictable. On the other hand, the traditional chemical labs are able to experiment with physical materials directly giving them a higher likelihood for creating new commercial products more quickly. The differences in the nature of the objects being produced across labs suggest that measurement of contribution needs to be appropriate and aligned with the uniqueness of each production process. For example, an adhesive-based product goes through discrete operational phases from conceptualisation to commercialisation. Interactions with the users or customers advance through these phases until the product is sold and shipped. Subsequent interactions signal that a new transaction is taking place. This process varies with the iterative nature of relationships with customers and products developed by the Brownfield lab. From conceptualisation to post-sale maintenance, SPAR products iterate between releases and bug fixes. The clearly phased structure of operational processes in Alpha-D is therefore more suited to the company's tangible products.

### **5.1.3 Theme 3: Distortions created by post-acquisition structure-culture interaction**

The third theme emerging from participant observation data suggest that there are important distortions created by the post-acquisition structure - culture interaction. First, there are enabling as well as disabling effects of collaboration. Alpha-D's values of collaboration amongst workgroups and technologies within its matrix structure and the use of project teams underscores the heavy meeting culture observed. As a result, meetings are a core feature of daily work life of employees and evidence their attempts to share useful knowledge and information. Some Brownfield lab employees voiced frustrations about the disruptive effect of numerous meetings and trainings. These are seen more as distractions which take them away from focusing on their core research and development work, particularly on high priority projects. The disabling perspective held by the lab engineers about the company's idea of collaboration indicates the existence of incongruence in understanding. The data reveals similar differences in understanding about creativity and productivity. The engineers disagreed with the organisation's approach to identifying their creativity and measuring their productivity. Alpha-D sees the evidence of productive work as the creativity reports. It emphasises

the need for these reports to be generated for visibility. The R&D team have a different understanding of where their creative output sits. Rather than being in the form of creativity reports, it resides in the lines of code. These lines house potential for unlimited configurations and possibilities in creativity. While the production of creativity reports are intentional actions, the understanding of the team is that true creativity was more a by-product of their diligent and focused work. There is also a difference between Alpha-D and the Brownfield lab engineers in the conceptual understanding of what is considered as a new product. There have been debates within the Lab about what really constitutes a 'new' idea as understood by Alpha-D. Conversations in observed meetings revealed that the engineers held themselves up to a higher standard of creativity in production than what was considered as adequate by Alpha-D. While Charlie encouraged them to turn in the smallest of ideas as creativity reports, the engineers were unimpressed with this approach, as they were motivated by craft pride. The creativity reports as indicated by Alpha-D policy are a form of representation of the team's work individually and in aggregate. As such, they provide some visible basis for recognising the value being added by the engineers. However, some engineers disagree with the logic with many considering such reports as a waste of valuable time, given the abundance of multiple priority tasks needing attention, including development and continuous maintenance work. The engineers came from a product-focused culture where energies are directed towards bringing products to life rather than on writing up documents such as creativity reports. Furthermore, Alpha-D's processes for dealing with creativity reports appears to involve a subtle dimension of internal selling in order to move creativity reports along the organisational pathway to patents. Historically, key senior members of Alpha-D had championed the promotion of supporting the development of ideas thought to have high potential until it became a successful commercial product with patent protection. The relationship observed between the lab members and their leader, Charlie suggested that Charlie was responsible for championing the cause of the team. He represented the interests of the lab in discussions with senior Alpha-D management staff members. A later conversation with Charlie confirmed that he played an active role in championing the cause for ideas logged in as creativity reports which he believed had strong potential to be commercially successful. While Charlie was actively engaged in many collaborative meetings and functions outside the lab, the engineers were more concerned with focusing their attention on engineering development and maintenance work.

Despite the engineers' perspectives about what counts as real work, they continue to operate within a company-defined appraisal system. The Brownfield team on the whole was appraised based on creativity and quality measures. In addition, the company looked at how commercially successful their legacy products were in the market. Business meetings and other division-level communication sessions gave specific financial indicators of the SPAR products' performance which had not been too good since the acquisition. With respect to products, quality measures are especially important for development or technical work and include: quality and uniqueness of product, performance of product relative to competitors', service delivery turn-around time and number or frequency of customer complaints. The quality metric for engineering work was better understood by a professional from within the field and hard to judge or appraise by someone who was not a software or hardware engineer. The bulk of a developer's job was not visible by simply observing him or her at work. As a result, metrics for measuring performance are unable to capture what takes place during the actual coding or programming process. Development work is a labour-intensive production process which is difficult to separate from the final output given that coding work is iterative. In contrast to the challenges with measuring coding work, the lab's broader appraisal system also takes into consideration the engineers' ability to complete Alpha-D prioritised projects to specified timelines. This was a more straightforward assessment of performance based on company-specific standards of quality. With respect to time-lines, several conversations during lab meetings indicated that a number of projects were behind schedule. As far as the engineers were concerned, there were valid explanations for the delays. In addition to reviewing completion times and acceptable product quality, new ideas are expected to be generated to populate the bank of potential new products. Some prioritised projects involved new and competitive product platforms with specific functionalities. Alongside this, non-prioritised projects continued to be given attention even though there were sometimes challenges with getting expedited approvals for requisitions. The themes of strong company values and complex bureaucratic features reveal cultural hallmarks of Alpha-D which are embedded in its policies, processes and practices. The interactions between Alpha-D's complex bureaucratic structure and the Brownfield craft culture creates conditions of conflict where values which hold incongruent meanings are forced to coexist in a community.

## 5.2 Findings from Interview data

From a detailed analysis of interview data, key findings emerge which relate to characteristics of the acquired population's culture, implications of the culture's encounters and interactions with the structural characteristics of Alpha-D (the acquirer), as well as results of this interaction. These findings are shown in table 5.2. Specifically, the first theme in the table indicates the importance of elements of professional identity in the engineering team such as craft pride, autonomy and ownership. The second theme relates to the need to project a favourable image to Alpha-D and the need to communicate the Brownfield team's output in terms that are visible to Alpha-D. The third theme is the incompatibility in meaning systems between Alpha-D and Brownfield. In particular, there is indication of inadequate measurement of performance in relation to the materiality of the object being produced, in relation to the notion of quality being applied to appraise the Brownfield development work, and in relation to the social conditions underpinning interaction in development work. The fourth theme relates to resistance to the introduction of formalised work processes and structural changes and effects of the bureaucratic structure of Alpha-D on the Brownfield team.

**Table 5.2 Summary table of themes emerging from interviews and indicative concepts**

<b>Interview Themes</b>			
<b>Elements of professional identity</b>	<b>Visibility / Image management</b>	<b>Incompatible meaning systems</b>	<b>Strong bureaucratic influences</b>
-Craft pride  -Autonomy  -Ownership	-Financial visibility  -Productive visibility (Echoing Individualisation of contribution)  -Physical visibility	-Inadequate performance measurement for Brownfield R&D  -Quest for tangibility versus intangible work  -Notion of progress via quantification versus via qualitative advances  -Communal versus individualised work	-Resistance to structural changes and bureaucracy  -Effects of bureaucracy on team

The above identified themes will now be discussed subsequently in subsections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4 using the themes as subsection labels. Evidence for the themes will also be provided using quotations from interview transcripts.

### **5.2.1 Theme 1: Significance of elements of professional identity in the engineering team**

The first finding from the analysis of interview data concerns the significant role of the elements of professional identity in the engineering team. The elements of the engineering team's professional identity emerging from interviews deepen the understanding of interactions between the reported culture of Brownfield pre-acquisition and the bureaucratic structural features of Alpha-D. The indicative labels are

craft pride, autonomy and ownership. Interview participants indicate that software and hardware engineering work are technical subject areas which are best comprehended by people within the technical engineering community. Engineering for the SPAR cameras was a more specialist area of expertise and involved a high level of expert knowledge and experience. The work involves creative application of knowledge particularly in code writing to develop programmes which run on the sophisticated cameras. In essence, it was mental work which required high concentration and several hours of close attention to detail. The results of such creative work gave the developer a strong sense of pride particularly when the product performs as designed. Julian is an example of a creative engineer who designs the software framework for the programme that runs on the cameras and enjoys his work immensely. He values the freedom to work uninhibited and some of his past achievements have come from focused periods of uninterrupted work. He emphasises this core value:

‘For me...as far as this product goes...leave us alone. Just...I don't know how...you know, no silly meetings, no creativity reports, just protect, protect, protect our time, and aggressively protect our time and let us focus on what we do best. But I was amazed when I first saw how Alpha-D operates... ‘How does anybody here get anything done?’ because there is always so much else going on...’ (Julian Interview transcript, p. 10)

He further confirms, ‘...and I think that when we're left to it, to focus on the real job, I think we are creative and effective...’ (Julian Interview transcript, p. 11). Describing his previous experience in Brownfield prior to the acquisition, he indicated that a key driver of creative work was the thought of being able to produce through coding, high grade, complex and more sophisticated cameras with endless possibilities for further development. Referring to the creative potential embedded in lines of code, he reveals that:

“It’s normally constantly evolving, constantly being worked and constantly being added to. The best of the code is structured. The easier it is, the more modular it is, the more self-contained the modules are; those are all like sort of quality metrics, if you like. And the easier it is to add new modules... to you know, extend the functionality... that kind of thing...because software is extremely complex. You know you can end up with hundreds of thousands of



miles of codes. So many infinite ways of...the languages are as expressive as human languages.” (Julian Interview transcript, p. 14).

The relevance and impact of engineering work was also valued by the engineers. Julian recalled his sense of achievement upon seeing his products out in the public domain, ‘...be in London and look up and there are your cameras...other people probably look up and ...they don't like them...(laughs). That's giving you a feeling of achievement...’ (Julian Interview transcript, p. 2)

Post-acquisition however, the freedom to make choices about what to create had become bounded by Alpha-D’s dominance over decisions about priority projects as well as by requirements to give evidence of productive work in the form of creativity reports. Some engineers continued to work even though it was not on any prioritised project, giving these individuals concerns about worth and job security. George highlighted the effects of such prioritisation in his comments,

“ It’s such a big company and people get involved with stuff which they might think is a good idea but they want everybody to row in the same direction and have control of what's going on and they want all the resources to go for the really big project...I don't have any big projects going on which sometimes leaves me a bit sort of worried...” (George Interview transcript, p. 9).

“ So if what we're doing is not priority.. why not put us doing something which is priority...Should I be joining the camera team to contribute as well...?” (George Interview transcript, p. 10).

Some engineers expressed the freedom they experienced in Brownfield as being able to take decisions on their creative work either in line with customer need requirements or when developing a new product. They also expressed this freedom as having a sense of ownership over the entire process of bringing the cameras to life from ideas to testing and installation. This autonomy was strongly treasured. Following the acquisition, the R&D team encountered Alpha-D’s gated process for the introduction of new products with periodic gate review meetings composed of cross functional team members. The engineers found this restrictive and frustrating as the gated process was unsuitable for the continuous and iterative nature of the camera business from design to maintenance. The overriding orientation and push from Alpha-D at the time was for the creation of

products with relatively less complex or sophisticated functionalities such that they could be produced at relatively cheaper costs and then sold at relatively lower prices or as part of an integrated system of products. The cost-to-build profile of the team had increased significantly due to added compliance-related costs. Alpha-D had strict policies around mandatory field site training and additional expenses were incurred on acquiring equipment for health and safety compliance. In addition to the obvious financial costs, the new structure brought about other costs to the engineering team in terms of a loss of autonomy and some degree of loss in the ownership of the final products.

### **5.2.2 Theme 2: Need for visibility and image management**

The second theme emerging from the data is a concern with how the lab and its members are seen. Interview participants were aware of the need to make what they do visible to Alpha-D and there was also a consciousness that the company values productivity, profitability and collaboration. Against the backdrop of the Brownfield acquisition almost three years before, the team needed to show a profitable business within Alpha-D. This was particularly important given that the SPAR business had not done too well since acquisition as the team struggled to adjust to the new company's processes and culture. Being aware of this, Charlie constantly urged the team to produce creativity reports to show that the team was generating ideas. He emphasised that what the engineers considered as the slightest of ideas should not be discarded. In terms of how the company viewed productivity, generating creativity reports would make the team visible to Alpha-D. The company clearly attached importance to R&D work and all labs across the different divisions were required to meet their assigned quotas for creativity reports. As the interface between the lab and the rest of the organisation, particularly senior management staff members, it was important for Charlie that the lab showed some degree of prominence through its creativity reports, pending the production of the next generation of competitive SPAR products. Charlie's constant urging during meetings suggested that the engineers were not responding as expected. They were aware that one of the ways the lab's productivity would be appraised was based on the creativity reports generated in total per year. They knew that they were expected to meet their individual quotas of creativity reports and the

reports could be traceable to the engineer who wrote it because the name would be reflected it. Their poor response however indicated a form of subtle resistance to the policy. Interviews revealed that the general perception was that allocating quotas as a measure of productivity was unnecessary and inappropriate for creative workers like them and so it was generally not prioritised. Furthermore, the engineers had a more sophisticated and pride-driven conception of creativity than what Charlie's repeated urgings seemed to call for. Despite these differences, Charlie continued to urge them during meetings to turn in even the smallest of ideas not only to evidence their productivity in measurable terms but also to improve their productive position relative to other labs in the company. In addition to creativity reports, the team was required to populate their pipeline of new products. The company policy specified that a portion of its total revenues were to be generated by products created within the preceding period of five years. In view of this, a strong productive position for the SPAR lab would be a precursor to contributing significantly to annual company revenues and positive positioning relative to other R&D labs.

The SPAR lab was positioned at the end of the floor in an open section where they were physically visible to anyone passing by. The visibility of their location opened up the team to indirect observation and monitoring by Alpha-D management and Charlie was conscious of this. Even though during the acquisition they had negotiated for flexibility to work from home twice a week, on lab tour days where top level management were in attendance, Charlie stressed that it was important to have a full house to project a positive image. Conversations also indicated that there were concerns about the need to be physically seen as actively working at their desks. For example, on days when the engineers worked from home, all contract lab employees were still required to be in the office because the flexible work arrangement did not apply to them. For lab members as a whole, what is more observable is work that involves physical or social contact with other colleagues such as meetings. Due to the specialised nature of software and hardware engineering work, casual observers may not be able to tell how well engineers at their desks are working nor can they appreciate the intensity of work being done. Julian confirmed in his interview that some of his best productive work was achieved during an extensive uninterrupted period as he worked from home. In reality, while physical visibility on the premises may provide a level of comfort to observers that work is on-going, it may not reveal much about the type of work. Concerns about

visibility appeared to be a response to the need to manage the image of the lab. Charlie gave periodic updates about the progress of lab work to his senior management bosses and also presented similar information during specialised project meetings. It was particularly important to make the lab activities prominent because the financial side of the SPAR business was yet to pick up significantly after the acquisition. In the absence of direct control over commercial performance and financial visibility of their products, Charlie gave emphasis to physical and productive visibility. As the manager in the lab, Charlie's individual contribution to productivity was also being assessed. It is unclear whether part of his personal task was to integrate the lab into Alpha-D's processes. However, his actions indicate that this might be the case. Given that the Alpha-D appraisal system tracks individual contributions to creativity reports, to the pipeline of new products and conversely espouses the value of collaboration in developing innovative products, the need for visibility for the lab team would appear to exist on a collective as well as an individual level. When viewed against the understanding that the team conventionally operates in a communal way to produce their output, the assessment of individual productivity introduces distortions into key elements of their meaning system as a team of interdependent creative professionals. Whereas observed lab relationships show that the engineers have mutual respect for the individual subject areas of colleagues without any indications of perceptions of ranking regarding expertise, the requirements of the appraisal system facilitates a shift in focus to how the self is seen, as separate from the group. The prestigious technical award which clearly gives recognition to deserving individuals reinforces the value placed on individual contribution in the company. The theme of visibility thus echoes individualisation of contribution earlier identified as a category under the first theme from participant observation data.

R&D work in Alpha-D was varied and involved development, maintenance, management (for team leaders), collaboration meetings and training. Although many interviews indicated that there was dissatisfaction with the distracting role of non-engineering work, the engineers struggled to manage the content of their varied work while on the premises. Some indicated that real work got done on days when they were not tied up in multiple meetings. Engineering-related work traditionally took up several hours of the team's time. Being relatively well paid for their expertise, there was a need to somehow account for the time spent on development work which was understood

more by them than colleagues outside their technical community. It was also important to present their productive work to Alpha-D in terms that the company could understand and which were compatible with the company's value of commercial or financial viability. An ongoing concern in the team was how to report what they did as income. Conversations with ex-Brownfield employees indicated that prior to the acquisition, the development and production cycle for a new product was completed before its eventual sale. However, Alpha-D's structure required that a business justification needed to be made for pushing developed ideas through to successfully patented products.

### **5.2.3 Theme 3: Coexistence of incompatible meaning systems**

The interaction between the team's work patterns and Alpha-D's structured processes revealed differences in understanding. The data suggests that there are different bases for what constitutes the essential elements of culture in the two organisations. While the foundational elements of Alpha-D's culture such as its values and complex structural features had developed over the years through its experiences, the key elements of the culture in the engineering team appeared to have come from the nature of the object they produce and its implications for work methods, their professional identity and memories of their previous work experiences prior to the acquisition. In line with this, the third theme emerging from the interview data is the coexistence of incompatible meaning systems in the post-acquisition organisation. Given the elements of professional identity such as pride in craft, autonomy and ownership which underpinned how the engineering team worked, encounters with Alpha-D's cultural values which emphasised contrasting approaches of control, processes and bureaucracy exposed differences in understanding. A system of meaning surrounds the nature of the engineering team's work as well as the requirements of their work. The object being produced by the team has both a tangible and an intangible form, where the cameras were physical products and the software running on them was intangible. In addition, sale was followed by a flow of services aimed at maintaining the performance of the product. The camera products are complex computerised systems with potentially unlimited configurations and the skill of the engineers was embedded in the design of

the product and the software which operated it. Being complex creative work, developing these products involved intricacies such that the creative capabilities of the developers which resided in lines of software codes are mostly appreciated by those who understand coding. VP 21 reveals the intricacies involved in his comment:

“It's quite hard to measure the quality of software. A good software engineer who is going through somebody else's code will start to pick out, 'Hmmm...this is good'. Or, 'Oh my God, this is rubbish'. But the person who is using the product may not see much difference so then he may think, 'what does it matter?' ”  
(Julian Interview Transcript, p. 11).

Coding work, similar to traditional research practice required attention to detail, accuracy, and persistence. However due to the mental production process, it required intense concentration over long periods. Alpha-D having an existing array of research labs appeared to have acquired the SPAR camera business as a complement to its suite of products and research labs. R&D work was valued in Alpha-D because it was believed to birth innovative products which were projected to be commercially successful. To facilitate the generation of relevant product ideas, the company usually provided R&D teams with market information and included the team in conversations with customers on an on-going basis. The collaborative ethos was emphasised by Alpha-D and resulted in multiple meetings across workgroups for sharing ideas. For the SPAR lab, obligations to participate in numerous meetings often brought frustrations because it compressed their available work time on the company premises into only a few hours of what they believed was productive work. Against the backdrop of meeting individual quota requirements for creativity reports and the requirement to generate new innovative products, the engineers struggled to reconcile the competing organisational pulls with maintaining the integrity of their craft which called for the necessary commitment of time to creative work.

The interview data suggests that the bureaucratic structure and cultural elements of Alpha-D though clearly defined, hid tensions occurring in the key aspects of the SPAR team's culture. Broadly, the data reveals that there was an inadequate fit between the engineering workgroup's understanding of their product with its requirements and conditions created by the general company rules governing processes for R&D work within which the team had to operate and were assessed. Based on the type of object

produced, differences were observed in the pattern of work in the company. Specifically, there were differences with respect to work flows which indicated discrete and continuous types of work. The R&D team's work was iterative in nature, moving between different aspects such as coding, testing, bug fixing, releases, manufacturing, sale and after sale services. Comments from members gave indications that prior to the acquisition, the engineers had a continuous rather than transactional relationship with their customers. Following sales, engineering would continue to work on fixing bugs that arose as the customer utilised the product and this was known as maintenance work. It took up a sizeable proportion of the engineers' time and had an unpredictable element to it as bugs could come up over time and so fixes were potentially continuous. The unbroken relationship with the customer and the product was seen as a valid part of the engineering work because continuous product development could either be test-driven or maintenance-driven.

This contrasts with work on the more tangible Alpha-D products which are based on adhesive and abrasive material and which have discrete time frames in terms of interactions with customers. The tangible nature of products was compatible with the structured customer relationship. From receipt of customer orders to shipping the manufactured goods, the Alpha-D process progressed stage by stage to invoicing and payment. Due to the iterative quality of the SPAR product, the team experienced challenges fitting it into the Alpha-D structure. In particular, having to engage with bureaucracy and follow processes to secure the necessary stage-based approvals brought frustrations for the team.

Tensions also existed with respect to time frames for appraisal of work. Based on the clear and fairly concrete structure of Alpha-D's traditional operations, it was possible to appraise or predict performance in terms of a number of outcomes i.e. with respect to invoices raised, payments made, orders received or orders processed. Transactions had clear start and end points. In the case of the SPAR lab, the work involved iterations between design, development and maintenance work. Furthermore, the lingering nature of interactions with the customer intrinsically called for relatively longer time frames for completion and assessment of their tasks, going against the phase-based approach of Alpha-D. Given the nature of the SPAR products and the iterative conditions around their production, adapting to phase-based appraisal of work presented challenges for the team. The appraisal system in Alpha-D appeared to be applied uniformly across the

research labs requiring them to meet quotas for creativity reports every year as an evidence of their productivity, in addition to coming up with innovative products.

Over the century of its history, Alpha-D had developed competence in processes supporting its tangible products. The SPAR products on the other hand had a key component which was an intangible, specialised intellectual creation. Given that Alpha-D's processes were designed around the objects being produced, the acquisition of intangible products without appropriate adjustments in processes had implications for the productivity and performance appraisal for the products. As Julian reveals, "They (Alpha-D) want end results. They also want things like creativity reports. But to me, those sorts of things are...you know, the bulk of a software engineer's work I think is like the bit that you don't see on the surface." (Julian Interview Transcript, Page 14).

With respect to performance appraisal, there were tensions identified in the company's performance measurement system. Alpha-D approached assessment of performance through measuring contributions to productivity across business and technical workgroups. Sales and marketing teams regularly tracked the performance of products in time periods such as monthly, quarterly, half yearly and annually, comparing these with targets. Positive performance was indicated when the measurable targets were achieved or surpassed. In addition, year-on-year performance was measured and tracked. Quantification appeared to represent a notion of progress and through this the company was able to account for productivity across various indices such as products, costs, workgroups or revenue. The SPAR lab, like other labs was required to operate within similar performance measurement rules. However, as discussed in previous sections, the iterative nature of software development work, the lingering relationship with SPAR customers and consequently the unpredictable timeframes for completing tasks in a strict sense contributed to the team's perception that quantification was an inappropriate approach to assessing their output. The SPAR lab was different from traditional chemical labs because its core materials were intellectual in nature. The engineering team preferred to focus more on their creativity rather than on the quantity of creativity reports they generated for the company, despite the formal requirement to produce such reports. They believed that producing a highly complex, sophisticated and functional product was ample evidence of their intellectual prowess and they were in no doubt that the product would be paid for by the customer. They also believed they had achieved industry success and prominence prior to the acquisition through this focus on



creativity as they worked freely, deciding on ideas to pursue. These historical antecedents underpinned the passive form of resistance they displayed. Julian remarked that the best products he had designed in the past had come from a time of undistracted independent work. He recalled the experience:

“So I was working from home and so I had no distractions...yeah...I practically worked all day every day and I had you know...just great...fantastic...to actually have that opportunity to just really focus, really get your head down and just design, design, design, design, design for like six weeks solid, and that design is still sort of the basis of the product today although it was 7 or 8 years ago probably.” (Julian Interview Transcript, p. 3)

As against the company's quantitative notions of productive progress, the SPAR team indicated that historically, they understood quality in their work clear product advances; producing a highly sophisticated and complex product with potential for endless future development possibilities. The need to conform to Alpha-D's policies governing R&D labs and produce quantifiable results meant making adjustments in their thinking to fit with the shorter-term and commercially-driven expectations of Alpha-D. The indirect effect of an institutionalised structure which reinforced short-term performance measurement and commercial viability was a gradual loss of quality in their craft, not just in terms of the final product, but in the way the engineers approached their work. The imposition of quantification amidst other structural constraints to the work of the lab team became facilitators for stifling quality development work as the engineering team understood it.

Tensions were also observed with respect to individual and collaborative ways of working. In Alpha-D, collaboration was highly valued and the frequency of meetings, both virtual and face-to-face showed patterns of interaction that appeared to align with this value. Simultaneously however, organisational structures which drew boundaries around individual contributions potentially communicated mixed messages. The application of this rule to the SPAR lab introduced distortions to the social interaction patterns which guided how they worked. The different subgroups within the SPAR lab were run by employees who had expertise in their individual areas. Despite the simple expertise-based structure, there was a general understanding of the interrelationship between work in the respective subgroups. Each subgroup handled a section of the final

product and an understanding of the importance of the final fit informed their work interaction patterns. Julian attempted to describe the integrated nature of their work using the metaphor of a building in the following quote:

“I never know what a good analogy for software is...sometimes I talk about a building, but a big complicated building, not a simple little one, and you want to add another storey on or you want to dig a basement or you want to add a wing or something, you know...you can do all of this... and if the original building was good, it has very strong pillars, and very strong foundations, then maybe it's easier to adapt it. If the original house was badly built, you add another storey and the whole thing collapses. It's an analogy but it's not good i think, because in some way software sections are more complicated than a building. More like a machine with lots of interacting moving parts.” (Julian Interview Transcript, p. 15)

“... you know, hopefully where he's (*the developer*) off somewhere maybe with his head phones on and then he's on his own. And that's when he's doing his real work and nobody...I'll see that when I do the code reviews or whatever or when I'm working on the software myself. Because we all work on... it's like one big construction that we all work on but you know I might work on this bit one day and then a few days later, he's working on something else... and I'll be looking at that bit because I'm trying to understand how something works...whatever. So, you know, we all work on... some of us, each other's work.” (Julian Interview Transcript, p. 14)

The company's appraisal system made it possible to draw boundaries around the contribution of individual employees in the lab and made comparison possible across diverse subject specialists. Whereas the lab operated as an interdependent unit, Alpha-D's structure for accounting for individual performance through quota requirements and the recognition that came with it potentially directed attention to how the self would be seen, separate from the team.

Interactions between the SPAR team's values and key cultural or bureaucratic characteristics of Alpha-D revealed that different meaning systems were coexisting.

The performance management system in the company expressed a lack of attention to appropriate indices which were aligned with the team's notion of quality work and productive advances. Rather, it directed focus to quantitative measures of progress on the performance of the engineers using the policy-based performance appraisal exercises and reviews to check how well they delivered on quotas for creativity reports and met Alpha-D instituted quality standards. Alpha-D's quality standards were embedded in its procedures and processes. However, a fulfilment of procedural requirements failed to cover the quality of the work process for cameras as well as the quality of the key persons on the job. For instance, the quality underlining a test plan writer's work was not captured by the Alpha-D quality criteria and this had direct implications for the success or failure of the final product after it was sold to customers. Julian recognised the inherent challenges for Alpha-D, having knowledge gaps regarding the SPAR business and described the difficulty involved in appraising software work:

“Software is difficult to run...good software is a huge challenge and I don't think anything here measures that. They look at end results, they don't look at ...the process” (Julian Interview transcript, p. 14).

“I suspect Alpha-D's probably got quite high quality expectations...erm.... I don't think they necessarily know enough about what we do...” (Julian Interview Transcript, p. 12).

“...the quality control man says... ‘you need a test plan and you need to execute that test plan and we need to see the results and the results must be stored in the repository...’ What it doesn't say is what is in the test plan. So your test plan can literally say... ‘Switch it on. Can you see images coming through?’ ‘Yes.’ ‘You've passed the test...’ You can always put anything in the test plan... But there's a missing bit that that process can't do and that's the person who's writing that test plan. Is he writing the test plan so that the thing will pass? Or is he writing the test plan to genuinely challenge the product, so that we are that much more confident of the quality?” (Julian Interview Transcript, p. 12, 13)

“It (*the appraisal requirement*) will say that you may need to get XYZ released on a certain date or you have to produce something...some satisfactory end result. One of the things with software though is it's quite hard to measure the quality of software. A good software engineer who is going through somebody else's code will start to pick out, 'hmmn...this is good.' Or, 'oh my God this is rubbish.' But the person who is using the product may not see much difference so then he may think, 'what does it matter?' The reason it matters is because erm...it's very seldom fixed or static. It's normally constantly evolving, constantly being worked and constantly being added to.” (Julian, Interview Transcript, p. 13)

#### **5.2.4 Theme 4: Resistance to bureaucracy and incongruent meanings by the Brownfield team**

The fourth theme emerging from the data emphasises the Brownfield team's responses to bureaucratic influences and the resultant incongruence in meaning in the post-merger organisation. The indicative labels show the SPAR team's responses to bureaucracy encountered in Alpha-D as well as effects of bureaucracy. There are indications of resistance to the introduction of bureaucracy and structural changes as the team passively resisted alterations to their ways of working even though they knew they had to comply. Some of the ways they expressed resistance include sarcasm, cynicism, conspiracy theories, jokes, complaints, distrust, apathy and suspicion. For example, George made some remarks about the instability inherent in the complex Alpha-D hierarchical structure:

“You have the people with direct connections and then they have dotted lines to somebody else and then every week it changes anyway so why bother ...”

“Yeah it's crazy and then they say, "(*he mimics*) Oh well, look we currently spend \$X billion a year on R and D... and then you ask to buy a hard drive or something "(*mimics again*) Oh no, it has to go through... " somebody is sure spending my share of that ...” (George Interview transcript, p. 11)

George further gave his own theory about the company's recognition system, seeing it as an attempt to circumvent paying better wages:

“However I think all this business of recognition is in lieu of paying a decent salary so rather than, instead of... cause that will be more expensive, so rather than keep up to reasonable market standard with salaries and keep people generally satisfied you pay them very little, tweak the hell out of them for them to work and pat them on the back when they do something good and hopefully that would help them feel happy enough.” (George Interview transcript, p. 12)

Resistance was not only indirect towards Alpha-D but expressed directly within team relations. Emma was responsible for compliance in R&D and so was seen as the representation of the new process-driven way of working in the team. Emma regularly raised issues requiring compliance in accordance with Alpha-D processes and gently tried to enforce policies. Supported by Charlie, the main task was to systematically monitor and ensure procedural and regulatory compliance in the R&D team. Compliance issues for Julian were an added distraction to his core development work, particularly because he was working on a prioritised project. On a few occasions, Julian was reported to have engaged in thinly veiled outbursts at Emma during and outside team meetings. Loretta who headed another department had interacted with the R&D team on a number of occasions and observed a general lack of interest. Given her experience with supporting integration in a previous acquisition, she attributed this to their not having bought into the integration yet. Loretta had earlier identified structural differences between Alpha-D and the previous acquisition to Brownfield which was also a smaller organisation. She noted the effectiveness of the company’s flexible and informal structure for its productivity and industry success and had questioned the need for introducing Alpha-D procedures:

“...you really felt like the customer was at the heart of everything that you did which was great to see and because I was coming in as a(n) Alpha-D-er trying to bring in all this process and everything and thinking, well, is that at the heart of the customer; bringing all this process? Does that actually slow things down...?” (Loretta Interview transcript)

Apart from observed responses to bureaucracy, the data also suggests that Alpha-D’s bureaucratic structure has a number of effects on the team. Bureaucracy for the team was evident in new policies and processes they had to comply with, a new workgroup

structure which reorganised the team's historical work interaction patterns, a tall hierarchy of authority embedded in a complex matrix structure and defined role boundaries within the context of an open collaborative environment. Its effects were revealed in distortions created in the team's understanding of work, concerns about job security, frustrations and apathy, changes to dynamics of team interaction as well as and awareness of the inadequacies in the pre-acquisition Brownfield culture.

Compliance with the new Alpha-D processes introduced distortions to how the team understood their work. For the engineers, work was understood to be development, testing or maintenance-related activities. In Alpha-D however, collaboration was a key value and it was signified by formal meetings such as strategy, training or briefing sessions. Attendance was mandatory at non-R&D team strategy or project meetings but was considered by the engineers as an additional layer of distractions which pulled them away from what they considered as their core work. The usual set of activities competing for the attention of engineering staff members include: lab tour shows, meetings with other workgroups or project teams, mandatory training and compliance courses and administrative or team management work. The different activities were not considered as work whereas Alpha-D regarded them as necessary for achieving collaboration. Olly recalled his observations of engineering colleagues in numerous meetings and the negative impact on their ability to focus on their work as they understood it to be:

“I see other people in our department ...meetings every day, almost every hour...it's just not my life...sometimes you see them sitting down, sometimes you don't see them sitting down, when you see them they've got the phone, on the meeting...yeah. I sort of feel like sometimes they spend more time in meetings than... being able to do the work they are to do.” (Olly interview transcript, p. 3)

George was another employee who struggled with understanding the priority given to attending meetings, seeing this as part of non-work activities:

“...My biggest issue is thinking that the contribution I'm giving the company is not what it could be because I'm wasting my time being probably a crap manager and not spending enough time doing development work which is what I think would be valuable to the company.” (George interview transcript, p. 3)

“I haven't done any engineering work since I've been here cause I've been doing management work” (George interview transcript, p. 6)

“I just took it on and of course when I took it on I didn't know about all these time wasters like employee performance review and all that kind of stuff I don't enjoy.” (George interview transcript, p. 7)

Concerns about job security emerged as the lab team struggled to balance the work demands of their global positioning with the organisation's prioritisation system. Alpha-D emphasises efficiency and the decisions it makes based on this key consideration result in selection of projects with the highest potential for contribution to income. The efficiency orientation of Alpha-D suggests that out of a pool of possible projects, some would be selected and others categorised as non-priority. George is an engineer who happens to be working on non-prioritised projects. The classification system affected his perception of his relative worth and relevance in the company and brought up concerns about the security of his job:

“I don't have any big projects going on which sometimes leaves me a bit sort of worried... I fully believe that someday some American sitting in... is going to look at our bottom line and say, ‘These guys don't do anything... get rid of them.’” (George interview transcript, p. 9)

“(mimics senior colleague)...Oh I'm fed up of hearing about all these rogue projects you work on”... (*acts out his own shocked response*) ‘Rogue projects? I'm doing my job!...’ and (*again mimics senior colleague*)“Oh yeah, but it's not prioritized....” (George interview transcript, p. 10)

Prioritisation of projects by Alpha-D perhaps unintentionally communicates subtle discrimination amongst employees and introduces changes to the dynamics of how the team interacts. The structure of the workgroups running the SPAR business is such that the lab is at least on a structural level seen as a highly valued idea-generating core with supportive appendages such as customer service, business and technical support workgroups. However, within the lab, there are subtle differences indicated by the weight attached to tasks. Engineers working on prioritised projects are aware of the high importance attached to what they do. Their colleagues are also aware of this ranking. Expectedly in lab management meetings, a lot of attention is given to issues

concerning the prioritised projects. In his characteristic unhurried style of running meetings, Charlie systematically attends to issues raised on such projects before others are discussed. Any hindrance to achieving results on the priority project within defined time frames was identified and acted upon. The prioritisation system of Alpha-D in effect filters into how meetings are organised and carried out. Specifically, it drives the structure of the meeting agenda and allocation of resources. Concerns about job security also arise from Alpha-D's policy on exclusion of contract employees from important meetings. Olly expressed his concerns when he remarked:

“... sometimes when there is important meeting just after an announcement and only employees are allowed, you start thinking... ‘so how long has this department got left?’ Unfortunately you can't get any answer to that question. You're just gonna have that stuck in your mind for the rest of the week.’ ” (Olly interview transcript, p. 7)

He playfully described the policy-induced segregation in the R&D team referring to the unseen boundaries created by color codes on employee identity tags: ‘when the black badges go ...the blue badges have the show.’ (Olly interview transcript, p. 8)

Communication during interactions with interview participants also indicates the effects of bureaucracy on the team. Employees are not allowed by policy to use certain expressions or exhibit certain behaviours within the organisation. The company policy prohibits swearing, discriminatory and impolite expressions, discourages comments indicating a lack of ambition or unwillingness to incorporate progressive changes to current work, seeing any preference for maintaining the framework of current work as a lack of broad-mindedness. In the case of the acquired Brownfield population, excessive references to any successful pre-acquisition work methods were discouraged particularly where these were expressed in contrast to Alpha-D's current methods. With respect to promoting ethical talk and behaviour, on-line compliance courses were routinely offered and attendance was mandatory with certificates issued upon completion. Many members of the acquired group were conscious of the need to avoid breaking the rules as they had taken the courses. In general, the observable work atmosphere in terms of oral communication could be described as clean. However, during some interviews, many participants appeared so comfortable with the interview that occasionally they used swear words to express intense feelings or narrate an



experience where it was used. At the same time, there were indications of concerns about being heard by passers-by as they spoke candidly on issues. During his interview, George became aware of how freely and somewhat loudly he had been expressing himself and remarked, 'The bad thing is I didn't remember that these walls aren't very sound proof.' (George interview transcript, page 11). Similarly, Emma lowered her voice several times during her interview, glancing around quickly to see if she was being heard by nearby lunch eaters in the cafeteria each time she used an expression which could be termed unacceptable. She again had whispered during the interview, 'I should kind of keep my voice down ...' (Emma interview transcript, p. 9)

Other effects of bureaucracy on the team have to do with frustration and apathy. George describes the complicated nature of the organisation's processes which reveals an irony in the Alpha-D bureaucracy. He highlighted that the work and resolution process for an issue could potentially swallow up the issue rather than helping to resolve it.

"...The easiest way to get rid of something bothering you is write an A (complete a form) for it 'cause then it goes into the system and you don't hear about it for months and if it comes back to you, you try and get it into an X (another process) and you really won't hear of it for years cause it goes into their bureaucracy and everybody has to... it has to go to the business manager but you have to have input from the marketing and you will never get that because marketing don't know what they are doing... and then they want you to prioritize and focus and develop and all... the structure has become too gargantuan for its own good. I'm sure that's the way big companies work, like compared to Brownfield. I mean the whole thing is just such a waste of time (exhales loudly)." (George Interview transcript, p. 11)

George concluded, 'So I mean they get all this red tape and bureaucracy and all that sort of thing and it's just so wasteful and can nobody see that...' (George interview transcript, p. 13) Similarly, Olly described the hierarchy as 'layers of management' which took 'weeks and weeks and weeks' (Olly Interview transcript, p. 2) to get requests approved. Hayley also confirmed the frustration experienced with adapting to the strict rules about role boundaries in Alpha-D; 'with this company obviously you are part of a massive company. It's more procedures, more processes; you can't do anything that isn't your role and it's frustrating sometimes...' (Hayley Interview

transcript, p. 3). An effect of repeatedly coming up against Alpha-D's strict rules on role boundaries was a sense of apathy which for Hayley replaced passion for the job. Hayley describes the frustration as follows:

“ I said before you don't get involved with other people's roles. So you have your role; that's your job, that's what you do. If you step outside of that, then it's very much ‘Why are you doing that? That's not your job... ‘Oh well, because we need to get that sent.’ ‘Yeah, but you don't do that...’ and it's very.. I think we are finally clicking that, you know... then you tend to sort of go the other way and you think, ‘Well, why bother? Nobody seems to care.” (Hayley Interview transcript, p. 8)

In responding to engagement surveys, Hayley identifies similar gradual erosion in caring. The reason for the employees' passionate responses to issues had been their deep level of concern about what could negatively affect their business.

“I think a lot of us were saying negative things which in the end we just thought, ‘well, nobody does anything and nobody listens, so might as well... don't just bother’. So now we all just go ‘indifferent’. ” (Hayley Interview transcript, p. 10)

The bureaucratic structure of Alpha-D also introduced changes to aspects of interaction within the workgroups related to the SPAR business. The workgroups were made up of mostly ex-Brownfield employees. Indications from interviews and conversations with them were that the strict requirement to follow processes altered the informal and organic ways of working which they had become accustomed to and resulted in negative outcomes such as delays in delivering on products. In addition, it brought about strained social relations in parts of the R&D team. Specifically, cautious relations between Emma and Julian were the effect of Emma's push for compliance with Alpha-D's policies and procedures in her role as the quality and compliance member of the workgroup. Hayley worked in a non-technical role and spoke about reduced closeness with colleagues since the acquisition. This was mainly due to the significant amount of time spent learning and adopting the procedures of Alpha-D, leaving little time for social interaction:

“ we used to go lunch together you know we'd hang out outside of work together and we used to go to the pub at lunch time or whatever. We also had a close relationship with our customers... so you've got that rapport... erm... but I miss that now because we don't really have that because we are so busy trying to sort out the processes and procedures...” (Hayley Interview transcript, p. 3)

Furthermore, Hayley revealed that due to a general flexible attitude to roles within Brownfield pre-acquisition, employees were able to engage more in work across different roles and feel more connection to the entire work process. In Alpha-D, strict role boundaries brought a sense of a lack of control over work beyond one's immediate role, and in turn, higher likelihood of delays for customers. The functional demarcation within the complex matrix structure also contributed to wedging in social distance between former colleagues. Hayley comments,

“ you get used to working closely with these people and all of a sudden they say the lab are a global resource so we can't sort of really go and talk... like we would just go upstairs and say "oh we need this" or " can you advise me on that" or and now you are aware that obviously... they are doing things for all over the world like everybody is all different departments, different people but its suddenly weird to be segregated...” (Hayley Interview transcript, p. 4)

Moreover, some workgroup relations had become monetised formal relationships. Hayley illustrated this in her remark:

“You kind of feel bad for saying, ‘oh could you help me do this’ and ‘can I just ask you that’ and you wanna ask them because they are our friend and you know that they know the answer and you know they've helped you in the past but now it's like if (Team) C help you they should be charging you for their time and you know, it's very odd...” (Hayley Interview transcript, p. 4)

Apart from their interactions with colleagues in the SPAR R&D lab, social relationships with other non-lab employees did not appear to be close knit. Olly acknowledged that

there were loose ties with other workgroups within the division perhaps reinforced by a lack of information about the structure of other teams.

“...It feels like we don't sort of integrate very well with other people that are similar to our department but not in our department. So for example, in marketing, sales, that sort of thing... here, I have no idea who does our marketing, no idea who does our sales...” (Olly Interview transcript, p. 3)

The unsettling effects of Alpha-D's strict processes had been observed in a previous acquisition by Loretta. As a designated Alpha-D representative domiciled on the acquired company's site and tasked with enforcing Alpha-D's culture, structure and processes, Loretta had observed the spontaneous and somewhat informal element in the way that the smaller company operated. Her observations of the successful development of a new product in the absence of formal processes made Loretta quietly question the need for the change, having seen the disruptive effects of introducing Alpha-D's processes into the company.

“...before there was the general manager on site. He had his key technical lead he had his business development manager and he would just walk out the building on to the floor and say, ‘Right. Let's develop this and this and this and people would immediately just start coding and then develop a new product... and of course I come with N (process) and it's like, ‘well what's the market saying? What's the customer saying? What do they want?’ Then we have to have a gate review with the people in the US and they've got to approve this product development and it really slowed down cause it was a very small company... whereas the Alpha-D way is we have a gated process and we go through it and of course that all takes time you know simple things like if you want to put a gate together you need the gate keepers, you need the project manager; that could take you several weeks just to get those times in the calendar...” (Loretta Interview transcript, p. 1)

Encountering Alpha-D's strict rules, procedures and processes revealed contrasts with the pre-acquisition culture of Brownfield, as reported by its ex-employees. However, it

also made more prominent the inadequacies in their previous culture. A number of interview participants who were ex-Brownfield employees indicated their awareness of some weaknesses in their former work culture even though they appeared to still value much about their former work culture. They became more conscious of the marked differences in ways of working as they encountered the more structured and process-driven Alpha-D culture. Olly acknowledged that the relaxed and easy-going work environment he observed while at Brownfield may have in some ways filtered into the general attitude to procedures and processes. For example, he described testing procedures in the former company relative to those in Alpha-D as ‘pretty much non-existent’ (Olly Interview transcript p. 4). Julian similarly confirmed his concern about the risk that some elements of the Brownfield culture may have been carried over, particularly with respect to quality control. He highlighted the need to ensure quality in production was given strong emphasis to avoid organisational or customer disappointment. He describes his concerns:

“...One of the things at Brownfield is that our quality control was never very good... so there’re lots of problems after we’d already sold the product...”

“ I’m a bit worried that there’s some of our old Brownfield culture because I said then that we were not very focused on quality and it’s still with us. We haven’t really lost it because some of us are ...the same people are still there and that maybe the quality isn’t going to be where it should be and then you know, if we do start to sell it, and there are failures in the field, I think Alpha-D’s gonna be very angry...” (Julian Interview transcript p. 12)

Hayley in retrospect admits to the fact that there were weaknesses in the former company prior to acquisition. While speaking about the frustrations of a lack of role flexibility in Alpha-D compared to the flexibility experience in Brownfield, she acknowledges the reality of imperfections in the previous organisation’s culture.

“ I mean it wasn’t all perfect...we look back at that now with rose-tinted spectacles like it was all so great there and we can do that but it wasn’t...”  
(Hayley interview transcript, p. 3)

Despite the awareness of weaknesses inherent in their historical work culture, there was an overarching sense of positivity in the SPAR team's reference to their culture prior to the acquisition. They valued the flexible work roles and informality which largely had characterised their relationships. The informality was perceived to have transcended work relationships and filtered into customer relationships and the engineers enjoyed the freedom to explore their creative potential without bureaucratic inhibitions. Whereas, there were indications of a sense of joint ownership of successes or failures while in Brownfield, the acquisition had brought about a reconstruction of workgroups where structural characteristics subsequently altered social relations between the team. Within the company's matrix structure, clear rules defined relationships, there was functional specialisation and role boundaries introduced segregation into what the team believed had been an organic work relationship.

### **5.3 Additional sources of themes from the interview data.**

Of the 24 participants interviewed, the 18 most informative interview transcripts were selected based on their richness in referring to the different themes and the availability of supporting quotes. Others transcripts serve as confirmatory material which provides evidence and validation of the identified themes. Marginal themes emerging from the data are recognised but were excluded because they are outside the focus of the study. These are indicated in table 5.3.

**Table 5.3: Representation of additional sources of themes from interview data.**

<b>Additional Interview participants</b>	<b>Organisation of origin</b>	<b>Main interview themes (Table 4.3)</b>	<b>Isolated new themes</b>
Alex	Aquired	√	Loss of content in bottom-up communication
Bill	Aquired	√	Wage disparities, work status and effects on social interactions
Chris	Separate acquisition	√	-
Dan	Aquired	√	-
Isabella	New hire post-acquisition	√	Boundaries between contract and permanent staff  Secrecy, 'glossing over' negatives.
Kathlyn	Aquired	√	-
Mike	New hire post-acquisition	√	-
Preston	Acquired	√	Loss of bottom-up communication in Lab
Quentin	Acquiring	√	Boundaries between legacy Alpha-D workgroups
Ross	Acquired	√	Boundaries around language use
Sabrina	Acquiring	√	Alpha-D language (-speak)

Interviews were analysed and categories relevant to the literature drawn on in the study were identified and grouped together under themes. Apart from the themes summarised in table 5.2, there were indications of other isolated themes from the data. These were identified but excluded based on the criteria of marginality or a lack of connection to the presented literature in this study. The isolated themes were excluded because they were marginal and were not widely captured across the interviews. In a few interviews, there were categories which pointed to some issues as key themes but they were not very relevant to the scope of literature used and were therefore excluded as depicted in table 5.3. On the whole, the research findings show the prevalence of some themes over others. For example, there were isolated themes around fictive kinship behaviours, leadership styles, rituals and ceremonies in the observation data, while other themes regarding perceived boundaries within workgroups or language use emerged from the interview data as shown in table 5.3.

#### **5.4 Linkages between contextual, observational and interview data.**

Figure 5.1 shows a representation of the potential relationships between the themes that arise across the different sources of data i.e. contextual, observational and interview data. The figure depicts the interaction between the cultures of Alpha-D and Brownfield after the Brownfield acquisition. A key feature of the relationship is the prevalence of Alpha-D values, indicated by the dominance of the first larger-sized green oval, relative to other shapes beneath it. These values include: a strong commercial orientation to profitability, individualisation and quantification of contribution to productivity, commodification of labour and sensitivity to image and reputation. The values are underpinned by bureaucratic structural characteristics and on the face of it appear to be clear expressions of the drivers of the company's culture.



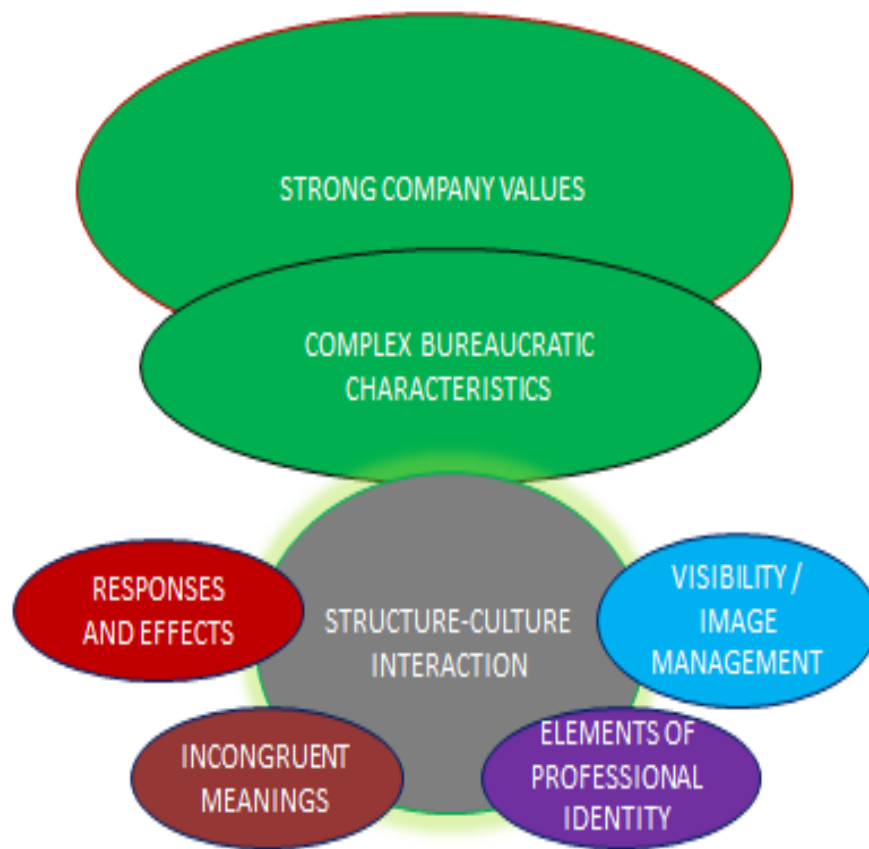


Figure 5.1 A representation of the thematic relationships emerging from data analysis

What is less obvious are underlying tensions as a result of the company values and structural features interacting with the acquired population's system of meaning. The acquired engineering group has a different system of meaning which is more concerned with highly valued elements of professional identity such as craft pride, autonomy and ownership of the production process. Following acquisition, the engineering group is faced with the reality of a more structured work environment underpinned by commercial values of productivity and efficiency.

Alpha-D operates a bureaucratic organisational structure which emphasises rule following and functional specialisation within an intricate matrix structure. Furthermore, the structure has an embedded stratified employee system where employee status as permanent or contract determines access to certain types of

information, development opportunities and meetings. The company's values supported by its structure are evident in some policies which introduce further complexity to the value system. Due to the complexities of the structure, one salient effect is that many employees operate in conditions of conflicting or incompatible values. For instance, there is the tension involved in decisions to focus on concerns which promote the engineering team's product development-related goals versus activities which are more organisationally driven for immediate commercial benefits. The acquirer's matrix structure creates such situations where employees are sometimes caught between competing obligations to the different points in the matrix. For example, the lab is a global centre for the ANPR particular technology. As a global resource, it is responsible for businesses across several continents. It is located in the UK and some of its costs are borne by the UK office. However, its global reporting centre is in the USA. Within this structure, the engineers operate based on prioritised projects for which resource approvals are often expedited. However, other locations also draw on the lab's attention for their local businesses and the lab is expected to collaborate with them in developing solutions. In effect, under such conditions, the prioritisation system and efficiency orientation of the company not only determines how the lab broadly prioritises its work but also communicates subtle forms of work inequality. Aspects of work which are imposed relate to more administrative tasks such as detailed recording of work hours, writing up on creativity reports to meet given quotas, compliance with legal documentation for products to be sold in different markets, more formalised patterns of communication within the team and managerial responsibilities for team leaders. Observed responses to the imposed and structured ways of working indicate passive forms of resistance whilst complying with procedural rules. These emerged as: cynicism, a lack of trust in the acquiring organisation, as well as a loss of passion in taking on responsibilities outside organisationally-defined role boundaries. Also, requirements to monetise interactions between certain workgroups within engineering for 'services rendered' introduced changes to previously informal patterns of interaction which was expressed as a valued feature of the pre-acquisition work relationships.

Prioritisation of projects, individualisation and quantification of contribution as well as rule following are examples of some value indicators of Alpha-D's approach to control. More specifically, the company is sensitive to issues of access to information and takes reasonable efforts to ensure employees uphold standards of confidentiality. For

example, there are physical barriers to entry in certain sections of the building and security is taken seriously both within and outside the building. There is a strict clear desk policy as well as widespread use of privacy filters on desk tops and laptops. Virtual meetings are facilitated by information technology which is able to identify the locations of participants and meeting rooms are purpose built to ensure privacy. Despite these indicators, the company promotes and projects transparency, openness and collaboration as values. It encourages open sharing and a free flow of information which is expected to support creativity and innovation across divisions and technological platforms. The layout of the floors reveals an open plan seating and transparent glass walls encasing meeting rooms. Frequent daily meetings occur to promote information sharing and the company indicates its openness to ideas from employees irrespective of role through its policy on 15% free employee time for pet projects. The various contradictions indicate inherent tensions in the upheld values of Alpha-D particularly heightened in the experience of acquired brownfield employees.

In summary, the green circles represents the acquiring firm, Alpha-D as an entity outside its culture, as a technical system of values which it regards as a driver of success in its operations. These values are underpinned by a complex bureaucratic structure. The culture of the acquired company, Brownfield is represented by the grey circle below the line. The acquisition of Brownfield creates a touchpoint with Alpha-D's values and bureaucratic structure which results in grey areas of tension and distortion in the values of the engineering community. Post-acquisition there appears to be the assumption or expectation by Alpha-D of an unquestioning acceptance and absorption of its promoted values. There was a lack of attention to the implications of recreating a culture in an acquired community particularly how technically-driven cultural integration would influence meaning systems, elements of professional identity, concerns with visibility and image as well as possible responses to bureaucracy in the acquired community such as incompatible meaning systems, passive resistance to structural imperatives and effects on social interaction patterns within the engineering team. The structure-culture interaction creates tensions giving rise to the four areas that pose underlying integration problems for the organisation. These dimensions of impact will be discussed in the light of established theories and relevant empirical literature in the next section.

## 6 CHAPTER SIX - DISCUSSION

### 6.1 Introduction

As concluded in the previous chapter on data analysis, the post-merger environment of Alpha-D concealed tensions in different aspects of organisational life. Prominent tensions existed by virtue of dual positioning for the minority community given their identity as a group of professionals while at the same time an acquired group of employees in a larger organisation. These tensions were striking in the acquired community as interactions between the acquired team's culture and Alpha-D's values revealed inconsistencies in understandings and expectations around work and identities. Emerging themes shed light on the salient elements of the craft and professional identity of the acquired group which became exposed to pressures from the new post-merger organisational environment. Given the acquiring organisation's emphasis on quantifiable measures of value (benefits), the context of cultural interactions post-merger revealed incompatibility in meanings, resulting in cognitive and behavioural responses which indicated distortions in their meaning system.

The main cultural struggle found in this study was an important identity struggle by engineering teams in the post-merger environment. The R&D team is seen to be struggling with reconciling elements of its professional identity with the demands of fitting their identity around the notion of conformity to the employer's values following the merger as a way to evidence "loyalty". This tension was exacerbated with the requirements of the more rational and structure-driven environment with strong emphasis on performance via management monitoring, performance metrics and relevant reward and sanction structures to ensure such conformity. The post-merger organisational context provided legitimacy for how the acquiring firm chose to manage cultural and identity struggles, in the sense that the acquisition was a major financial investment from which returns were expected and for which it was necessary to minimise identifiable risks. As a result, concerns about a successful organisational transformation following the merger took strategic priority over and above any other concerns such as the ones discussed in the opening paragraphs of this chapter regarding the engineering team.

The team appears to be faced with the choice to either fully comply with the dictates of the new environment and be transformed into what the organisation would like them to be and which may be alien to their professional identity or to continue to resist and operate in a way that is true to their craft and the integrity of what they do. The latter choice places them at cross purposes with post-merger integration efforts and there is the risk that they will collide with policies or procedures and would eventually have to leave the system. From this perspective, the team appears to be straddling the demands of the two obligations and as a result has to live with the tensions of a meaning system at risk of being eroded. The risk of erosion is from the need to show compliance and adapt in a direction that conforms to the acquiring organisation's values but which lacks sensitivity to the behaviours and values intrinsic to the nature of their creative engineering work, as well as to their historical patterns of social interaction. These thematic areas will be discussed further within the framework provided by relevant anthropological theories and a critical review of other related studies and conclusions.

The subsequent sections in this chapter are structured as an integrated discussion of the two research questions followed by a meta-level discussion of emergent findings in relation to ethical challenges which permeate the cultural analysis and emerge from it. These findings show the interwoven connections between ethical issues and cultural analysis and will be elaborated on as the ethical dimensions of culture. The discussion on the first two research questions is integrated because the questions are viewed as related in terms of relevance to the key themes of incompatible meaning systems and elements of professional identity. The research questions seek to understand the nature and sources of meaning systems in the post-merger context, interactions and areas of incongruence in meaning systems and responses to areas of incongruence which were identified in the study. The elaboration on the ethical dimension builds on insights generated from findings in relation to the previous questions by uncovering the deeper-level ethical challenges underpinning the diverse meaning systems which are inherent in the post-merger context of cultural interactions.

## **6.2 Symbolic significance of elements of professional identity in the engineering team**

Findings from this study suggest that there is a symbolic value ascribed to elements of professional identity in the acquired engineering population who have been described as creative knowledge workers. These elements of professional identity are values of craft pride, attachment between persons and their work as part of an on-going identity process and autonomy over creative output and creative processes, as well as an understanding of a detachment between the producers and what is being produced as rendering work as an external object. The values relate to the work as well as the persons doing the work and are integral to the performance of such work. The symbolic perspective suggested by the data supports a Geertzian understanding of culture which views the symbolic as conceptions of unseen models for behaviour and attitudes. Viewed in this way, values and meanings can be linked with behaviours within a social group. From the foregoing, the culture of the acquired group can be described as a symbolic system of meaning, integral to the identity of the workers as engineers, the creative nature of the engineering work and how it is carried out.

The theoretical perspectives of Geertz (1973), Kroeber (1963) and Tylor (1871) are notable and influential in the definition and understanding of culture. As anthropological standpoints, they emphasise the social basis of systems of meaning. Anthropologists within the functionalist tradition such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown (Leach, 1974) also give emphasis to social influences in how a social system is maintained over time. While it is relevant that culture as a phenomenon denotes intersubjective social mechanisms underpinning the emergence and sustenance of values, symbols, practices and beliefs, anthropological assumptions about culture as a unitary notion within the framework of conflict-free mechanisms need to be questioned. The results of this study which indicate concealed tensions in meaning systems confirm the importance of non-material aspects of culture in giving a richer picture of the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973; Alvesson 1993). Geertzian (1973) perspectives on culture highlight the symbolic in a given system of meaning as a way to understand the underlying structures which hold up the culture and the implications for responses to external sources of influence. From this perspective, symbols in culture are intertwined repositories of meaning for people linked cognitively to identities and

experiences of those people. As opposed to being a collection of lofty but abstract ideals unconnected to the person, symbolic elements of a meaning system are intrinsic to how members understand and interpret the meaning system.

Geertzian ideas on the important role of symbolic elements in meaning systems are consistent with findings of studies within the critical management literature which link work culture and member characteristics in a category of workers such as knowledge workers (Alvesson, 2001; Benson and Brown, 2007; Marks and Scholarios, 2007; Barnes and van Dyne, 2009 and Mladkova, 2011) who are characterised by predominantly intellectual work. For example, Alvesson's (2001) empirical study indicates the interwoven relationship between the nature of knowledge work and the system of values supporting the work, particularly the close connections between creative work and the high involvement of the self in the production of creative output. For knowledge workers, knowledge is thought to reside in people who have high expertise and training and who are engaged more in intellectual work than physical work (Alvesson, 2001; Benson and Brown, 2007; Marks and Scholarios, 2007). The cultural profile of creative knowledge workers thus gives an indication about their meaning system which would highlight the highly significant role of knowledge and skill as values.

In understanding the internal structure of meaning systems, Kroeber (1963) is relevant in that he draws attention to coherence in culture as a result of patterns rather than random elements. This suggests a degree of stability in culture which is plausible considering the role of repeated intersubjective processes of meaning making, through which cultural reality becomes socially recognised and to varying extents, shared. However, Kroeber regards culture as a phenomenon which also undergoes changes through cultural processes of diffusion, acculturation and assimilation. These processes are regarded as factors which work to stabilise or enable changes in culture. This implies that if recognisable patterns become distorted, there is the possibility that culture would lose its internal coherence and stability would be affected. Leach (1974) draws attention to something about the nature of culture which enables it to maintain the continuity of social systems, suggesting that some level of stability can be inferred from the way in which members of the social system interact over time. It is however useful to examine the assertion of relative stability in the nature of culture. Anthropological views on culture indicate that it is learned within a social context.

Culture is transmitted across time within a given society through the process of tradition while it is transmitted across space to other societies through diffusion (Kroeber, 1963, p. 219). Repetition and education have been identified as being particularly important for building tradition and therefore continuity within a given context.

In the light of Kroeber's (1963) ideas, a given culture which has persisted over time can be expected to metamorphose into tradition through the pivotal role of education and repetition. In the context of two interacting cultures such as one presented by a merger and acquisition, Kroeber's (1963) perspective would suggest that cultural elements can similarly be transmitted through a system of primary education or orientation activities for newcomers and compliance with repetitive organisational practices such as meetings, appraisal or performance reviews or periodic performance monitoring. However, as Kroeber (1963) recognises, the appearance of dominance of one culture over another can be superficial and a minority culture can retain its tradition and values. This directs interest to identifying facilitating conditions which may enable the persistence of those values.

The persistence of cultural differences after some years following the M&A in this study confirms that observed uniformity in general behaviour masks a different cultural reality within the minority population, facilitated by the nature of the work done. Kroeber's work is mainly concerned with how voluntary adaptation and education facilitate the persistence of culture. However, this perspective ignores the potential and intellectual capacity of individuals to play active roles in reflecting upon their experiences of influences coming from cultural elements outside their culture and the decisions they make as a result of such reflections. Findings from this study show active meaning making by knowledge workers in the context as they are experience inconsistencies between the imposed organisational values and their work-based system of meaning.

Geertz's conception of culture also echoes the assumption of non-contestation and passive reception of cultural influences, ignoring the possibility that processes of meaning-making may be taking place beneath the surface. In contrast, human agency has been identified as a necessary condition for intelligible interactions in social communities which adhere to professional ethics and meanings surrounding the value of craft and work within practices, rather than externally imposed performance metrics



(MacIntyre, 1981; Archer, 2004 and Akrivou & Sison, 2016, p. 127). This suggests that the capacity to engage in reflexivity is a necessary element of social interaction which allows for a consideration of the self in relation to the surrounding social context (Archer, 2004). This is particularly important for new or unplanned circumstances which call for appropriate responses, especially the application of practical wisdom.

Alongside anthropological assumptions about the nature of participants in a culture are assumptions about the nature of culture. The anthropological literature shows more concern with ideas about culture being shared and accepted in the context of a relatively unitary notion of culture but imprecise about foundational explanations for the nature of culture. Geertz (1973, p. 89) in defining systems of meaning as ‘inherited conceptions’ recognises the role of historical influences as an intrinsic part of the interrelated ‘webs of significance’ which characterise culture. In general, symbols, values and meanings are often presented as pre-constructed and anthropological scholars assume pre-socialised communities, without giving genetic accounts of their origins. This perspective fails to account clearly not only for the origins of culture but also for the possibility of multiple influences in a given culture<sup>16</sup>. Evidence from this study identifies specific sources of historical conceptions which feed into the culture in the context of interactions post-merger. For the acquired community, some elements of culture appear to be traceable to their professional identity, some can be linked with previous work-related interaction patterns prior to the acquisition and more significantly, there are elements connected to the nature of the engineering craft. An understanding of the layered, interconnected and relatively stable nature of culture as well as the active meaning-making role of participants in a culture has implications for decisions made in organisations particularly as regards responses to cultural processes such as diffusion, acculturation and assimilation.

The anthropological literature emphasises the socially shared nature of culture, understood in a largely unitary sense. However, this study’s results indicate that several influences can exist to create diversity in a given culture. In agreement with Geertz (1973), studies in the management literature (Martin et al., 1985; Alvesson, 1993, p. 78; Martin and Frost, 1999; Martin, 2002, p. 333) echo the need to account for historically anchored influences on culture. However, the anthropological literature is imprecise

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<sup>16</sup> The anthropological notion of culture is largely unitary.

about the foundational explanations for the nature of culture and unclear about the origins or sources of cultural elements. Kroeber acknowledges that culture can persist over time but simultaneously is also exposed to influences through processes such as acculturation, diffusion and assimilation which facilitate cultural change. However, the ideas about cultural change conflict with Geertzian notions of culture which suggest that culture is a layered, intertwined and subsequently relatively stable phenomenon whose complexity can withstand or prevent arbitrary changes from being effected. The arguments of Geertz and Kroeber about stability in culture rest on the assumption of passive acceptance by members of a culture, particularly through the role of education and repetition. While passive acceptance may be reasonable to assume for very young members of a society for example, dependants; such as children, it is inappropriate to hold this as an article of faith and should be tested and treated with scepticism when a new context is being studied. For example, a context of active participants who engage reflectively with their social environment (Levi-Strauss, 1963; Archer, 2004, Akrivou and Sision, 2016, p. 128) may present opportunities to test the assumption.

If Kroeber's assumption about people as passive receptors holds, then it implies that those in positions of authority who direct the content of education are effectively able to introduce changes successfully to culture. Kroeber's (1963) framework for explaining processes in culture such as diffusion, acculturation or assimilation is underpinned by notions of power which act as mechanisms for driving the intended cultural changes. For example, overt power can drive the transmission of cultural elements such as practices, ceremonies or language. Studies by influential socio-political scholars also agree with the role of influential elites in a society (Bottomore, 1973). More specifically, political elites are able to chart courses for their societies through the exercise of power. Passive acceptance in this context is understandable when viewed against the backdrop of the availability of coercive force to effect compliance (Lukes, 1974). However, this may not preclude the existence of differing interpretations to elements of the culture, given the role of agency as previously highlighted.

To understand the basis for divergent interpretations and provide a challenge to the assumption of passive behaviour, it is relevant to consider other forms of power residing in subgroups within a community. Bottomore (1973) identified elites across different domains in society including military, religious life, business and education.

As part of a knowledge-based community (intelligentsia), experts and professionals represent elites for whom a key source of expert power lies in their expertise. Given the existence of political elites and knowledge workers in a given community, a dual influence on culture can be anticipated. The influence on culture from knowledge workers is notable especially where the nature of the work they do is central to the culture. As a result, some influence can be expected from the culture of the expert community. As shown by studies in the management literature (Alvesson, 2001; Benson and Brown, 2007; Marks and Scholarios, 2007; Barnes and van Dyne, 2009 and Mladkova, 2011), knowledge workers engage in typically intellectual work which requires high levels of thinking and creativity. Mladkover (2011) identifies high levels of independence as one of several values important for decision making in knowledge work. Other values include freedom and substantial control over their work processes and methods, which is oftentimes characterised by flexibility rather than working in a linear fashion. Alvesson (2001) similarly identifies values related to craft pride, emphasising the significance of the symbolic role of external networks and social relationships in affirming the expert status of knowledge intensive organisations. These values represent fairly stable elements of the culture because of the direct relationship to the work done. Findings from this study confirm the importance attached to elements of culture in professional groups (Alvesson, 2001) but beyond this, the symbolic role these elements play in the meaning system of the group is also uncovered.

### **6.3 The role of the craft in protection from and resistance to cultural assimilation.**

The anthropological literature associates patterns of meaning, patterns of interaction and education with persistence and stability in culture but is imprecise about the role of participants in the culture, mainly taking the assumption that the socialised are passive reproducers of what is transmitted to them. Contributions from socio-political authors however attribute influences on cultural processes to key actors in conventional positions of power (Bottomore, 1973; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). The account of these studies on the origins of culture suggests that it is a deliberate form of social engineering Hobsbawm (1983). Evidence from this study's findings however

contradicts the perspective of Hobsbawm (1983). In the studied context of a merger and acquisition, organisational culture as defined by the acquirer serves an economic objective linked with efficiency orientations, organisational profits and market needs. There is no evidence of a well-established purpose regarding how culture serves to maintain professional ethos and practices or social practices particularly in the acquired population. To this extent, the formal organisational culture exhibits a narrow focus and there is no evidence from this study that the plurality of meanings within the context and (in extension) effects on the different groups are recognised. Supporting this line of thinking, Alvesson (2001) suggests that cultural forms of control exist in high-tech organisations through pressure to ensure conformity to corporate culture. Specifically, he argues that management and structural mechanisms of control ensure a formal<sup>17</sup> pressure on knowledge workers to gradually objectify these professionals towards their conforming to who the organisation expects them to be (Alvesson, 2001, p. 877) in line with the prevailing culture, which is a forced (violent) identity change process. This is analogous to cultural assimilation (Kroeber, 1963) in anthropological terms. The perspective of cultural control is evidenced in findings from this study which show the dominance of the acquirer's culture in the post-merger organisation. This is seen in the prevalence of bureaucratic structures, processes and policies which the acquired knowledge workers have to comply with as summarised in table 5.1 under section 5.1.1 in the previous chapter. The dominant values of the acquirer include: emphasis on commercial returns and profitability, emphasis on quantification and performance measurement, individualisation of contribution and sensitivity to image and reputation. While these findings appear to confirm studies in M&A contexts which reflect a managerial bias or focus, they also draw attention to the symbolic nature of elements of the meaning system in the group of knowledge workers. Within the group, the nature of the work has clear links with symbolic values surrounding the work as mentioned earlier such as craft pride, autonomy, the expert knowledge they possess and how these are connected to their identity as creative knowledge workers and professionals. The post-merger context where organisational values are imposed thus constitutes a means by which their identity is being eroded. The erosion of professional identity through symbolic violence has been recognised in related studies (Bourdieu, 1990; Oakes et al.,

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<sup>17</sup> Formal – representing what the organisation expects from people.

1998; Lee et al., 2014) and this study provides empirical results which confirm conditions that facilitate the gradual erosion of professional identity.

For the acquired knowledge workers, an important implication is the implicit need to demonstrate conformity to the organisation's values through showing visibility (Alvesson, 2001) as evidence of conformity and loyalty. Findings from the post-merger context indicate the dominance of the acquiring organisation as evidenced by the structural framework within which the acquired group is placed.

However, the pressure to conform to corporate culture for the acquired group is matched by the strong norms and meaning system surrounding their creative work. Contrary to Alvesson's (2001) thinking, this study shows weak evidence of self-promotion activities on an individual level by the knowledge workers. However the group leader plays a more active role in promoting the team's efforts and presenting the team as productive in commercial terms understood by the organisation. Through frequent persuasion, members of the acquired group are deliberately and gradually re-oriented towards aligning with the new rules governing performance, bringing about gradual concerns with how the self is seen as opposed to a sense of communal identity. Alvesson's (2001) study on the face of it suggests an assumption that a lack of self-marketing skills by knowledge workers has potential to hamper their career progression within such an organisation. However, results from the post-merger organisation in this study indicates that the knowledge workers can choose to leave the organisation for another employer if they so desire. Indeed, there was a case of a key staff's resignation while the field work was being conducted. Despite having the choice to seek employment elsewhere, those knowledge workers employed on contract basis may be in a weak position as a result of the temporary nature of their ties to the organisation and its associated conditions of service, in spite of their specialist expertise.

Given the aforementioned core characteristics of knowledge workers and close links to the work itself as outlined by the literature on knowledge work(ers), one can expect behaviours consistent with doing mental and creative work to form key and relatively persistent features of the culture. Findings from the post-merger context validate these literatures' concerns and reveal how patterns existing in interaction and interpretations

of observable phenomena give indications of the internal structure of the expert culture. When viewed in the light of anthropological ideas on the nature of culture, the nature of the work emerges as a defining feature underpinning internal consistency between values, symbols, interpretations, and behaviours in the expert community, giving it some measure of stability, independent of external influences, particularly by dominant organisational values. The anthropological literature despite its contributions on the nature of culture however is silent about the dynamics of interaction between groups in a culture. Contributions from the socio-political literature provide some answers, suggesting that the power elite are a subset of the dominant class in society and wield corporate and state power (Bottomore, 1973). Where knowledge workers and political elites coexist, an opportunity is presented to test the anthropological assumption of passive dispositions by members of a given culture. What is prominent is that conditions are created for the exercise of power by the political elites (in the organisational sense) and these conditions form the framework within which those who carry out knowledge work (are allowed to) operate. The context of relations between the two groups could thus be characterised by a power imbalance in the political sense (Lukes, 1974; Bottomore, 1973). In the post-merger context for example, there is a distinct motivation in the expert community to maintain its expert culture. The motivation comes from the nature of the work and symbolic elements of the meaning system which exist separately from the prevailing expectations of the politically defined culture. In addition, the leader of the group of knowledge workers acknowledged in a casual conversation his awareness of the need to 'preserve' the culture of his group. As evidenced by this study, the post-merger environment of relations is defined by powerful decision makers in the acquiring organisation seeking to integrate a minority expert community. The conditions created by the acquiring organisation define interactions within the context and broadly delineate value preferences. However, these preferences are blind to the existence of an expert culture rooted in the nature of knowledge work in the minority population and resultant effects of political pressure on their practice-based meaning systems (Greenwood et al., 1994), a possibility which is unaccounted for by the anthropological literature.

The emphasis of the anthropological literature on a unitary and shared notion of culture thus focuses attention on broader areas of internal consensus but excludes more dynamic cultural relations. For example, the dynamic between the exercise of political

power (which can be coercive in overt or covert ways) and meaning systems which have divergent interests are unaccounted for. These conditions are significant to note because they indicate how conflict may or may not be resolved within the context of relations. The anthropological literature also fails to account for differences in systems of meaning as a result of the existence of other forms of power in a given group, such as expert power. The post-merger context of this study reveals the political conditions within which the acquired expert community is expected to function. In cultural terms, the acquired group is faced with the expressed value preferences of the acquiring organisation. However, simultaneously it is also constrained by factors integral to the practise of its profession, mainly as a result of the nature of the creative engineering practice and ethics which work to retain its expert culture. The constraining role of the craft is significant to note because it simultaneously acts as a form of insulation and protection from the prevailing commercially-driven value-system which expects the knowledge workers to change and conform. From this perspective, the acquired team of knowledge workers may be considered politically as the less dominant entity in the relationship. However, they are able to indirectly but actively engage and push back against the dominance of the acquirer's values as a result of the nature of their knowledge work- the craft. The craft thus gives a form of stability and protection from cultural assimilation to the professional group.

The anthropological literature suggests that stability in meaning systems is particularly relevant in relatively homogenous groups with close, distinct relationships (Leach, 1973, p. 97). Long term social interaction can facilitate a sense of affiliation in such groups, creating opportunities for fictive kinship ties to develop, particularly where the roles in the group involve elements of dependence and responsibility. Given this, the engineering team can be conceived of as an artificial kinship group (Schneider, 1984) sharing understanding of their meaning system, history and purpose. Within the lab workgroup, members are aware of their common identity as engineers and based on their shared history, professional identity and values associated with it, the type of objects they produce as well as a common work purpose, the lab workgroup is a relatively cohesive community within the engineering team with a stable sense of its own meaning system. Leach (1973, p. 111) argues that kinship ties are driven by sustained social interaction. Findings from this study however reveal that the plethora of opportunities for interaction given by collaborative meetings outside the lab team

appeared not to elicit the required sense of affiliation between the lab and colleagues outside the lab. Rather, boundary perceptions persisted as members of the engineering team interpreted the meeting, not as an opportunity for collaboration but as a hindrance to their real knowledge work. Requiring attendance at such a meeting was seen as a demonstration of power by the acquiring organisation to which they were subject. Importantly, meetings which are conventionally social and relational contexts represent mechanisms for diffusing the acquirer's culture and metrics, as well as new habits and behaviours that are expected by employees. Whereas prior to acquisition, the engineering team believed their relationship was characterised by shared goals, role flexibility and an informal work ethos within a system of reciprocal obligations and rights, in the new organisation their activities were governed by strict rules and the company's goal preferences. Having examined the nature and diverse sources of meaning in the post-merger engineering workgroup community, areas of incongruence in meaning will be discussed in the light of the relevant anthropological literature and empirical research.

#### **6.4 Coexistence of incompatible meaning systems**

Findings from this study suggest that the nature of object produced and its significance to patterns of work in the engineering community are defining characteristics of the group which have been in existence prior to the acquisition. The engineering community is mindful of having a unique identity as creative knowledge workers and this is reinforced by the symbolic elements characterising their work. Given the close links between identity, work and craft values, there are grounds for the persistence of their meaning system. Organisational values such as efficiency and individualisation of contribution which dominated the post-merger environment were in conflict with practice-based values in the acquired community. To emphasize areas of incongruence, key elements of the meaning system in the emergent post-merger organisation will be identified and discussed.

Findings give indications about competing values distinguishing the two merged organisations and the different business and social contexts underpinning them. On the



one hand, there are strong values in the acquiring organisation which have developed over the years. Historical accounts<sup>18</sup> suggest that some of the values emerged as a result of experiences and the company's efforts to overcome challenges in business while others can be traced to the approach of the founders (Bottomore, 1993) to research and development (R&D) work. Specifically, a patient and tolerant attitude was promoted towards the traditionally time-intensive R&D work. Gradual alterations leading to stronger emphasis on commercial returns and profitability could be traced to the company's response to a period of vulnerability in the early phase of its operations. Gradual alterations however seemed to have effect in new aspects of meaning and values which manifest cultural evolution over time. The strong commercial orientation was also strengthened by the need for self-preservation because the early years of operations were characterised by products which were not financially profitable. As against waiting for products to become profitable after introduction, emphasis began to shift towards an early assessment of product and financial sustainability via an *a priori* identification of profitable products based on results of market surveys and financial analysis of the competitive environment before full scale commercialisation. These however evolved towards an increasing commercialisation; commercially driven activities became firmly integrated into the organisation as standardised processes to be followed for introducing new products to the market. Given the unpredictable element in 'blind' R&D work, coupled with uncertainty about eventual commercial viability, efficiency considerations governing decisions about resources deployed towards the development of ideas and products could be justifiable. In line with this, Alpha-D's prioritisation practice identifies and supports the top ten global projects projected to contribute significantly to profitability.

Accordingly, quantification and measurement of performance are values which are also consistent with the efficiency orientation underlying many structures and the materiality of the organisation (expressed in policies, procedures and processes). These values are strengthened by the fact that the company has developed competence over several decades in an industrial production model which emphasises commoditisation and unit-based measurements of contribution to productivity. Having operated historically in a competitive business environment, the company developed a strong aggressive orientation to R&D, intellectual property ownership and competition but at the same

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<sup>18</sup> Historical accounts – data was obtained from documents and books in the company archives.

time, was sensitive to the need to be seen as promoting and conforming to the highest standards of ethical business conduct, given prior experiences of negative publicity. Collaboration as another key company value may not be unconnected to an efficiency orientation applied to R&D work as the company historically gave emphasis to developing multiple uses to which its technology platforms could be applied. Creativity as a core value of the company was at the heart of R&D work and accounting for it in measurable terms was central to the company's assessment of how efficiently resources had been deployed towards R&D work. For example, the production of creativity reports was counted as evidence of the generation of ideas which could be progressed to becoming patents or trade secrets. Business and financial justification for such ideas could further increase the chances that they would become fully commercialised. The efficiency orientation thus underpinned decisions about resource allocation and selection of innovative creations towards maximising commercial benefits. This thinking is consistent with typical cost-benefit approaches of organisations set up to make profit.

The data indicates that many values of Alpha-D are first of all historically anchored (Martin et al., 1985) and echo the role of founders as well as learning from experiences as the source of culture; ideas emphasised by the definitions of culture given by Schein (1990) and Tylor (1871) respectively. Tylor (1871) highlights the complex mix of capabilities and habits acquired by man in his role as a member of a society in defining culture while Schein similarly identifies cultural elements rooted in learning from previous actions. Essentially, both perspectives take a functional approach to culture and a positivist philosophical assumption about the nature of cultural reality. This view has influenced later research on organisational culture (Kilman et al., 1985; Deal and Kennedy, 1982). In the post-merger context of this study for example, values of sensitivity to image and reputation were borne out of past experiences. The espoused values of Alpha-D were supported by a complex bureaucratic organisational framework which emerged from growth in the company's size and scale of operations. The company is characterised by classic bureaucratic elements such as rule following, functional specialisation, hierarchy of authority and control. However, one can see reflections of Alpha-D's concerns about being seen to be ethical in business dealings and conduct in the company's heavy process culture as an attempt to build transparency into its system of values. Being ethical is taken to refer to following standard

procedures, promoting transparency and integrity. The result is a tension between control - particularly control over access to 'sensitive' information – and transparency as contrasting but important values. There are other areas of complexity in the value system. It is unclear whether the stratified employee system is based on efficiency, financial or access control considerations. However, the segregation of employees based on work status has effects on social interaction and communication particularly within the SPAR team<sup>19</sup>. The matrix organisational structure also has effects on the work life experience of employees. The nested positioning of the SPAR engineering lab<sup>20</sup> creates additional complexity regarding inconsistencies in understanding and expectations around identities and work, as highlighted in the opening paragraph of this chapter. The inconsistencies are masked by an overt structural focus on efficiency but are revealed by findings which suggest distortions and tensions in relations with other members of the organisation, particularly given the rules surrounding formal inter-workgroup interactions. For example, the data indicates that informal reciprocity which had characterised the relationship between two SPAR workgroups prior to the acquisition by Alpha-D had become replaced by monetisation. What could be regarded as informal favours were no longer given as the receiving workgroup would be charged for the 'service'. Complexity was introduced into social relations as a result of rules which viewed each workgroup as a unit capable of contributing value or revenue. On the other hand, formal work relations were characterised by complexity in managing competing demands. When considered within the framework of the company's prioritisation policy and efficiency orientation applied to R&D work, the engineering workgroup are often caught between competing obligations to the UK, Region, USA or global demands. The data points to key components of Alpha-D's system of meaning which include: commercial orientation, bureaucratic processes, efficiency orientation, measurement of performance and quantification, sensitivity to image and reputation and commodification of labour. However, importantly there is some indication that the acquiring organisation's value system lacks internal consistency and a uniform explanation and as a result masks incongruence in interpretation. The finding supports the earlier critique of intersubjective processes characterising the emergence of a meaning system as being open to diverse interpretations. The bureaucratic organisational framework thus contributed to creating conditions for inconsistency in

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<sup>19</sup> These effects are discussed in the previous chapter under analysis of interview data.

<sup>20</sup> See figure 5.1

interpretations. This finding indicates a weakness in the unitary notion applied to culture in the anthropological literature and suggests that in an organisational context, there is a need to consider effects on interpretations of meanings particularly as a result of a framework of structural conditions.

The acquired organisation came into Alpha-D with its own unique set of values and system of meaning. As predominantly engineering professionals in an entrepreneurial organisation, they were trained in their craft and considered themselves as operating within the framework of their culture. The team's profile is consistent with findings in empirical literature which identifies R&D units as clusters of knowledge workers due to the dominance of intellectual work in their activities (Alvesson, 2001; Benson and Brown, 2007; Marks and Scholarios, 2007; Barnes and van Dyne, 2009 and Mladkova, 2011). The engineering lab team in particular reflected work aspects involving both structure and flexibility, uncertainty and creativity in consistency with the way scientific lab work has been perceived (Latour and Woolgar, 1979). Some studies draw distinctions or overlaps between knowledge-intensive organisations and professionals, pointing out that public recognition and association with a higher social purpose distinguishes professionals (Koehn, 1994, p. 15; Alvesson, 2001). While the data in this research indicates that some members have professional accreditation and others became experts by training, certification and years of practical experience, what is relevant to knowledge work is the high level of expertise and training which characterises their intellectual activities. For the acquired group which was a mix of professionals, experts and support technicians, key elements of their work identity related to craft pride, autonomy and ownership of the production process and these were seen to have been the hallmarks of their work culture prior to the acquisition. In addition the data suggests that having previously worked together in the smaller entrepreneurial pre-merger organisation, social interactions had been characterised by flexibility, less of process-driven work, flatter hierarchies, quicker and more spontaneous communication, pointing to a more informal and communal interaction pattern. From an anthropological point of view, knowledge workers viewed in this way exhibit culturally distinct identities, tied to the nature of their work. This is also consistent with findings in the literature which emphasise the cultural aspects of engineering workgroups related to what they do (Kunda, 2006; Dubinskas, 2015) and how this informs their social interaction patterns. Some of these cultural elements

include creativity and autonomy and a focus on delivering highly complex creations as core values underscored by the pride taken by engineers in their accomplishments. In addition, R&D work typically benefits from the absence of strict time pressure so as to produce quality work, as opposed to the structured monitoring per time which characterises a manufacturing or industrial trading operational model.

Geertz (1973) popularised a focus on meaning as a key component of culture, arguing that a deeper insight into cultural phenomena is only made possible through an interpretive approach to understanding the meaning behind observable aspects of culture. The Geertzian definition of patterns of meanings suggests that they reveal both what is valued and what is not. As inherited conceptions embodied in symbols, meanings are not isolated interpretations, but are connected to other manifestations of culture such as values, practices and beliefs. Kroeber's (1963) theoretical contributions on social processes are less relevant for analysing patterns of meaning or incongruence in meaning because of its silence on the role of people in the emergence of the meaning system. There is an underlying assumption in Kroeber's ideas which views people as passive receptors of cultural influences. Geertzian notions of culture in contrast draw attention to the active role of members of a culture in making sense of and engaging with their social experiences, particularly the significance of symbolic thinking. Geertz's ideas establish that symbols and the meaning they carry cannot exist in isolation from the people within a culture. As a result, people are connected to meaning systems through active interpretation within intersubjective processes of interaction. The social construction of meaning however suggests that interpretation can vary from person to person, resulting in differences or incompatible interpretations. Geertz (1973) views incongruence within the context of the relationship between patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction, projecting that in the absence of coherence between patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction there is likely to be social conflict. Two implications derive from this argument. First, the argument fails to account for differences in interpretation or incongruence arising from subjective and intersubjective engagement with elements of meaning systems. Secondly and from the perspective of relative stability in the nature of culture suggested by Geertz (1973), the inability of an

existing structure of meaning to explain new experiences<sup>21</sup> creates a lack of fit between meanings and external events, giving rise to incompatibility.

The Geertzian notion of culture sees culture as made up of both cultural and social systems where a cultural system is an ordered system of meanings and symbols (Geertz, 1973, p. 144) while a social system is an ordered system of interaction within roles in society. (Geertz, 1973, p. 144). In line with these notions, the social system in the engineering lab revealed mutual respect for other colleagues' areas of subject expertise while working collaboratively with them to produce the final output. All software and hardware engineers were supported by technicians and customer service colleagues, even though the creative component of what was produced was based on intellectual work carried out by the lab team. Taken together, the entire team of professionals and experts produced complex and highly specialised objects and the sense of identity of the group appeared to draw to a high degree on the nature of their creative work, values from either professional associations or communities of practice for uncertified experts and experiences from working as a smaller integrated community in Brownfield prior to acquisition. The intangible nature of knowledge and skill which are the key material processed was a notable feature of the acquired engineering community because it defined not only how the work was carried out but also what was relevant for assessing the work as will be discussed subsequently.

As a non-material aspect of its culture, ownership of knowledge and skills represents a significant part of the collective stock of meanings unique to the group culture around which other elements of the meaning system were based e.g. autonomy in decisions about creative pursuits, craft pride as intrinsic reward for the production of complex technological objects and communal respect for individual subject area expertise. The meaning system thus reveals a composite set of influences from professional or craft ethics as well as those relating to interaction patterns in a smaller and more close-knit organisation. Faced with expectations requiring them to be compliant, loyal employees following acquisition, the complex bureaucratic environment symbolising the new set of values and meanings imposed by the acquiring organisation represented a new experience which was incompatible with the engineering team's existing meaning system. The post-merger context was thus made up of a culturally diverse group with

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<sup>21</sup> which may or may not involve patterns of interaction.

stocks of unique meanings. As indicated in the previous sections, there are differences in the foundational elements of the cultures of the merging organisations. While Alpha-D draws on founding values of efficiency and measurement of contribution arising from historical responses to experiences, the acquired Brownfield team's culture is made up of influences from the nature of the object they produce, professional ethics, shared history and prior social interaction patterns. In effect, the post-merger organisational context houses a diverse set of meanings and values rather than a unitary notion of culture often alluded to in both anthropological and organisational studies on culture (Martin 2002; van Marrewijk, 2016). The basis of each meaning system shows alignment with particular values and attitudes to work. From the standpoint of the acquired population, the new cultural environment highlighted areas of differences in orientation and incongruence in values underlying many organisational practices. The effect was a distortion in the acquired group's system of meaning as they struggled to make sense of new values which conflicted with theirs.

As identified earlier, a key driver of distortions in the meaning system of the acquired group was the complex bureaucratic structure of Alpha-D which introduced constraints to how the team worked. The bureaucratic characteristics represented a preference for values of efficiency, control and individual performance measurement to maximise productivity and were evidenced by strict rule following, a dynamic matrix organisational structure, a stratified employee system and policies which reveal orientations to collaboration and individualisation of work contribution at the same time. Former Brownfield employees in retrospect reported that they had a more flexible approach to rules prior to their being acquired. As a relatively smaller organisation, their work processes and interaction patterns were understood to have been underpinned by informality and flexibility. These values were raised as explanations of attitudes to role boundaries in their pre-acquisition organisation and employees reported often stepping outside of their formal roles to help colleagues towards contributing to achieving their goals. A bonus sharing system was also thought to have contributed to building sense of shared goals in the organisation and employees could link their individual efforts within or peripheral to their formal roles to a jointly recognised outcome. In contrast, Alpha-D was strict on enforcing strictly defined role boundaries although job changes were encouraged for those who were open to developing a varied career within the organisation. There were also rules about processes and procedures for

work which created significant challenges for engineering team. In particular, the lab struggled to fit their iterative work process around the phase-based procedures of Alpha-D. The reality of tensions and inconsistencies in the new experience of the merger also brought additional frustrations for the team's ability to make sense of the prevalent organisational values. For example, the matrix organisational structure appeared stable but in reality was dynamic due to the policy which allowed the company to redeploy (human) resources around the company as needed or where requested. A stable hierarchical structure was particularly important for progressing approvals regarding engineering work. The team's experience had been dotted with frequent changes to key personnel roles and subsequent delays in moving engineering work along process-wise. The iterative work was thus subjected to breaks and delays as a result of organisational changes in personnel. The structural positioning of the lab also reflected tensions in the organisation. The lab as a global resource was expected to attend to demands from all company locations around the world even though it was located and embedded in the UK division. However, its work was largely dictated by the USA given the organisation's prioritisation business policy. As a result, the lab team was frequently caught between obligations to demands from multiple locations. For example, while working on a prioritised project K, the same engineer(s) may be needed to attend to product extensions, corrections or modifications from European or Asian locations. The prioritisation of certain projects over other also introduced subtle discrimination into the team, creating perceptions of ranking in work and potentially creating gaps in the existing sense of community within the team. Inconsistencies in the set of values encountered in the post-merger setting coupled with incompatibility of these values with the acquired group's meaning system reveal the active interpretation activities of the engineering team and how external influences are introduced into their meaning system. The influences are significant because as Geertz (1973) argues, meanings underpin symbolic representations of views of social life tied to constructed explanations of social reality. Given that meanings can be subjectively and intersubjectively determined, previous work interaction patterns contribute to the team's meaning system because they involve interpersonal experiences, professional affiliations and the collective understanding of significant elements in their craft.

The engineering team in the post-merger context also becomes involved in social interaction which exposes it to the enactment of values of the acquiring organisation,



expressed through language, rules and routine practices. Patterns of interaction are also important components of culture which can contribute to reinforcing social ties within meaning systems (Geertz, 1973). Rituals as a symbolic aspect of culture have been identified by Geertz (1973) as being able to facilitate this. Rituals involve interactions between people and groups and have underlying cultural values. In Alpha-D, meetings are an example of such symbolic interactions underpinned by the value of collaboration. However, this study shows that the activity of attending numerous non-lab meetings did not have the same symbolic meaning for all participants, particularly the SPAR lab. Rather, the activity (attending meetings) symbolised the dominance of the acquiring organisation.

## **6.5 The emergence of conflict from incompatibility in meaning systems**

A key finding from this study is the nature of the conflicts which emerge as a result of incongruence in meaning in the post-merger context. Not only were there tensions and conflicts in the understanding of key elements of the meaning system in the group of knowledge workers as a result of structural impositions post-merger, there were also conflicts which were ethical in nature regarding decisions about their core work, which is also linked to their identity as knowledge workers. Participant observation revealed that work in the engineering lab was conventionally communal as software and hardware engineers collaborated across their various subject areas, supported by technicians who were called on as needed to carry out testing work, while quality control and the administrative team kept tabs on compliance issues and formal meetings. Whereas the research findings indicated that communal practice was integral to the team's operations given the interdependent areas of expertise, the current company regulations focused on isolating the contribution of each member of the team for appraisal purposes. Discussions with interview participants revealed that the existing appraisal system was oriented towards identifying and quantifying productivity per person, represented by the requirement to generate creativity reports, as opposed to qualitative advancements which the engineering team considered as a more representative and adequate notion of progress. For example, a participant stated that,

“For me...as far as this product goes...leave us alone. Just...I don't know how...you know, no silly meetings, no creativity reports, just protect, protect, protect our time, and aggressively protect our time and let us focus on what we do best...” (Julian Interview transcript, p. 10)

Assignment of quotas to their creative output changed the conditions under which they worked, substituting flexibility within acceptable notions of uncertainty with quantifiable results per defined time period. This went against the understanding of the engineers about flexibility associated with creativity in their work patterns needed to maintain values such as craft excellence, craft pride and quality work. The maintenance of the values allows for intrinsic motivation from pride in professional identity and a reinforced sense of belonging to a profession as a broader social notion (Koehn, 1994) rather than simply adhering to a narrower set of norms in order to exhibit loyalty to the values of a particular employer (business). The nature of the object they created which had a combination of tangible and intangible components was also incompatible with the company's process and phase-driven industrial production model for the tangible products developed by its conventional R&D teams. In response to the obligation to comply with the new system of values by showing quantifiable evidence of productivity and operating within a prioritised system of work, the acquired community faced pressures on their meaning system internally and externally. Externally, pressures from the imposition of a new value set substantially eroded the freedom to decide on creative work, freedom to develop what they considered was top-of-the-range in terms of quality and the resultant accompanying pride in the work they produced, a source of intrinsic motivation. The overall effect was an introduction of distortion into their existing meaning system as creative knowledge workers. Internally, the nature of the work which appealed to their sense of professionalism and pride called for sustaining the values of excellence and autonomy which defined their craft. The post-merger context of relations thus reveals contrasting approaches to work and areas of incongruence in meanings.

Geertz (1973) suggests that established patterns of meaning can be expected to manifest some stability due to the structured internal relationship between symbols and meanings. However, the framework within which the patterns exist refer to a set of experiences over time. Where new experiences are not explainable using the existing framework, the meaning system is at risk of losing relevance as a reference point,

particularly if the new experience persists. A cultural system as a result can be expected to show instability or distortion in the interrelationship of symbols and patterns of meaning where persistent new experiences are incongruent with its meaning system. Where a meaning system is centred on the nature of the work, it can be expected to be potentially stable in the way it continues to exert influence on the performance of work in the community. At the same time, external experiences which persist and are in conflict with the meaning system create additional pressures for meaning making for the members of the focal culture. Data from this study indicates that the acquisition by Alpha-D imposed an efficiency-driven set of values on the engineering team and can be seen as a new experience, in contrast to their meaning system's emphasis on striving for or maintaining excellence and integrity in their creative work. Given the team's struggle to reconcile the new values with their existing meaning system and the consequent alteration in patterns of work, behaviour and interaction called for by the imposed company rules, tensions arise in the process of meaning making. The engineering team is faced with a moral dilemma either to transform into loyal and compliant employees -- the kind of human resource the acquiring organisation would want them to be -- or to retain their identity and practice as defined by the craft. Professional work is often associated with a higher social purpose hence it is accorded high status by society (Koehn, 1994). From this perspective, the engineers came into the merger relationship having a clear and cherished identity as professionals. However, mechanisms in the post-merger organisation aimed at controlling what they did in order to establish a pervasive, post-merger culture in the acquired population and worked through gradual objectification of the professionals to ensure loyalty and conformity so as to achieve organisational goals.

## **6.6 Ethical challenges emerging from the coexistence of incompatible meaning systems**

Findings from this study reveal various ethical challenges inherent in how culture is understood, approached and enacted within a social structure. As noted earlier in my data, I show there is a symbolic value ascribed to social, personal and professional work and identity processes whereby in the acquired engineering population, prior values of

craft pride, attachment between persons and their work as part of on-going identity process are replaced by a detached emphasis to producing results based on external metrics and management requirements. I have discussed also how these were linked to the complex bureaucratic structure following the merger which becomes a key driver of distortions in the meaning systems and suppresses the cultural symbolisms inherent in the minority or 'acquired' culture in this study. Indeed, building further, these themes can be linked with the problematic perspective that firm separation lines are possible between action and being (person) which is discussed in virtue ethics. In practical terms from a virtue ethics standpoint, we cannot isolate *being* an ethical person from exemplifying the unity of virtues in *acting* as a virtuous person (which continues to enable the cultivation of ethical character) (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 140, 152; Akrivou and Sison, 2016, p. 114).

Virtuous action is seen as that which is done not in order to conform to a rule but out of respect for the virtue demonstrated and aiming for virtue as an end in itself. From this perspective, in an organisational context, the pursuit of excellence in both one's action to produce one's work and in how this work cultivates personal character and professional identity are interlinked and expected as being part of creative or craft work and the broader profession. The importance to the rational form of practical intelligence which underlies human action for the formation and cultivation of character virtues in Aristotelian virtue ethics theory helps to explain why actions cannot be understood as separate and independent from actors' on-going identity work (Akrivou, 2016; Sison, 2016). Ethical action would thus be an effortless (almost natural) integration of acting in an excellent fashion and being an excellent member of a profession.

The interconnections between identity, practice and the person is thus not only relevant to debates in anthropology and cultural studies, but is a central concern in the ethics literature, particularly contributions of Aristotelian thinkers in the West who emphasise the notion of personal and communal virtue. Within this line of thinking, the definition of identity (personal and of a social practice) is linked with the nature of work and also connects to the link between the work (praxis) and the producers of the work (the self or person who acts) noted by Sison (2016). This connection is a vital link in virtue ethics in the East and the West precisely because it ensures humanity and it provides a space for both personal and relational growth and shared responsibility in the context of a

practice, as opposed to external or rule-based approaches to ethics (Akrivou & Oron, 2016).

In the acquired organisation as shown, this unity and integrative meaning has been distorted and obstructed by the ‘new organisational culture’ which is being imposed. Accordingly, there is an observed incompatibility between meaning systems as found in the post-merger context of this study which is rarely discussed in the organisation. As noted, it remains a concealed and denied discourse and there is a total absence of dialogic ethics which the literature sees as a foundation for virtue (Akrivou et al., 2016). This is very important, as when values are defined, they are defined within the framework of an ethical environment (Blackburn, 2016, p. 6).

This incompatibility has been expressed in debates about (in)congruence between market-driven and virtue-based organisational values in contributing to achieving the common goals and good of organisations and groups (Sison, 2016). Other studies in the literature also indicate the corrosive effects of the imposition of extrinsic forms of motivation or goals on intrinsic ends of workers (Frey and Jegen, 2001) such as the pursuit of excellence in craft for its own sake (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). In the post-merger context of this study which reveals the external dominance of incompatible values, the acquired group as a community of expert and creative knowledge workers is faced with conditions which raise ethical questions regarding appropriate responses to the dual cultural reality in which they find themselves.

As noted, an ethical environment generates specific ethical issues and meanings (Blackburn, 2001, p. 6) as opposed to a ‘thin’ conception of values, as if they are abstractly created statements. Values are therefore underpinned by ideas about what is acceptable or not, rights and obligations in social relationships and conceptions of good / wellbeing or otherwise and these conceptions are reflected in how things become valued or not. From this perspective, moral positions are inherent in the values held (Blackburn, 2001, p. 6) and indicate how an ethical culture and climate underpins a specific value system. For example, ethical standpoints are expressed symbolically through myths, religion, narratives or ceremonies (Blackburn, 2001, p. 16). It is the collective attitude towards conceptions of right or wrong which allows values to be defined regarding a range of issues such as justice, rights, obligations or duties, virtues, conduct, freedom or equality (Blackburn 2001, p. 7). Given the close links between

ethics and culture, it is easy to appreciate the importance of diverse values and meanings inherent in notions of ethics. In this study, the post-merger environment appeared to conceal and to deny the legitimacy of essential coexistence of various value systems. Rather, it aimed to manage a process of the creation of a new organisational culture which gradually erases the previous meanings and patterns of interaction. From this study's findings, there is no evidence of an acknowledgement of differences in meaning and viewpoints in the formal management processes. There is also no evidence showing that these differences have been addressed, even where the post-merger complex social processes appear to suggest that the acquirer is an ethically relativist organisation, which is not really the case. As Blackburn (2001, p. 19) points out about relativism, differences in viewpoints as a result of cultural diversity make it difficult to arrive at a unified notion of what is thought to be appropriate ethical standards. The post-merger context of this study on the surface appears to be indication of a successful financial transaction progressing steadily through cultural integration as far as observable interaction patterns reveal. However, closer examination of meaning systems in the context suggests that the organisational context is one of cultural diversity where meaning systems are incongruent and persist (Blackburn, 2001, p. 18). The noticeable promotion and monitoring of a set of unitary and dominant values of Alpha-D suggests a unitary notion of the organisational culture exists whereas in reality, the acquisition of a community of knowledge workers with a different meaning system introduced a cultural problem not resolvable by cultural assimilation. The structural features in the post-merger context appear to provide a framework which facilitates cultural assimilation but in reality work more to subordinate the identity and meaning system of the acquired group to the desires and goals of the organisation (Blackburn, 2001, p. 79).

Given the sharp contrasts between a primary emphasis on efficiency, quantification and market-driven values of the acquiring organisation versus a fundamental concern with virtues of excellence, autonomy and flexibility in the acquired population, employees are being pulled in opposing directions. They are presented with a situation where they must decide on the appropriate course of action. It is worth noting that the goals in the creative community are not necessarily incompatible with the commercial goals of the organisation as a whole (Akrivou and Sison, 2016) given that excellent products will be beneficial to final end users (consumers), the knowledge industry, the organisation's

reputation for quality and also for facilitating intrinsic motivation in the primary producers. However it is also true that serious points of friction and incompatibility exist regarding ways of valuing the best approach through which the organisation can go about achieving its commercial goals. There is no evidence that suggests that these incompatibilities are seriously addressed; findings reveal they are instead concealed. In this sense, it would be at once possible, albeit a complicated social process to conceive a shared focus (Akrivou and Sison, 2016) on the notion of achieving a good outcome for the post-merger context which has not happened. Importantly, however, the point of difference is in conceptions of how the outcome would be achieved and for which groups. To this end, there is a need for an approach promoting tolerance as well as agreement on overriding principles transcending cultural differences but which allow for the achievement of goals congruent with the meaning systems identified. In this study, an ethical outcome would be possible insofar as a shared concern for virtue and benevolent dialogue as its basis is systematically practiced as noted by Akrivou et al., (2016). This involves tolerance and openness to dialogue which considers the voice of the less-dominant group, which justifies the view that virtue is the basis of dialogue for dialogue to be understood and practiced in the moral sense as noted by Akrivou et al., (2016). The willingness to promote understanding, empathy and negotiation facilitates open conversations towards achieving goals collectively. In extreme situations of incongruence however, Blackburn (2016, p. 25) suggests that it is possible to have significant divergence in meaning such that an integrated or unified position cannot be achieved. In such circumstances, respect for differences would be the overriding ethic which can promote achievement of goals as a collective.

This study's findings confirm the persistence of cultural boundaries delineated by knowledge work as shown in critical management studies on organisations (Alvesson 2001). Alvesson (2001) highlights the significance of expert knowledge, creativity in uncertainty and codified/tacit forms of learning as key elements of knowledge work. There is also recognition of the personal nature of the skills which are often inaccessible to those outside the sphere of expertise and which makes it difficult for outsiders to evaluate knowledge work. Taken together, these characteristics describe cultural practices in the community of knowledge workers. For example in the post-merger context of the study, there are distinct knowledge boundaries preventing those in Alpha-D outside the engineering community from being able to appropriately appraise their

work. This provides the benefit of reinforcing an expert status for them as knowledge workers, which is both symbolic and highly valued. Conversely however, the feature described by Alvesson (2001) as overt image management behaviour is not found to be prominent in the acquired population on an individual level, particularly as substitutes for tangible representations of proficiency. On a group level however, there are expressed concerns about visibility by the leader of the group in response to the organisation's structured ways of measuring performance relative to other workgroups. The persistence of cultural boundaries in the post-merger context of this study is attributable to differences in the underlying system of values and meaning expressed in different forms, rather than to the observable expressions of the dominant organisational culture in organisational practices, ceremonies and rules. Importantly for the acquired population, a lack of congruence in systems of meaning and the agitation for dominance between different meaning systems creates fairly persistent boundaries between it and the organisation, both real and perceived. Contrasting values are at the heart of the observed differences in the organisational culture.

The dominant set of values promoted by the acquiring organisation represent, at least on a superficial level, a portrayal of an integrated organisational culture post-acquisition, where the merged entity continues to work successfully towards its goals, evidenced by favourable overall financial results. In reality, however, there are underlying tensions as a result of contrasting and incongruent values. For example, market-driven efficiency orientation and individualisation of contribution contrasted with a focus on craft excellence, autonomy and communal work. From the perspective of the acquired population, the cultural interaction draws attention to indications of different cultural realities contending for dominance in the post-merger environment. First there is a techno-rational reality (Lankshear, 1997), which is at the level where Alpha-D promotes a set of company values that are widely recognised and which the company rewards. This is a reality underpinned by efficiency orientations aimed at maximising benefits and echoes through many of the organisational values and practices. Indications about the meaning system in Alpha-D emerge from founders' historical cultural values and their evolution through the years as responses to situations and challenges as indicated by historical accounts. These were embedded in the organisation's policies and procedures. Significantly, the dominant notion of organisational culture was not a unitary one. Despite the prevalence of the company



values, there were also pockets of differences in thinking amongst Alpha-D employees which revealed external influences in meaning systems on a more personal level. For example, values held included differing personal perceptions of ideal practices (Archer, 2004, p. 10) based on comparison of previous work experiences outside or within Alpha-D or from personal attitudes to work such as embracing change.

The second level of reality reveals underlying tensions in the company's value system. This is where interaction between the values supporting efficiency and rationality in Alpha-D and the craft-driven cultural elements of the acquired group creates additional tensions which present the engineering team with ethical choices. The structure, processes, resources and managerial approach of the acquiring organisation are imposed on the acquired community with a view to assimilating the new community into its established rational culture. The data indicates that this approach did not consider the significant role of the nature of the object produced and manner of production (practice) which allowed for achieving excellence in the craft (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 175). The enforcement of rules, processes and procedures that were incompatible with the craft gradually hindered the pursuit of such excellence, as affected employees struggled to balance compliance requirements with intrinsic predispositions to doing what is considered right for its own sake in the context of their profession. The post-merger context thus masked tensions arising from differences in conceptions of value between the two merging entities given the acquirer's emphasis on maximising benefits and the acquired group's concerns with achieving excellence in work.

Values underpinning acceptable understanding or approaches to life have been a key part of the ethical literature and have been viewed as existing within a framework whereby moral consciousness (MacIntyre, 1966, p. 190; Blackburn, 2001) is salient and focal. As moral agents, people in communities are assumed to utilise their conscience as to how best to go about enabling agreement regarding what is acceptable, right or wrong and how to treat minority and majority moral standpoints. Ethics then defines the corpus of accepted principles governing behaviours, actions and beliefs within a social community (Blackburn, 2001, p1). From an Aristotelian perspective, values can be understood from the standpoint of whether they are virtuous ends in themselves or means to other ends (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 139; MacIntyre, 1966, p. 61). For example, the pursuit of excellence has been mainly associated with creative or artistic activity

and is considered as virtuous and an intrinsically motivating end in itself (for its own sake) (MacIntyre, 1966, p. 62, p.175). Intellectual virtues from the Aristotelian viewpoint are thought to be developed and sustained through training or systematic instruction while character virtues are sustained through continuous practice (MacIntyre, 1966, p. 64; MacIntyre, 1981, p. 145). The anthropological approach to this study reveals findings consistent with these ideas in the ethical literature on indications of origins of culture through the influence of elites via systems of primary education. As a result of continuous practice, both actions and the person (actor) can be described as virtuous. When the organisational context is viewed from an ethical lens, in exercising virtue there is a duty for the acquired population as members of the new community to conform to the demands of authority structures in the post-merger organisation. Simultaneously, there is a duty to pursue excellence in the work done as members of a craft community with its own unique set of norms. These tensions indicate what MacIntyre (1981, p. 145) identifies as the incompatibility between commercial values which become key dominant drivers of human action and agency in commercially-oriented organisations and a pre-occupation with purely virtuous approaches to work.

#### **6.6.1 Problematic ethical choices facing the community of knowledge workers**

Given the context of cultural interactions in the post-merger environment of this study, members of the acquired community become faced with a dual cultural reality where they are required to decide on appropriate responses. On one hand, they may or may not decide to comply and transform into the kind of people Alpha-D would like them to be. On the other hand, they may continue to straddle the demands of incompatible meaning systems in the event that they choose not to leave the organisation. As practising members of their expert knowledge community concerned with promoting the integrity of their profession, it is unclear what principles would guide their choice of response, given that the craft community is faced with opposing pulls from incompatible meaning systems. Attempts to take account of their current circumstance in choosing an appropriate response position would inevitably have consequences. Three options can be identified: first, the choice to conform and align completely with the acquiring organisation's values which emphasise efficiency, speed and commercial profitability;

secondly, the choice to align completely with the norms of the craft community and continue to strive for excellence in creative pursuits; thirdly, an attempt to straddle the conflicting demands from both directions and find an appropriate ethical mid-point (called the mean in ethical terms (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 141).

The first option represents not only yielding to or accepting the dominant market-driven values but also a change of identity in line with the organisation's expressed preference. Yielding in this way represents a radical shift likely to be detrimental for the community of knowledge workers and would result in losses not in financial terms but in terms of potential advancements in product quality. There is also loss in terms of identity as commercial values erode concerns for virtue and replace sources of intrinsic motivation given that work and identity are interrelated. To achieve productivity purely in technical and commercial terms as the organisation sees it would require lowering normative standards of excellence to accommodate compliance with dominant and short term expectations around productivity. MacIntyre (1981) suggests that in a bureaucratic and commercially oriented organisational context, the agency of employees is constrained by the prevalence of organisational goals and directed towards compliance with given rules and externally imposed metrics aimed at promoting the organisational values and conventions (MacIntyre, 1981, p145). The assumption of passiveness is disputed by other studies which draw attention to the centrality of thoughtful human agency in giving meaning to human existence as members of cultural groupings through reflexive and participatory activities on the basis of benevolent virtuous collaboration for the common good (Akrivou and Sison, 2016, p127; Archer, 2004). The latter view is more compelling and suggests there are avenues for resolving the assumption of human passivity in some of the reviewed literatures by the cultural and sociological authors.

The second option or response privileges the norms of the craft community over the values of the acquiring organisation. While it may be a natural inclination with the promise of yielding the best outcome for the team in terms of product quality and worker wellbeing, it places them in an unfavourable position against the framework of criteria and rules against which their performance would be assessed. Privileging autonomy, flexibility and craft integrity may mean that benefits for the acquiring organisation may not emerge in the short term. However, in the longer run, this choice is not inconsistent with achieving commercial benefits for the organisation (Akrivou

and Sison, 2016, p. 127) in the sense that a product which is the outcome of natural expressions of the community's meaning system represents excellence in craft which can also have commercial value. The challenge for the post-merger organisation would be to be accommodating of a virtue approach to work until it can translate the excellent products into commercial value.

The third option is an attempt to straddle the demands from divergent systems of meaning and value. This option is ethically problematic because of the dual sense of loyalty as a result of being members of separate communities in the post-merger organisation; first as a community of knowledge workers and secondly as acquired members of the organisation. Findings from the study indicate that the third option appeared to be the current choice with attendant effects on the team. A prominent effect was the tension for the employees in terms of gauging appropriate actions to take per time and the resultant diminishing wellbeing evidenced by concerns about job security and passive forms of resistance to rules although these are masked by outward compliance. For example, a participant indicated his concerns about his relevance to the team during an interview.

“I don't have any big projects going on which sometimes leaves me a bit sort of worried...” (George Interview transcript, p. 9).

There are also effects in the areas of changes in social relations, subtle discrimination in the team and an erosion of craft norms as they struggle to accommodate the new rules. In ethical terms, there is a loss of value on an organisational level as well as in the craft community where employees work under conditions of stress (van Marrewijk, 2016, p. 351), distrust, dissatisfaction and apathy which also contribute to diminished productivity.

## 6.7 Chapter summary

The research questions addressed in this chapter illuminate the understanding of the nature, sources and interaction of meaning systems in the post-merger context of cultural relations in the post-merger community. Drawing on relevant anthropological theories on culture, the empirical evidence challenges tacit assumptions of studies on

organisational culture about unitary notions of organisational culture and show in the post-merger context the levels of complexity and diversity inherent in meaning systems, traceable to different sources. Anthropological theories on culture have been highly influential on later studies on culture in the management literature by drawing attention to the role of the symbolic and interpretative approaches to research on understanding culture (Geertz, 1973). However, they assume pre-socialised participants and communities (Kroeber, 1963, p. 155) and are silent on the role of human agency in cultural processes. Studies on organisational culture in the M&A literature which have been dominated by management-centric standpoints also echo this silence (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988; Cartwright and Cooper, 1993; Weber, 1996). Findings from the post-merger context validate the arguments supporting an active, deliberative role of members of a culture (MacIntyre, 1981; Alvesson, 1993, p. 92; Akrivou and Sison, 2016; Archer, 2004; Van Marrewijk, 2016, p. 351; Gover et al., 2016) particularly relevant for conditions of cultural disequilibrium presented by a merger and acquisition process. Van Marrewijk (2016, p. 351) in a longitudinal ethnographic study specifically identifies the concept of revitalisation in which employees actively engage in re-synthesis of elements of their meaning system to adapt to the M&A process. Contrary to the findings of van Marrewijk (2016), indications of reflexive deliberation of knowledge workers in this study as members of dual but integrated contexts do not seek to eliminate cultural elements that no longer fit in but rather expose the ethical environment underpinning their work and highlight incongruence in values and meaning which presented ethical challenges. More specifically, incongruence in values was made salient by the nature of knowledge work and the objects produced which was closely tied to the identifying characteristics of the acquired population as a community of experts and professionals (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 175). As a result, group identity dilemmas remain unresolved and this seems to be the case in the context of this study. Geertzian notions of social conflict arise as a result of incongruence between patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction in culture (Geertz, 1973, p. 164). However, as earlier discussed, findings from this study show that cultural issues are also inherently ethical, presenting real challenges in the merged population as revealed in conflicting understandings and incongruence in meaning. This study expands on the Geertzian notion of conflict by demonstrating the nuanced nature of conflict in culture and identifying deeper level ethical conflict which emerges as a result of distortions in a meaning system. From a virtue ethics perspective, the context of incongruent meanings

presents an ethically problematic situation where any choice of response or action has attendant ethical implications. The implications concern not only preserving the integrity of the craft but also the layered identity of the members of the community of knowledge workers as practising craftsmen and as loyal employees. These implications will be discussed further in the next chapter which gives conclusions from the research.

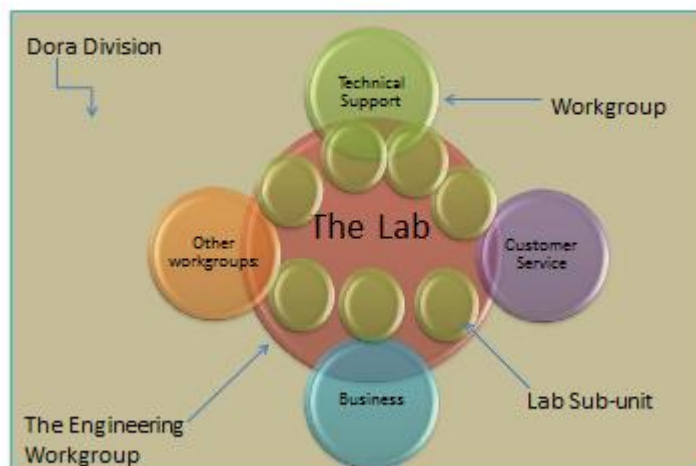


Figure 6.1 Structure of interacting workgroups in the Dora Division

## **7 CHAPTER SEVEN - CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This study adopts a cultural theoretical framework to understanding a post-merger context of cultural interactions which reveal diversity in meaning systems. The aim is to explore the phenomenon of organisational culture from an interpretivist perspective. Specifically, taken-for-granted assumptions regarding organisational culture in the management literature are probed, in particular, organisational culture in an emergent post-merger organisation. In this study, the understanding of organisational culture is deepened by integrating insights from relevant literatures such as anthropology and contributions by socio-political scholars. The key population of study is a group of knowledge workers who have been identified in the critical management literature as having key elements of their work related to autonomy, ambiguity and expertise. (Alvesson, 2001).

The research questions investigate the nature and sources of meaning in population of professionals within the post-merger organisation, probing for areas of incongruence. In addition, responses to incongruence are explored. The study's findings reveal an on-going identity struggle for the acquired group of knowledge workers. This is a key finding because of the intertwined links between their work practices, meaning system and their identity. The struggle can therefore also be seen as an on-going cultural struggle following the acquisition. The findings provide empirical evidence of indirect but active resistance to acculturation and assimilation into the dominant acquirer's culture, as a result of the nature of their creative knowledge work. These findings provide insights into the dynamics of cultural interactions in a community of knowledge workers within the context of a post-merger organisation, and specifically show the symbolic nature of the key elements of their meaning system identified as values of autonomy, craft pride and the expert knowledge, ownership, communal and interdependent practice and the intertwined links with their identity. These findings enrich the understanding of organisational culture in emergent post-merger organisational contexts as well as contribute to the existing literature on knowledge workers. The study furthermore uncovers embedded ethical dimensions to the challenges around the coexistence of incompatible meaning systems within

organisational culture. The ethical dimension to organisational culture has received insufficient attention in the literatures informing the study, such as the management, socio-political and anthropological literatures. The cultural analysis thus provides important insights which also inform key debates in the ethics literature.

Methodologically, adopting an ethnographic research design for this study enables an interrogation of the taken for granted aspects of organisational culture following a merger and acquisition, particularly gaining an understanding of the lived experiences of the acquired community from their perspective, in contrast to studies on mergers and acquisitions which reveal a largely positivist (Cartwright et al. 2012) and management-centric bias. In addition, existing studies with a focus on organisational culture in the management studies literature lack an in-depth theoretical insight from cultural studies and cultural anthropology so this study offers value to address this gap.

This chapter expresses the relationship between the research findings and the research questions, and demonstrates broader linkages with the literatures informing the research as well as recent empirical and conceptual studies. There is also acknowledgement of lessons learned from the conduct of the study in terms of limitations and how they were addressed. Implications for theory, policy and practice are given and new questions are raised which can benefit from further research.

## **7.2 Relationship between research findings and research questions**

The focus of this study is on exploring meaning systems in a context of cultural diversity presented by a post-merger organisation. To this end, the research questions were concerned with understanding the nature and sources of the meaning system in the post-merger organisation in relation to a professional group of knowledge workers. Specifically, research questions were focused on:

- (a) understanding the nature and sources of meaning systems in the merged Alpha-D and Brownfield workgroup community, and identifying areas of incongruence in meaning.
- (b) understanding Brownfield work groups' responses to incongruence in meaning regarding the nature and ethics of work



From the study's findings, the cultural analysis regarding the above exposed how this post-merger context of relations manifested ethical challenges and dimensions. These dimensions involve the social practices linking work itself to the ethical identity of the persons and communities who produce the work as well as the broader organisation, and enable an expansion of the analysis beyond the management, cultural and socio-political literatures to relevant debates in ethics.

### 7.2.1 Empirical findings

In the merged community under study, culture was found to exist as two incompatible realities: first there was a superficial overt culture which was observable in interaction patterns, indicating compliance with the acquirer's organisational rules but which also masked underlying tensions. Secondly, culture existed as an interconnected system of meaning, practice and identity emerging from the nature of the work, professional membership of communities of knowledge workers and historical work interaction patterns. This finding contrasts with tacit notions of culture as shared and unitary, associated with influential anthropological studies on culture (Kroeber, 1963; Geertz, 1973; van Maanen, 1978). The finding also contrasts with conceptions of culture either as integrated or assimilated into the acquirer's culture after a merger or acquisition, implicit in many studies in the management literature (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Kilmann et al., 1985; Shaver, 2006; Lubatkin, 1983; O'Neill, 1998; Borys and Jemison, 1989; Jemison and Sitkin, 1986; Hoskisson and Turk, 1990; Buono and Bowditch, 1989; Buono et al., 1985; Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988 and Larsson and Lubatkin, 2001). Differences in values between the cultures of the two merging organisations revealed diversity in meaning systems. In particular, the domination of the acquirer's values resulted in distortions to the acquired community's meaning system. The close relationship between the ethics of craft<sup>22</sup> and the hybrid<sup>23</sup> nature of the final product made which was composed of tangible and intangible parts made was a core aspect of the acquired group's meaning system. Adoption of the dominant values which largely emphasise efficiency over craft excellence therefore meant changes to work practices

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<sup>22</sup> These emerge from the analysis of data (Chapter 4) and are elaborated upon in the Discussion (Chapter 5).

<sup>23</sup>

which conflicted with the group's notions of working to preserve the integrity of their craft and their identity. Close connections between practice and identity have been established in the literature on ethics, particularly in the area of virtue ethics (MacIntyre, 1981; Akrivou and Sison, 2016). The importance of an ethical perspective on the effects of M&As on stakeholder groups including employees have also been identified (Collett, 2010) although emphasis is largely on financial and measurable notions of impact. From an ethical standpoint, the conflict of values in the post-merger context of this study was ethical in nature with implications for work practices, the products made and the identity of the workers. In situations of conflict, liberal philosophers suggest according equal (or quasi-equal) status to all cultures in order to give weaker cultures a voice (Rawls, 1971; Kymlicka, 1989; Barry, 2001). However, ethical conflict can hardly be expected to be resolved exclusively through political means. Members of the acquired group play a key role as knowledge workers whose values are closely linked with their identities (Bottomore, 1973) in preserving their culture and do so as they interpret or re-interpret parameters defining the culture.

### **7.2.2 Theoretical findings**

From the point of view of the anthropological literature, in particular the works of Geertz (1973) and Kroeber (1963) which are relevant and highly influential to later studies on culture in the management discipline, this study exposed the nuanced details of the relationship between patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction (Geertz, 1973) in the acquired population. While observed interaction patterns appeared to reflect an acceptance of the acquirer's culture, findings suggest they were a response to the need to comply with new organisational values and practices, rather than an activity congruent with the craft community's meaning system. In contrast with Geertzian expectations regarding incongruence between patterns of meaning and patterns of interaction, overt conflict was not observed in the study. Findings suggest that dominance can be established over values, language or interaction patterns without eradicating the existence of subcultural values or language which may continue to exist alongside them.

There were also intertwined links between meaning and ethics relating to the creative knowledge work. Results from this study illuminate the role of participants in cultural processes within the diverse context which uncovered the ethical dimensions of culture. This finding is significant because it confronts the tacit notions held by the highly influential works of Geertz and Kroeber on culture as an uncontested way of life established through education and socialisation. Specifically, the findings suggest a more precise answer to the implicit view on the role of people (who are assumed as passive receptors of cultural influences), taken for granted in the anthropological literature. Many studies on culture in an organisational context of an M&A also reflect the lack of role specificity inherent in the anthropological literature having been influenced by these earlier studies. A number of studies highlight culture as a problematic area in organisational change as well as in mergers and acquisitions and suggest that people related issues are relevant to consider in M&As (Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988; Harris and Ogbonna, 1998; Ogbonna and Harris, 1998; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 2003; van Marrewijk, 2016). Given the significance of people as active participants in culture, this study provides rich insight into the dynamics of cultural interactions from an anthropological perspective.

The third finding provides insight into the ethical dimensions of culture which relate to social practices that connect work to identity in the acquired population. The ethical dimension of culture is a less studied area in the literature on mergers and acquisition and this study provides value for addressing the gap in the literature. In an occupational community such as a creative group of knowledge workers, there are interwoven relationships between the nature of the work (practice) and identity of the workers. The ethical literature provides explanations for these links in virtue ethics theory and reveal how work and identity are important components of culture. Research in the business ethics literature on organisations and ethical culture have been concerned with attitude to ethics in organisations, employees' perceptions of their organisation's ethics as well as determinants of ethical decision-making, and suggest commitment to the organisation as an ethics-related attitude (McCabe et al., 1993; Trevino, 1998, Trevino et al., 2008). These studies have largely been based on quantitative approaches which by design are limited in the depth of insight that can be gathered as opposed to more qualitative and interpretative research. The studies are also fundamentally instrumental and indicate organisational concerns with desirable and beneficial outcomes, usually in

terms of what furthers the organisation's agenda. Despite this shortcoming, the studies draw attention to employee commitment as a demonstration of ethical behaviour (Trevino, 1998; Trevino et al., 2008) although this is debatable and depends on the framework of the surrounding ethical environment. Nevertheless, it is plausible to expect that a visible lack of commitment could have implications for an employee in a contribution-focused and efficiency-driven organisational context. This becomes relevant when analysing ethical dilemmas where commitment is demanded on two related but distinct domains such as commitment to values of craftsmanship and simultaneously commitment to the imposed values of an acquiring organisation. In other words, a commitment to both virtue ethics and imposed values supporting commercial notions of productivity seem to be coexistent in the context of the lab. In general, there is some recognition in other studies that ethical considerations are beneficial in a corporate context for bringing about cooperative and trusting relationships (Jones and Bowie, 1998; Soule, 1998), however this can be impeded by short-term efficiency orientations underpinning organisational values, orientations sometimes substituted for ethical values as regulators of behaviour in organisations (Goodpaster, 2000). The identified studies so far in the business ethics literature emphasise ethical organisational culture but focus more on practices related to social interaction within the context of the workplace and how to ensure overt compliance with external standards of right and wrong. Other studies (Koehn; 1998; Macintyre, 1981) in contrast however recognise the distinct differences between market-based orientations and virtue-based orientations to work in organisations, providing a backdrop for this study's exploration of diversity in culture in a post-merger context where diversity is not simply emerging from emotional responses to the M&A by the acquired population or for political reasons such as position in the deal (Collet, 2010) but empirically grounded in virtuous practice and identity. In particular, the context allows for an investigation of challenges posed by conflicts in meaning systems as a result of ethical dilemmas accentuated by the nature of work in a community of practice.

### 7.3 Research propositions from findings

Some propositions are subsequently made in response to findings identifying relationships between key elements of culture as outlined in the research questions:

In the context of diverse meanings, there are indications of coherence in meaning systems in the acquired group which are attributable to multiple influences but essentially underpinned by defining aspects of the group, such as the nature of knowledge work done and group identity.

Incongruence between observed interaction patterns and the acquired group's system of meaning exists in the absence of overt or observable conflict particularly where there are organisationally-imposed interaction patterns which are unconnected to defining aspects of the acquired group's work as earlier identified.

The imposition and encroachment of dominant organisational values which are underpinned by efficiency and market-based orientations introduce distortions to the acquired group's meaning system. In this study, the distortions are evident in different interpretations and responses in the acquired group towards the values underlying the structural framework of the organisation. As a result, although social conflict in patterns of interaction are not observed in this study, findings indicate that the imposition of external values which conflict with defining aspects of the group e.g the nature of creative knowledge work or group identity resulted in incongruence in the cognitive domain as the knowledge workers in their craft community struggled to interpret the newly imposed organisational values in the light of their existing meaning system.

Active and reflexive agency in the community of practice reveals distortions in the meaning system which exposes the ethical nature of the dilemma faced in terms of choices that the group has to make and which system of values to align with i.e. to resist cultural assimilation and protect the integrity of their craft (practice) or to demonstrate loyalty and commitment to the organisation's dominant values. The ethical tensions notwithstanding, there may not necessarily be overt conflict given the political conditions which serve to ensure employee compliance with the post-merger rules and regulations.

Defining and symbolic elements of the craft (knowledge work) such as autonomy, craft pride around expert knowledge /status and the intertwined links to identity serve as a form of protection from or resistance to acculturation and assimilation into the acquirer's culture.

#### **7.4 Limitations and future directions**

This study provides insights that are relevant for contexts of cultural diversity by uncovering background dynamics of cultural interactions and the ethical dimensions which underpin and work to preserve a meaning system, often unaccounted for or taken for granted in empirical studies in the literature on organisational culture. Practically, it provides value for the understanding of the interwoven relationship between the person and the work in a community of practice as well as the implications of tensions and conflict in meaning systems as a result of incompatible values which reflect in interpretations of identity, craft and productivity in a bureaucratic capitalist organisation. The study gives insight into the complex context of cultural relations brought about by a merger and acquisition and the real challenges created in and for the organisational context as a result of the dominance or privilege of efficiency orientations over craft-based systems of meaning and ethics.

Some evidence of male dominated values and culture was found in the ethnographic study. However there is insufficient data to analyse these. Instead, observations have been based on the general demographics and statistical information on the organisation and representative groups and populations. Links between gender and cultural values in the context were not in the scope of this dissertation but could be something interesting to explore in the future.

Issues of control and culture could be additional variables to include in the international business research, particularly where the literature suggests that multinational companies should manage their subsidiaries differently, depending on local contexts and their resources.

Other limitations relate to natural constraints regarding the finite time available for the researcher to conduct the fieldwork given the strict timing of a full time PhD programme and the researcher's ability to observe all events simultaneously (Patton, 2002, p. 563), necessitating making choices about observations, documents and people to focus on during field work.

The implications of the identified relationships between ethics and meaning systems for the theory, policy and practice warrant further research in culturally diverse contexts. This research on diversity in meaning is exploratory in focus and requires further study to investigate the longer term effects of incongruence in meaning systems on members of a community of practice.

In particular, research on how incongruence affects definitions of self and group-identity, elements of the meaning system and stability in social relationship structures are useful for developing understanding of the broader trajectories created by enforced cultural integration.

In addition, it is useful to research into how individuals and groups resolve underlying tensions in culture in a way that is ethically compatible with their meaning system such that choices made do not betray the team, the organisation and the self.

Given the specific context of the case studied, I was unable to derive policy implications from this research for the reason that my study was too specific to allow such conclusions to be drawn. Further research however could investigate policy implications of this approach which is an ethnographic organisational analysis and some directions are suggested for achieving this. Comparative qualitative research can be done to enrich the understanding of results across different cases. Also, a combination of my in-depth qualitative study with more quantitative studies can be done to investigate for example, whether companies that relinquish control over subsidiaries have better financial performance.

## **7.5 Implications for theory**

The results of this study are relevant to the theory of culture from the anthropological perspective and make prominent the active meaning making role of

members of a cultural grouping in sustaining the continuity of a meaning system or in allowing alterations to it. More specifically, findings show the dynamics underpinning the appearance and coexistence of subcultures (Martin, 2002; Van Marrewijk, 2016), drawing attention to underlying tensions which present ethical challenges in a context of diverse meaning systems. From the ethnographic approach utilised, the understanding of notions of culture adopted by influential anthropological (Geertz, 1973; Kroeber, 1963) and management literatures (Smircich, 1983; Schein, 1985; Alvesson, 2001, Nahavandi and Malekzadeh, 1988) is extended to account for ethical implications of reflexive practice for delineating identity and meaning systems. This contrasts with findings from studies which distinguish subcultures by personal / group attitudes to organisational culture or functional practices alone (Van Maanen and Barley, 1984; Sinclair, 1993; Kunda, 2006; van Marrewijk, 2016<sup>24</sup>).

Implications relevant to the concerns expressed in the business and broader ethics literature demonstrate the need for further cross fertilisation of cultural anthropology and business ethics. Emerging from the cultural analysis in this dissertation, my findings show the MacIntyrian critiques to how organisational values, symbols and meaning systems emphasise efficiency and instrumentalise community and culture as tools to help achieve market and strategic objectives, attributing a passive or reactive role to social processes. However, combining key ideas from ethics literatures and cultural theorists such as Geertz (1973) and Kroeber (1963) and also viewed from a practice ontology, we can see how meaning making in communities of practice, groups and organisations can indeed be facilitated, suppressed and concealed based on specific choices made. Such meaning making is one which enables the continuity of a meaning system and a process for addressing various meaning systems which coexist and often compete in organisations. This emphasises the importance of virtue theory as a theory that may inform cultural theory in related debates and also the importance of cultural theory for illuminating virtue ethics theory. This study reveals the relevance and need for empirical research surrounding theoretical discussions around orientations to human beings, action and production in an organisational context. More specifically, the

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<sup>24</sup> van Marrewijk (2016) – A longitudinal ethnographic study which distinguishes subcultures by personal / group attitudes to organisational culture.



discussions have to do with challenges and limitations posed by the nature of utilitarian or market ethics versus virtue orientations, which justifies MacIntyre's concerns regarding the way modern business organises and approaches work, key organisational stakeholders and the larger societal good. (MacIntyre, 1981). This study provides empirical evidence which reveals the interwoven nature of ethics, cultural meaning systems and identity of persons as members of a professional or expert community of practice. Findings demonstrate how deeper-level ethical challenges underpinning incompatibility in meaning systems arising from a conflict between meanings which prioritise the value of craft over imposed organisational performance metrics, create identity struggles. As identified in the discussion chapter, MacIntyreian perspectives link the process of achieving excellence in a practice with the enhancement of personal virtue and the development of the self in virtue terms. Distortions in the meaning system (which is underpinned by practice) caused by an externally imposed 'new' culture therefore creates ethical challenges for the ongoing process which strengthens the bonds between craft (virtuous) identity and the practice as virtuous actions. It is pertinent to note that the incompatibility in meaning uncovered occurs within the framework of a transparent but rigid control system of the organisation. Given that discourse and dialogic ethics were not prominent in this study's findings, the organisation's rigid control system contributes to further creating conditions which threaten the stability and continued existence of the practice, persons and the community as repositories and creators of virtue. In extension, conditions for losses overall are created in terms of identity, the craft community's meaning system, craftsmanship and productivity. An absence of evidence in the studied context regarding resolution of the ethical problem supports the view that there is value in further research in this area as earlier identified.

## **7.6 Practical Implications**

On an organisational level, awareness of ethical dimensions of culture in a diverse context of relations calls for adjustments in organisational conditions so as to facilitate open conversations regarding the factors underlying persistence of cultural boundaries. Under such facilitating conditions, there can be re-interpretations of incongruence or incompatibility in a less antagonistic light. A meaning system

which revolves around craft excellence in a community of practice is likely to persist except perhaps notions of excellence are renegotiated through a participatory, discursive approach to building meaning systems over time. Given this, the findings of this study are relevant for the management of a post-merger emergent organisation involving craft-based communities of practice such as knowledge workers.

Given the importance of the symbolic aspects of the meaning system for identity construction in the craft community, this knowledge is specifically valuable for managers of integration phases in M&As, particularly in multinational companies.

More generally, there are also implications for the management of professional employees. An understanding of their meaning system can inform policies which support decision making regarding choices which may have ethical implications, especially during periods of change or restructuring.

There are also implications for employees, teams and groups within cohesive professional and knowledge-based communities of practice in terms of their responses to imposed and incompatible values. A choice to align fully with the dominant organisational market ethics erodes the notion of the collective and a communal ethos, as individuals gradually are set on the path to transforming into more commoditised forms of resources, amenable to organisational manipulation. On the other hand, a decision to preserve and sustain the ethics of the practice potentially reinforces identity as a community of practice. However, cultural boundary lines become more firmly etched and integration or assimilation thereby becomes difficult to achieve. Decisions to avoid either extremes and 'manage' the tensions from incongruent meanings fall short of standards of productivity in both market and virtue ethics terms, benefitting neither fully. Living with the tensions may require that individuals have to resolve this at a personal level as it pertains to their specific work to demonstrate commitment to the organisation but also retain a sense of professional identity, which may carry elements of stress and diminished productivity. A fundamental issue underlying the clashes in meaning is that productivity is understood and interpreted in different ways. Over time as new learning emerges from the merger experience, as growth takes place in professional experience and as new members join the team, there is sufficient impetus for

gradual reconceptualization of peripheral elements in the meaning system, facilitated or hindered by dominant organisational values.

At the level of the organisation, ability to establish clear links between origins and elements of a meaning system is relevant for integration efforts because it brings into perspective more realistic assumptions about the nature of people and helps to avoid a denial of the legitimacy of different value systems.

More specifically, it enables an understanding of the potential for contention between externally imposed utilitarian and intrinsic virtue-based orientations which creates ethical dilemmas posing a threat to social cohesion, identity as self-defined and the craft culture.

Following on from this, there is also a practical implication for the limits of bureaucratic and cultural control in the organisation. Given the obvious larger size of the acquirer, a consideration to relinquish bureaucratic control over certain parts of the organisation implies that the organisation is giving people responsibility and trusting them to carry them out. However, it also allows them to thrive in doing their work according to the ethics of their profession. As such, a consideration to approach control over such employees in this sense would benefit the company and the rest of society at large as discussed in earlier sections of this chapter.

## **7.7 Concluding comments**

Across anthropological, socio-political and management disciplines, culture can be understood to be expressions of underlying values and world views with values also carrying intents, aims and ethical standpoints. From this perspective, a merger or acquisition process brings together expressions of different world views, including notions of what is acceptable, right or wrong. Such an organisational context becomes culturally diverse in terms of meaning systems and recognition of this diversity can reasonably be associated with efforts to embark on cultural integration initiatives. However, the role of differences in systems of meaning, in particular those connected to the nature of practice in a craft based community are important to consider, as often mergers are dominated by attention to deriving early financial benefits of the

transaction. Subsequently, post-merger activities risk being fundamentally treated as contributing largely to measurable indicators of commercial benefits, at the expense of non-financial and non-measurable notions of value. If organisations are understood to be sites of intersubjective interactions between people who are active agents in their lived experiences, a more realistic understanding of the real challenges of cultural integration can be achieved.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Consent Form and Information Sheet



#### Consent Form

1. I have read and had explained to me by ...**Yemisi Bolade-Ogunfodun**.....

the accompanying cover letter / information sheet relating to the project on:

**Dimensions of organisational culture in workgroups in a context of mergers and acquisitions** .....

2. I have had explained to me the purposes of the project and what will be required of me,

and any questions I have had have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to the

arrangements described in the Information Sheet in so far as they relate to participation.

3. I understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that participants have the right to withdraw from the project any time, and that this will be without detriment.

4. This application has been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct.

5. I have received a copy of this Consent Form and of the accompanying cover letter / Information Sheet.

**Name:** .....

**Date of birth:** .....

**Signed:** .....

**Date:** .....

8th April, 2015

O. F. Bolade-Ogunfodun

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Dear Sir/Madam,

**ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE IN WORK  
GROUPS IN A POST- MERGER / ACQUISITION PROCESS**

I am currently conducting an ethnographic study on the dimensions of organisational culture in work groups within a diverse context such as: a place with salient cultural differences, complex structure, a multinational organisation or a merger / acquisition process. This research was informed by an interest in exploring the cultural aspects of organisational life especially in the context of organisational diversity and focuses on understanding the nature and emergence of cultural patterns through relationships, values and bonds within work groups and how these contribute to organisational culture.

My research methods are built around participant observation, interviews and informal conversations and exploring texts on the organisation's culture. To this end, I would be extremely grateful for your kind support in facilitating this research within your organisation. Please be aware that this research is part of an academic PhD project in the University of Reading, Henley Business School. It is an independent (non-sponsored) research which is supervised by Dr K. Akrivou and Dr. J. S. Latsis. The research project strictly adheres to academic standards of ethics which explicitly emphasise anonymity and confidentiality. Neither the organisation, nor the participants will be identified, while the results and observations will be synthesised and aggregated in general patterns to show consistency with the literature. All data will be anonymised.

The planned duration of the study is a period of 6-8 months. This research has been given a favourable ethical approval by the University of Reading. Also, please note that

participants are free to withdraw at any stage of the research if they so wish. Kindly indicate your consent to participating in the research by **signing the attached consent form**.

If you have any further comments or questions on these points, please contact me at the above e-mail address.

Thank you and kind regards,

Yours Sincerely,

O. Bolade-Ogunfodun

## Appendix B: List of Interview Participant Pseudonyms

<b>Interview participant</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Gender</b>
VP1	Alex	M
VP5	Bill	M
VP9	Chris	M
VP10	Dan	M
VP13	Emma	F
VP15	Flora	F
VP17	George	M
VP19	Hayley	F
VP20	Isabella	F
VP21	Julian	M
VP24	Kathlyn	F
VP26	Loretta	F
VP28	Mike	M
VP29	Olly	M
VP30	Preston	M
VP31	Quentin	M
VP33	Ross	M
VP34	Sabrina	F
CC	Charlie	M
CCn	Beth	F
CC's boss	Frank	M
Frank's boss	Norbert	M
Business group	Protection Business group	
Division	Dora	
<b>Merging organisations</b>		
Acquirer	Alpha-D	
Acquired	Brownfield	
<b>Product lines</b>		
DECTRA		
HESS		
VERN		
REED		
COD		
TRP		
SPAR		



## Appendix C: Schedule of participant observation during fieldwork

	<b>SCHEDULE OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION MEETINGS</b>				
	<b>Participant observation</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Duration (mins)</b>	<b>Journal/ page</b>	<b>Week/Day</b>
1	Meeting 1 A team	13/5/2015	20	1	W0 D1
2	Meeting 2 A team	13/5/2015	100	1	W0 D1
3	Induction video	14/05/2015	30	2	W0 D2
4	Meeting 3 A team	19/05/2015	90	11	W1 D1
5	Meeting 4 L team	19/05/2015	100	11	W1 D1
6	Meeting 5 L team	20/05/2015	120	19	W1 D3
7	Meeting 6 A team	26/05/2015	30	20	W2 D1
8	Meeting 7 A team	3/6/2015	120	46	W3 D2
9	Meeting 8 A team	9/6/2015	120	48-49	W4 D1
10	Meeting 9 A team + Europe/USA	9/6/2015	60	53	W4 D1
11	Meeting 10 P team virtual	9/6/2015	10	55	W4 D1
12	Meeting 11 virtual Webinar HR on change	11/6/2015	48	69	W4 D3
13	Meeting 12 A team	16/06/2015	90	79	W5 D1
14	Meeting 13 P team virtual	16/06/2015	30	82	W5 D1
15	Meeting 14 A team	23/06/2015	90	95	W6 D1
16	Meeting 15 P team virtual	24/06/2015	22	107	W6 D2
17	Meeting 16 A team	30/06/2015	90	116	W7 D1
18	Meeting 17 P team virtual	30/06/2015	19	132	W7 D1
19	Meeting 18 P team virtual	1/7/2015	60	135	W7 D2
20	Meeting 19 A team	7/7/2015	73	144	W8 D1
21	Meeting 20 A team	14/07/2015	82	J2 1	W9 D1

22	Meeting 21 P team virtual	14/07/2015	16	J2 7	W9 D1
23	Meeting 22 A team	21/07/2015	75	J2 19	W10 D1
24	Meeting 23 A team	28/07/2015	101	J2 43	W11 D1
25	Meeting 24 Global Division Virtual	28/07/2015	104	J2 49	W11 D1
26	Meeting 25 L team	5/8/2015	120	J2 60	W12 D3
27	Meeting 26 (daily) P+A team virtual	5/8/2015	20	J2 67	W12 D3
	PHASE 2				
28	Meeting 27 A team	18/08/2015	60	J2 82	W13 D1
29	Meeting 28 L team	19/08/2015	30	J2 86	W13 D2
30	Meeting 29 A team	25/08/2015	105	J2 104	W14 D2
31	Meeting 30 Divisional / Europe Team	2/9/2015	435	J2 122	W15 D2
32	Meeting 31 Divisional / Europe Team	3/9/2015	120	J2 130	W15 D3
33	Meeting 32 Facilitated by leader A team	3/9/2015	60	J2 132	W15 D3
34	Meeting 33 A team virtual facilitator H/Q	3/9/2015	45	J2 134	W15 D3
35	Meeting 34 A1 sub-team	8/9/2015	80	J2 135	W16 D1
36	Meeting 35 A team	8/9/2015	140	J2 137	W16 D1
37	Meeting 36 L team	10/9/2015	60	J2 146	W16 D3
38	Meeting 37 A1 sub-team	15/09/2015	45	J2 148	W17 D1
39	Meeting 38 A team	15/09/2015	120	J2 149	W17 D1
40	Meeting 39 (A) Project monitoring group	15/09/2015	40	J2 155	W17 D1
41	Meeting 40 A team	30/09/2015	90	J3 29	W19 D2
42	Meeting 41 A1 sub-team virtual	5/10/2015	25	J3 48	W20 D1(a) Monday
43	Meeting 42 A team	6/10/2015	108	J3 58	W20 D1(b)

					Tuesday
44	PO 43 Symbolic event Location Pub A team	7/10/2015	45	J3 61	W20 D2
45	Meeting 44 A team	13/10/2015	75	J3 66	W21 D1
46	Meeting 45 L team	14/10/2015	30	J3 73	W21 D2
47	Meeting 46 A team	20/10/2015	90	J3 93	W22 D1
48	Meeting 47 A1 sub team	27/10/2015	60	J3 107	W23 D1
49	Meeting 48 A team	27/10/2015	90	J3 108	W23 D1
50	Meeting 49 A team	10/11/2015	70	J3 149	W25 D1
51	Staff social event (Fireworks night)	5/11/2015			
	EXIT				
51	Meeting 50 A group symbolic Xmas event Pub	15/12/2015		J4 17	W26 D1
52	Meeting 51 with A group. symbolic reflective session 3 years after acquisition	5/2/2016	420	J4 p25	W33 D1(Friday)
	Total number of participant observation events	53			
	Video induction observation (archival)	1			
	Formal meetings	50			
	<b>Informal gatherings</b>	<b>3</b>			
	<b>Virtual meetings</b>	<b>8</b>			
	<b>Face-to-face meetings</b>	<b>42</b>			

## Appendix D: Schedule of Interviews and participants during fieldwork.

	Schedule of In-depth interviews					
	Volunteer Participant (VP)	Date	Capture	Evidence: Journal page	Duration (mins)	(Week /Day) Timeline
1	VP1	20/05/2015	Manually recorded	J1 4*;16	30	W1 D2
2	VP2	20/05/2015	Manually recorded	J1 6*;16	60	W1 D2
3	VP1 (again)	2/6/2015	Manually recorded	J1 36	95	W3 D1
4	VP 7	3/6/2015	Manually recorded	J1 45	45	W3 D2
5	VP8	9/6/2015	Manually recorded	J1 51/52	25	W4 D1
6	VP9	10/6/2015	Manually recorded	J1 57	85	W4 D2
7	VP10	11/6/2015	Manually recorded	J1 63	60	W4 D3
8	VP 12	17/06/2015	Manually recorded	J1 86	30	W5 D2
9	VP 13	17/06/2015	Digitally recorded	J1 91	60	W5 D2
10	VP8 (again)	23/06/2015	Digitally recorded	J1 101	23	W6 D1
11	VP 15	2/7/2015	Digitally recorded	J1 139	23	W7 D3
12	VP 16	2/7/2015	Digitally recorded	J1 141	56	W7 D3
13	VP 17	7/7/2015	Digitally recorded	J1 146	71	W8 D1
14	VP 18	9/7/2015	Digitally recorded	J1 149	46	W8 D3
15	VP 19	15/07/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 8	42	W9 D2
16	VP 20	15/07/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 12	45	W9 D2
17	VP 21	16/07/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 14	61	W9 D3

18	VP 22	16/07/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 17	46	W9 D3
19	VP 23	22/07/2015	Manually recorded	J2 27	55	W10 D2
20	VP 24	29/07/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 54	62	W11 D2
21	VP 25	29/07/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 63	50	W11 D2
22	VP 26	30/07/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 69	77	W11 D3
23	VP 27	30/07/2015	Digitally recorded	J2	25	W11 D3
24	VP 28	5/8/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 75	50	W12 D2
	24 interviews				1222	
	FIELDWORK PHASE 2					
25	VP 29	9/9/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 150	84	W16 D2
26	VP 30	15/09/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 151	45	W17 D1
27	VP 31	15/09/2015	Digitally recorded	J2 152	47	W17 D1
28	VP 32	1/10/2015	Manually recorded	J3 41	20	W19 D3
29	VP 33	2/10/2015	Digitally recorded	J3 45	69	W19 D4
30	VP 34	16/10/2015	Digitally recorded	J3 91	60	W21 D4 Friday
					325	
	Total number of people interacted with 28					
	Total number of interviews 30 (two twice)					

	<b>Number of interviews in phase 1 = 24</b>					
	<b>Number of interviews in phase 2 = 6</b>					
	<b>Manually recorded 10</b>					
	<b>Digitally recorded 20</b>					
	<b>Total interview time (mins)</b>	1222+325	2			
		<b>1547</b>				
	<b>Total interview time (hours)</b>	<b>25.78</b>				
	<b>Average transcribing time (hours)</b>	<b>7</b>				
	Estimate of transcribing time	24.7*7=180.4				

## Appendix E: Open Coding of Participant Observation Data

	<b>Conceptual labels</b>	
Bureaucracy	Process driven work	
	Procedures and delays	
	Rules on acceptable work wear, language	
	Inaccurate bottom-up information flow	
Non- alignment	Product strategy / expectations / processes between Alpha-D and Brownfield	
	Side shows and development work	
	Goals between UK and USA	
	In understanding of the purpose of meetings	Networking, collaboration, ideation versus time wasting
	The nature of Brownfield product – unlimited configurations	
	Continuous structure of relationship with customers	
	In understanding of productivity	
	Perceived ranking of workgroups.	
	Performance measurement metrics	
	Reward and effort	

	Understanding of a Lab	
	Understanding of new product	
	Attitude to open communication and personal accountability	
	Orientation about irreplaceability of people	
	Understanding of value (intangible knowledge and experience of acquires)	
Image management	Pressure to show R&D was working	
	Alpha-D is sensitive to its reputation	
	Internal selling for career advancement	
Ideas about work	Real work versus time-wasters	
	Tension between maintenance and development work	
Role clarity	Absent in some roles	
	Multiple reporting lines	
	Frequent role changes	Disrupts /stalls progress



Craft pride	Territorial behaviour over inventions	
	Impact	
	Professionalism	
	Autonomy	
	Freedom	
Work relations	Values in Brownfield workgroups	
	Interaction patterns	
	Communication	
Alpha-D's value system	Valuing employees – replaceable, frequent role changes.	
	Formality in interactions, documentation of conversations	
	Self-service culture	
	Strong work ethic	
	Sensitivity to security, access, ethics, reputation, secrecy.	
	Role rigidity	
	Dominating attitude to acquisition: integrate new company into Alpha-D	
	Global prioritisation	

	Meetings associated with collaboration, communication.	
	Commercialisation	
	Quantification of individual contribution	
	Short-term approach	
Brownfield values	Close knit, family-like relations; caring ethos.	
	Role flexibility	
	Shared goals	
	A focus on getting the job done.	
	Product and customer focused	
	Tribal knowledge	
Non-Brownfield acquisition	Possessed tribal knowledge	
Inconsistencies	Encourages 'intrapreneurs in theory but process driven system frustrates them.	
	Mentoring	
	Reputed spend on R&D and penny-pinching	

	Employee freedom to invent versus priority lists	
Personality differences	Between hardware and software engineers	
	Between Brownfield staff and rest of Alpha-D	
Behavioural responses of Brownfield	Lack of interest or engagement.	
	Vulnerable feelings	
	Lack of communication	
	Sarcasm, jokes, complaints /moaning,	
	Superficial compliance	
	Altered interaction patterns due to structural segregation and monetisation	
	Fears about job security	
	Suspicion and lack of trust in Alpha-D	
	Prone to conspiracy theories	
Cultural diffusion	Language – acronyms	

(Observable elements)		
	Practices- self introduction ceremony	
Perceptions of Bounded areas	Geographical - UK versus USA	
	Organisational - Alpha-D versus Brownfield	
	Social – Ex Brownfield and merged target population	
	Ability levels – High performing versus regular employees	
	Technical (R&D) and non-technical	
	Contract and full time staff	
	Acquired employees versus non-acquires	
	Long serving employees and ‘newbies’	
	Uneven implementation of policies across workgroups	
	Functional workgroups	
Boundary indicators	Language (sports metaphors)	

	Nature of work done	
	Seating layout	
	Interaction patterns	
	Effects of policies	
	Conflicts	
	Parallel plans to Alpha-d plans	

## Appendix F: Interview Guide

1. Introduction - Give overview of research, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, seek permission to record interview.
2. Opening - Personal background questions / demographics.
3. Description of experience in Brownfield / former work.
4. Probe for details.
5. Description of experience post acquisition. Probe for understanding / description of current company culture.
6. Probe for details.
7. Description of current team culture using examples.
8. Probe for details.
9. Closing – Appreciation for time spent, verbal reassurance of confidentiality.

## Appendix G: Extract of conceptual labels by interview participant

Coding labels developed for making sense of interview data.

S/N	Participant	Conceptual labels
1	Quentin	Subtle goal displacement Informal perceptions of ranking amongst workgroups
2	Flora	Values happy work environment, spontaneous communication and a helping, sharing ethic as in previous work culture. Evidence of fun, playful team atmosphere in another Alpha-D workgroup outside Division. Person profile.-Perception of relatively more sparse communication in R&D compared to former organisation. Engineers less-responsive to greetings and appeared strange.
3	Loretta	In previous acquisition to Brownfield, observes flexible decision making contrasting with Alpha-D's gated process which slowed down work but also helped to reassign resources. Clear rules on acceptable work wear. Loretta was planted by Alpha-D on the acquired company's premises to drive a cultural change to Alpha-D's culture. Tribal knowledge versus market research Contradicting/Surprising find. Historically, Alpha-D is supposed to welcome and encourage 'intrapreneurs' and self-starters within the system. Charlie's latter responsibility (Feb. 2016) included identifying such entrepreneurial employees. Employee loyalty was attributed more to the final salary provision than by any other reason. Values seeing the development of her direct reports, having more fun at work and celebrating successes. Person profile.-Differences in personality characteristics between software and hardware engineers.

		<p>Software engineers showed insular behaviours.</p> <p>Loretta perceives the lack of interest from Brownfield as an indication of not having bought into the integration yet.</p> <p>Gender differences across some workgroups. The technical organisation is more male biased.</p> <p>Finding non-financial forms of motivating workers. Alpha-D's response to staff survey results which were going down.</p> <p>Trying to keep employees happy without giving a pay rise.</p> <p>Links the frequent meeting culture with networking, collaboration and ideation.</p> <p>Gradual loss of old fashioned social skills of respect, as perceived by Loretta.</p> <p>Diffusion of a practice /ritual from the USA to the UK.</p> <p>Cultural boundaries across USA and UK evident in language use. E.g. playbook, catchball sessions etc.</p> <p>Agenda to impose Alpha-D values on the acquired company</p> <p>Unclear intentions behind the introduced social rituals (Fireworks night, baking competitions, family fun day)</p> <p>Costs, interaction patterns and superficiality</p>
4	Sabrina	<p>Work values for Sabrina: recognition, variety, challenges, fulfilment. And enjoyable work.</p> <p>The link between informal relationships built outside work and good working relationships.</p> <p>Identified a uniquely British culture of being reserved and tactful politeness.</p> <p>Alpha-D language (speak): networking, collaboration, navigating the matrix.</p> <p>Boundaries across divisions, workgroups and across the business/technical silos.</p> <p>Links between Golden handcuffs, final pension salary, progression and staff turnover.</p> <p>Demarcation between long term Alpha-D employees and newbies who are in the minority.</p>



		<p>The Alpha-D language seems to be something taken for granted especially by long serving employees who had never worked elsewhere.</p> <p>Anger at perceptions of Brownfield's negotiations for and enjoyment of special privileges.</p> <p>Perceptions of unfairness in extending Brownfield's privileges.</p> <p>Sees her own deliverables as being central to the continued existence of employees' jobs.</p> <p>Emphasis on Productivity in Alpha-D being attached to metrics and tied to the organisation's goals.</p> <p>Possibility of managers imposing performance targets on direct reports.</p>
5	Quentin	<p>Policy implementation varied across workgroups.</p> <p>A perception of functional boundaries between IT and Business teams.</p> <p>An implied ranking of workgroups by employees as perceived by Quentin.</p> <p>Performance measurement metrics were clear and quantified in the Alpha-D business team but were vague in IT.</p> <p>Competitive internal dynamics between employees.</p> <p>Alpha-D was sensitive to its reputation.</p> <p>Language indicating boundaries between Alpha-D and Brownfield employees as members of different organisations.</p> <p>Observed boundaries between Brownfield workgroups from lack of communication.</p> <p>Vulnerable feelings in Brownfield.</p>
6	Isabella	<p>Small team size facilitated direct engagement with one another in conflict resolution.</p> <p>Informal interactions and communication outside and within the work environment.</p> <p>Easy, spontaneous and informal access to customer information in previous work but technology is the platform</p>

		<p>for accessing information in Alpha-D.</p> <p>Meetings signified activity or productivity and also served as a way for Alpha-D to resolve issues.</p> <p>Alpha-D encouraged frequent role changes.</p> <p>Indirect company control over role duration through appraisals.</p> <p>Boundaries between permanent and contract staff.</p> <p>Employment classification affected her sense of identity and belonging as an employee. Obvious symbol of contract status makes her feel detached.</p> <p>Caution in verbal expressions. Potential to gloss over.</p>
7	Hayley	<p>Work values include being able to help.</p> <p>Perception of gender as basis for assignment of tasks.</p> <p>Functional boundaries in Brownfield.</p> <p>Family ethos in Brownfield. Superficial ethos in Alpha-D.</p> <p>Strict role boundaries in Alpha-D compared with flexible boundaries in Brownfield.</p> <p>Close relationships amongst colleagues; informal interactions outside work, closeness with customers.</p> <p>Shared sense of achievement irrespective of role.</p> <p>Disconnection due to segregation of work components across countries; lack of control to resolve customer complaints.</p> <p>The bonus was seen as company recognition of employees' efforts in Brownfield days.</p> <p>Secrecy about voucher recipients and a lack of clarity about reward systems across workgroups.</p> <p>Could not connect reward to performance and felt guilt.</p> <p>Weirdness of segregation post acquisition.</p> <p>Guilt associated with asking for help informally from former colleagues. Such help is monetised and charged. Can no longer call in favours.</p> <p>A carry over of some values and practices from Brownfield.</p> <p>Avoidance in Alpha-D.</p>

		<p>Hayley had a different understanding of customer focused from Alpha-D.</p> <p>Human interaction element was important for acquired population.</p> <p>Perceived lack of true anonymity in staff surveys and resultant indifference of Hayley.</p>
8	Dan	<p>Short term approach to decisions made.</p> <p>Internal selling as necessary for career advancement.</p> <p>Work values as accuracy, meeting deadlines, working to time frames, flexibility in work days and hours.</p>
9	Chris	<p>Problems brought by bringing in bureaucratic structures and layers.</p> <p>Different understanding of what constitutes a new product.</p> <p>Different ideas about what constituted real work. Planning versus doing.</p> <p>Different understanding of drivers of decisions made. E.g. commercial success, numbers etc.</p>
10	Ross	<p>Short term orientation versus longer term orientation of Brownfield.</p> <p>Different interpretations of success from different business models.</p> <p>Different understanding of value.</p> <p>Alpha-D placed boundaries around acceptable language.</p> <p>Alpha-D was ethically sensitive to employees, customers and vendors. It instituted processes to safeguard itself.</p> <p>Ross valued impact, relevance, reward and significant of own contribution.</p> <p>Work relationships characterised by proximity, fun, effectiveness on the job and informal get-together outside the office.</p> <p>Reactions to Alpha-D acquisition were complaining and moaning.</p> <p>Alpha-D had a unique language.</p>

		<p>Fundamental difference in the nature of the products of the two organisations.</p> <p>Clear connection between staff effort and reward in brownfield. In Alpha-D, perceptions of unclear and selective reward system.</p>
11	Kathlyn	<p>Alpha-D culture of secrecy.</p> <p>Differences in attitude to open communication and personal accountability.</p> <p>Responses – resignation, indifference, working to rule, seeking change in role.</p> <p>Lack of role and task clarity in Alpha-D.</p> <p>Interference of secrecy with necessary and timely communication.</p> <p>Ownership of acquired company was extended to owning the total years of non-Alpha-D experience of employees.</p> <p>Responses to Alpha-D environment included: moaning, complaining, protective behaviour, reluctance to share knowledge, joking, swearing and rationalisation.</p>
12	George	<p>George valued small team size,, flexibility, trust, shared ideas on work, no bureaucracy, reciprocity, honesty and respect for hierarchy.</p> <p>Different understanding about desk positioning and productivity.</p> <p>Considered the company's recognition scheme unhelpful.</p> <p>Different understanding about what was real work.</p> <p>Performance management was not real work for him.</p> <p>Different interpretation of mandatory ethical training.</p> <p>Limited social interaction in R&amp;D due to personalities of engineers and travel distance.</p> <p>Fears about job security as a result of working on non-prioritised projects.</p> <p>Bureaucracy frustrated R&amp;D work.</p> <p>Lack of uniformity in application of rules across Alpha-D.</p>

13	Preston	<p>No consultation with lower level employees during acquisition. A mismatch on ideas about the brownfield business.</p> <p>Alpha-D's orientation to the acquired company was to integrate it with itself.</p> <p>The experience and knowledge are intangible components of the acquisition requiring a different treatment.</p> <p>Alpha-D missed out on vital information during acquisition by not listening or asking Brownfield employees.</p> <p>Preston's perception of a flawed due diligence process during acquisition</p> <p>Alpha-D treats people as replaceable and does not recognise where the real value is.</p> <p>The Brownfield product is complex and engagement with the customer is on a continuous basis.</p> <p>He believes the strategic decisions of Alpha-d are being driven by theoretical business school ideas and not common sense reasoning.</p> <p>Preston had concerns about the accuracy of bottom-up information flow to senior management.</p>
14	Alex	Alpha-D values : ethical, sensitive. Bureaucratic, process-driven, loss of content in upward communication process through bureaucracy.
15	Flora	Brownfield engineers appeared to exhibit similar behaviours, introverted. Less disposed to attending social events. Alpha-D is process /technology-driven.
16	Julian	Differences in perception of Alpha-D and R&D about appropriate performance metrics and what constitutes success. unseen component of work, Believes in small company culture, formal structures for performance evaluation, absence of recognition for 'process' metrics of such as attention to detail, labour hours and persistence
17	Mike	Disruptive potential in Alpha-D's culture which allowed for

		frequent voluntary (or mandated) staff movements across the organisation.
18	Bill	Alpha-D culture concerned with being ethical correct and rigid. Disparities in wages for different work status. May affect social relationships. Social interactions restricted to own workgroup. Collaboration is natural to Brownfield teams. Previous culture was informal; rapport with colleagues. Values creative freedom over 'career advancement' which can take it away. Space to invent. Choice to stay in work role where motivation exists. Innate aspects of engineering culture which can't be taught or managed.

## Appendix H: extracts of reflexive / observation notes from field diary

23/6/2015

23/6/2015    Wex 6 day 1.    PoI PoM KT.

@ 10am.    Observation @ meeting. <sup>Team</sup> f-t-f MEETING    Lang. as per blr

Followed usual formal style of opening greetings.    show expect of duties or obligations

Checking for presence of virtual members and attendance.

Routine asking for issues to be discussed. First 3 participants named were generally happy as is.

Leadership different. Sense of informal mirth. A sense of moving quickly along. Use of direct questions posed by <sup>meeting</sup> ~~lead~~ facilitator to elicit comments and initiate discussion.

Similar style of a 'working meeting', resolving one issue <sup>three</sup> thorough discussion, examination, different perspectives and eventually resolution. Virtual participants silent all this time.

Current Issue:  
Question from virtual participants. Operational words. Clarify, choice, → Implying prioritising requirements against limited human resources. Confused. Misinterpretation. Conflicting understanding of nature of product.

Two participants dominating a back and forth conversation. Other participants silent. Get clear. Questions about "who is the focal person to be held accountable for certain work".

"X should be talking to Y." This is a recognition of the new structure and the need to fit staff work practices into the new model.

"X, talking to X2" on behalf of Y. Y should be attended to by designated CS. people.

On poses to virtual participant directly to <sup>check</sup> ~~ask~~ for understanding and agreement.

Facilitator gently articulating a consensus proposal for a solution. 2-man conversation. still. Affirmative words to signal end of issue. Reiterating agreed point. Affirmative words again.

Direct question posed to second virtual participant.

Two meetings to be set up as a fall out of this meeting.

95

Wow! <sup>vs</sup> things seem to making small things

Prioritisation. As team leader, prioritise more

Alphabets.

ex Brownfield

View

view

Big Pic

little pics

£19,000,000

£10,000

### Reflex

I quite enjoyed this interview. I understood VP, a better, who similarly enjoyed the interview as depicted by the offer to continue after another meeting I came up. We'd been speaking for just over an hr and it didn't feel like it. Mapping out the structure of the interview

norms - Opening appreciation

Explain confidentiality & anonymity

" purpose of research & interview

" It will feel like a conversation.

Comfort zone Ask for VP profile

Background to work exp. teasing out

best bits  
not so best bits  
ideal bits

} gives an idea about values, practices, beliefs, concerns, history, and ideals, unexplored desires or areas of interest - examples.

{ Fast fwd to current reality. best bits  
not so best bits  
ideal bits -

You can then compare.

Reflex VP's next meeting was with my prospective challenging VPs who are not V-ing at all. I'm guessing there'll be a bit of discussion on how things went. I hope it smoothens things out for me such that they are receptive when I interview them.

Sigh!!!



Reflex

Each VP has a particular profile. This affects the kind of questions I pose to them. The profile includes the strength of MY rapport with them, who introduced me to them, their length of stay in the org; their personal attributes, their prev. work experience and their current function. VPs that are 'outside' the focal population based on the M&A are excellent sources of a diff perspective and linking with other work groups.

Methods (org)  
data collection  
Strategy

11.15 wed 13/11

Next issue discussed at a lively pace. Allusion to direct <sup>micro</sup> supervision by CC.  
on issue. Open feedback given by facilitator.

11.30. additional participant joined in. Opening greeting. Quick joke, & settled in.

Reflex Need to keep focus on observing social themes emerging rather than being bogged down in the details. Advice.

My understanding of the business of Alpha-B. Is deepened. Especially in a multinational, cross functional setting / cross geographical setting. Need to see the view from other units in LPHA-B.

Group advised / observed need for delegation in response to light hearted comment - self pole - by facilitator about glogbo ff up ice - ori e lo n gpa da si. Eni kan nipe se lo ye to join ice naa fan awen elomron lati se. Anon virtual participants o so nkankon ni glogbo asito yi.

MP

New participant's turn. Words used: 'higher priority at the moment'.

Reflex. Make!

Virtual participant o dun lat'enkan.

Direct one on one back & forth conversation between facilitator and MP at this point (11.35am).

There's been a change (email software used (ex-arcade). It's having disruptive effects on work experience of some staff. by CC & CCP. MP remarked that it had been a successful change over.

Flexible working. Smart phones. Remote <sup>based</sup> employee. Paid office.  
Versus <sup>paid</sup> smart phone.

Changes with mail software. Concerns expressed about new A. Staff required to take action to prevent loss of mails > 2 months old. Reference to Brangfield work provisions & was as far as this. mails existed for 'ever'. Years of emails (A). Talked about the merits of old B system. ie customer reasons, staff reference issues.  
Annotated discussions. Virtual participant speaking parallel

Week 5 Day 2, 17/6/2015.

Week 5 Day 3 at Phil  
Reading Conference.  
@ Hgnc.

- processes - Here Brownfield folks were inundated with a process-driven way of working which they were reluctant to latch onto. They experienced a lot of frustration in the early days of the MxA.

Enter VP13 - The presence of VP13 provided a way to gradually develop a bridge b/w the old & new ways of working. Unfortunately, this made VP13 a physical representation of the new ways of working and interpersonal conflicts veiled, perceived and actually expressed became the result.

VP13 considered reciprocity as a way to ease the perceived tension. Rationalised that it was.

- Clarity - A lot of information flying around.

Issues with Clarity of role, many instances of flexible, unclear and unknown expectations.

Both at VP13 level and at CC level.

- At CC level, expectations clashed <sup>across</sup> ~~with~~ geographical boundaries.

Reflex

VP13 perspective

Gives me an extra triangulation point for my perspectives / observations on CC.

VP13 very willing to continue with conversation <sup>without</sup> ~~despite~~ prompts. I was happy to follow the flow. I had a sense of providing value in this way.

I think this represents a shift in the perception of who I am.

\* VP13 referred to an incident in a meeting the previous week where A<sub>1</sub> Listen to X and write out / print out text (transcript...) made a comparison b/w Brownfield way of doing a particular task and the unnecessary bureaucracy attached to doing the same task in Alpha-b.



## Appendix I: Extract of interview transcript

Y:...And that coming from a different silo?

VP 21: Exactly (emphatically), it is coming from a different silo of the business, and then...It'll be something else...erm...training, user manuals...erm...type-approvals for...because they are re-type-approving all the cameras and ours being retained.....Why didn't they think of that at the point integration?

Y:hmmmm

VP21:(cough) Because we had everything type-approved in the UK. When they moved it to the US, then the US type approval. At least that's my understanding of why. Nobody seems to realise that I need to own them then recently.

Y: it is being two and half years

VP 21: Exactly 33:53 So suddenly it (pretend mocking voice) 'oh...we need all of this...' So that's been taking out a lot of our time and ...erm ...why did this not happen at the point of integration? This is when it should have happened. 33:57

Y:hmmnnnn...

VP21: You know... so those are the things getting missed. So my feeling is ...that was what I liked about the small company is it's absolutely clear what... what you need to do. Here they say it's clear, it's in your SMART objective, but I know you must also do this, you must also do that...etc etc

Y: Clarity. What's the implication of that? If they say something and their actions sort of suggest something else?

VP 21: Yeah as I said it comes from different...so. the marketing people will be saying is the most important thing in the world. Then (names bosses) who are (top) in the lab org structure will say, I want my creativity report quota, or...and... (laughs)

Y: It seems everyone is pushed...is being pushed by different things

VP21: Yeah yeah.

Y: What do you think the ideal would be?

VP 21: For me...as far as this product goes...leave us alone. Just...I don't know how...you know no silly meetings, no creativity reports, just protect, protect, protect our time, and aggressively protect our time and let us focus on what we do best. But I was amazed when I first saw how Alpha operates... 'How does anybody here get anything done?' because there's always so much else going on...tech forum...some people seem to spend all their lives just doing tech forum...(giggles...)

Y: That's a career for them... I suppose...?

VP21: Yeah...There's a lot of...one of the other things that takes such a long, long time is...as you may know is...Alpha...if you are a manager in Alpha, that's quite a big work load as well. That in a smaller company, if you're a manager, it's kind of, you give a better directions to what people should be doing...you give you issues and you take responsibility. Bu there's a lot more here. You've got to be concerned with people's development plans, erm...SMART objectives, mid-term reviews, end-of-the-year-reviews, performance appraisals, setting their objectives, monitoring their objectives, adapting their objectives, erm..having regular meetings with them...(chuckles in disbelief...)

Y:...on top of your development work? You've got to do all of these.

VP 21: Yeah. And I actually quite enjoy being a manager. It can be quite fulfilling but again I find a lot of that is just feels like a necessary overhead but then what? I think it's

Ideal work culture for Alpha, leave alone - No meetings - No Alpha - Helps down time.

Clarity about what you need to do in SME

In Alpha-2, there's a written component & there's an unwritten & frequently arising component.

Competing priorities - Product - is quotas

People Management compromise of his role is adding to workload

Maybe enjoys the power, prestige, position.

just **different kinds of people**. I think you know people who work from a smaller company perhaps different to people who enjoy this very structured environment. Y: Is it perhaps how you view adding value? What would adding value be for you if you've got limited resource of time?

VP21: I suppose so. Exactly. So that you've got to focus on the essentials and ...sometimes it feels like one of these management requirements are just.....because.. it's funny...I was discussing with S, because she was saying she was going to have her SMART objectives, her mid-term review with P...and then she said, you know, it's terrible because even with hers with CC, she said, I hadn't even looked at my objectives until we got into the meeting and then I realised I hadn't even remembered what half of them were. because I'm actually just getting on with my job. (laughs...) and I'm thinking, I haven't looked at my objectives either, you know...(laughs) So it almost feels like something you do just because the rule says you must do it and you don't really live by those...even though you sort of do erm...so for me that's something I just think, I'm not sure it's that helpful.

Y: Well, I've seen that you have several meetings with people...we need to round up now actually...you have several meeting. Within your group, how would you describe your working relationship, within your table there?

VP 21: I think it's... good. because we've got different personalities there...I like them all, we get on well...and I think that when we're left to it, to focus on the real job I think we are creative and effective... Another reason I'm...I mean you know S, he can be a little bit difficult sometimes, for example, (quickly adds) but then I mean everybody is and he can be quite...he doesn't like for example if he is busy with something and then you say, can you look at this, he starts to throw his toys and ...maybe that's me coming from a small company where you're always being, you've got about half a dozen different priorities at any one time and at any moment somebody could say, 'hey, this is kicking off' and it's not nice...erm... and it's perhaps just what I've become used to. S like...he just likes to work on one thing and if you try and change it he gets angry and you know...but the thing is...you know... you start to understand how he works, how A works, how D works and you make allowance and you also try and arrange that you play to their strengths. I think that's the most important thing and then hopefully you got a diverse enough team and I think I actually do have where erm...yes, maybe there's some areas where nobody's particularly strong and there's where you've got to push people a little bit. 40:13

Y: Well, that's coming from you as the manager of that team. I've picked up on a few things, making allowances, playing to their strengths, understanding others, pushing a little where it's necessary and that sounds to me like some of the things that you value within your group there. Did you ever talk about this openly or did it just happen?

VP21: To them?

Y: Yeah. To each other about the things that are important for this group to function well.

VP 21: erm...no. maybe I haven't...

Y: ...This is how we work...

VP21: I think it just evolved. I mean even when I became a manager, it was a bit...perhaps.....I was so busy (laughs) with the rest...and that hasn't changed a lot so it was almost like I didn't even think about it that much. 41:07 but I knew I needed to. I knew it was important but it was...one thing among lots of important things I suppose.

Differences in people who work in SMEs and those who enjoy the structured environment.

personal A disconnect b/w carrying out apparatus of routine and doing the actual job. Necessary to rule

As subgroup norms well when left to focus → creative & effective.

Personality work style differences amongst team members isn't can be managed.

Distractors that have nothing to do with the production process are unwelcome whether in AB or Alpha-B.

no formal talk in team about values. Just evolved