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Chapter 1

The Feeling Organisation

Even if superiors encourage honest feedback, people rarely believe that they mean it. So, generally they won't risk testing the boss's sincerity (Bartolomé and Laurent 1986:7).

The director opened the information meeting concerning the upcoming organisational restructuring by informing the participants that I was not a journalist but a researcher interested in how people handled 'organisational change' emotionally. About half of the employees in the hall laughed. 'Well, then he has surely come to the right place' commented one employee. The fact that the company had gone through several rounds of restructuring over the last decade might explain why the director's use of the words 'organisational change' caused chuckles among the employees.

This anecdote illustrates the focus of this study, namely, the handling of emotion within the context of organisational change. Organisational change is a setting of power relations. The manner in which employees deal with emotions, including spontaneous laughter can be interpreted as one way of handling a troublesome situation. Concerning the issue of organisational change, one employee explained to me 'sometimes you just *have* to laugh about it'. If you *have* to laugh, it smacks of employees' powerlessness, as they become the objects of management's decisions concerning restructuring. Power is also exemplified by the fact that the coming departmental managers, by presenting possibilities of the new organisational structure, sought to get the employees to go along with the organisational change. Getting the employees 'on board' is about trying to steer emotional responses in a positive direction, to convert anxiety and suspicion into trust and loyalty.

The aim of this work is to explore the role of emotions in organisational change. I describe and analyse how employees and managers handle emotions that arise as a response to organisational change. It is conventional wisdom that organisational change is a paramount feature of contemporary work life. Some observers even believe we have entered an era of 'organisational impermanence' with the consequent effect on people's lives (Lipman-Blumen and Leavitt 1999:20). An impressive amount of literature has treated organisational change from various points of view

(Collins 1998:9). Central issues in the change study have been questions of typology, strategy (Borum 1995), management of change, and motivation (Petersen 2000:54; Borum 1995; Jacobsen and Thorsvik 2002; Huczynski and Buchanan 2001; Morgan 1997). Recently, the role of communication in organisational change has been singled out as research topic to be developed more thoroughly (Petersen 2000). However, it is also relevant to focus on how employees and managers actually handle the emotional effects of organisational change, as this aspect of organisational change has not been studied empirically in any detailed way.

This study deals more specifically with the role of managers in dealing with the employees' emotional responses during organisational change. The assumption here is that a focus on how managers handle employees' emotions can shed light on the use of a specific form of power that is based on how they relate to their employees and how they motivate them. In conditions of organisational restructuring, managers must be able to motivate employees to go along with the change. For employees, organisational change means that accepted work routines and expectations are affected by feelings of uncertainty, anxiety or excitement. In the context of organisational change, managers must be especially attentive to their employees' feelings. Organisational change is thus an emotional process.

I treat the case of organisational restructuring as an example of a tendency that may become more dominant as organisational change becomes a permanent feature of contemporary work life. Changes in organisational life concerning the exercise of power may also work in favour of making the emotionally based form of power more significant. New organisational forms appear to entail a different kind of power game than the traditional game of hierarchy and rule-based sanctioning (Sennett 1998:109). It is also argued that employees are suspicious of managers and their motives, and they react cautiously to what managers say and do. Management's prerogatives and rights are challenged and some employees have bases of power they can use to subvert the position of their manager. Moreover, managerial orders are no longer automatically conferred with legitimacy from the prestigious job titles of the boss (Huczynski and Buchanan 2001:710). Another way of describing the transformation of the relationship between manager and employee is to underline that it has become more *personally engaging* (Sorhaug 1996:156; Hultengren 1995:203-219; Schultz 2000:172). Today's leaders, managers and consultants are oriented towards 'positive thinking', building up 'commitment', and 'passion'. Such concepts are often summarised in the phrase 'the turn to soft values' (Andersen and Born 2001; Thomson 1998). The metaphor of organisational 'energy' lies behind popular managerial

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ideas about empowering employees, as it is assumed that employees become more motivated creative if power is delegated and decentralised (Jacobsen and Thorsvik 2002:189).

In the organisation studied here, management emphasised values of openness, honesty and empowerment. It can thus be seen as part of the trend towards altering the traditional exercise of power by rule and command. I will argue that the emphasis on empowerment implies that managers are given the task of contributing to the engendering of confidence and trust. There is a constructive dimension to their work, as they are required to assist employees to think more independently and more creatively, which requires that they feel confident to management and committed to the organisation. In brief, I suggest that in an organisational setting, the dimension of power between manager and employee is becoming increasingly centred on managers creating 'emotional energy' – confidence, trust and loyalty - in their employees.

Traditional power theory and analysis has focused mostly on control and self-control of emotion as part of exercising power (see Chapter Two). This study attempts to expand the understanding of the relationship between power and emotion. I argue that approaching it from the perspective of the sociology of emotions can enhance our understanding of power. Focusing on the engendering of emotional energy provides a more adequate grasp of how action freedom/power of individuals is established. Power also involves certain forms of emotional energy, which are expressed more concretely in terms of increased confidence, trust and loyalty (see chapters Four and Eight). However, I do not focus solely on the productive notion of power qua emotional display and the generation of emotional energy, as I situate it in an analysis of the relationship between power and emotion (see Chapter Nine). The trend towards empowerment of employees does not imply that more conventional forms of power are replaced. Rather, it is the over-all composition of forms of power, which changes.

Creating a culture of honesty and openness is not an easy task. In 1986, Bartolomé and Laurent concluded that

Managers need to monitor subordinates' subtle cues. It helps to understand that it's easier for subordinates to learn about bosses' reactions and desires because superiors are more likely to express their feelings openly. By the same token, it's more difficult for bosses to find out their subordinates' real feelings; they're likely to express them indirectly and with caution [Bartolomé and Laurent 1986:7].

This argument is still relevant. The difficulty of creating a situation whereby employees can openly express what they think and feel to managers,

stems from the inhibiting effect of hierarchical structures (see Chapter Three). However, the managerial work in the investigated organisation towards empowerment was also successful even though it was restricted by the managers interpreting employees' emotions as merely psychological reactions to organisational change rather than more complex responses to it (see Chapter Eight). I therefore also discuss certain practical implications with respect to how the further empowering of employees can be pursued (see Chapter Nine).

Gaining empirical insight into emotion in organisation

This study focuses on emotional life in a production organisation (i.e., a non-service organisational setting). It seeks to compensate for a range of gaps in existing research, which I briefly mention here and which is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Research on the topic of emotion in organisation has tended to focus on how employees are trained to perform emotional labour and how they manage their emotion in doing this work in service-sector organisations. This research has focussed on the question of possible psychological costs of performing emotional labour. Most studies of how people manage (alter, modify) their emotions have focused on self-management of emotions according to cultural rules and organisational training and values (Hochschild 1983; Kunda and Maanen 1989). There has been a tendency to focus on emotionally related syndromes such as depression or phobias (Thoits 1989:322). Several studies have investigated how people cope with stress (Bloch 2001:189). In sum, the dominant perspective has been the perspective of regulating, controlling and managing emotion, which can be understood as an effect of focusing on more disturbing kinds of emotions. It can also be suggested that much research concerned with allegedly anti-social emotions has been spurred on by the assumption that knowing about them would make it possible to control the more destructive effects of emotional behaviour.

Consequently, there have been different calls to reorient research by, for instance, researching into communication and performance of emotion (Putnam, Phillips and Chapman 1996; Waldron 1994). The focus changed to examine how people express or manipulate their emotions in the sense of handling and taking care of others' emotion in ordinary organisation (Fletcher 1999; Lively 2000; Clark 1997). More research on positive and pro-social emotions in organisational settings has been called for (Hardy, Lawrence and Phillips 1998:72). Barbalet argues that

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confidence, trust and loyalty can be understood as silent social emotions that found action and that research into these basic or moral emotions is required (Barbalet 1996:75). Other sociologists require research that relate employees' managing of emotion to fulfil their work-roles to how structural positions can influence how individuals experience and express emotions (Pugliesi and Shook 1997:288). Inspired by these calls for re-orientation, this research has sought to approach emotion as more than (non-intentional) reactions to be repressed, controlled or regulated. It also treats emotion from a perspective of generation and communication of emotion.

Explorative case study informed by emotion sociological theories

I have chosen to carry out a case study in order to capture which emotions are generated and how they were handled during organisational change. After several attempts to obtain access to an organisation, I was fortunate to be allowed access to study a restructuring of the over-all Human Resource organisation within a large international pharmaceutical company based in Copenhagen. I chose this organisation, because it was a non-service job organisation that was willing to allow research on the handling of emotion. During a five-month period, I interviewed 15 persons - 1 director, 2 managers, 7 administrative employees, 2 office trainees and 3 internal consultants. The main criteria of selection of interview persons were to obtain a varied group of employees, as I was interested in exploring how employees and managers handled emotion. I also observed meetings and talked with employees when I was on the premises to prepare interviews or collect other material about the organisation.

The HR department consists of units concerned with organisational development, staffing, personnel issues and training. The work and personnel of the Human Resources department of this knowledge-intensive company is similar to HR units in other large knowledge-intensive firms (see Chapter Five). The organisation used in this case study was therefore not idiosyncratic with respect to the studied phenomena. The study is a qualitative study of how emotion was handled in different ways during change, and I have not analysed their distribution and relative weight compared to each other. The contribution of the study is therefore to qualify the understanding of emotion in organisation by shedding light on aspects of emotion in organisational life that are not usually highlighted (The general significance of the study is further considered in Chapter Nine).

While emotion is experienced personally, it is a very social phenomenon, since emotion most often concerns relations to other individuals or things of value. Emotion binds us together, and this means that we need an emotional perspective with which to understand a significant portion of human affairs.¹

Since my focus is the handling of emotion in interaction with others, I am *not* looking at emotion from the perspective of the individual's life story or psychological development. Rather, I view emotion as a set of structural, cultural, interactional and psychological conditions and forces. I apply perspectives from sociology of emotion (see Chapter Three) in order to see how different theories can promote more profound interpretation of the observed ways of dealing with emotions. In brief, I stress a sociological angle on the handling of emotion with a main focus on the reciprocal interplay between emotions and organisation, structure and culture.

The research process has been informed by theoretical ideas about how social practice and emotion work together. I framed the field of study by approaching it equipped with concepts such as emotion management, feeling rules, and rules of emotional display (see Chapter Three). This study utilises an adaptive theory approach: empirical research is informed by prior theoretical ideas and models while at the same time attending to the generation of theory from the ongoing analysis of data (Layder 1998:19).² I have provided examples of emotional episodes in order to demonstrate the way in which emotions are part of the studied change process. The goal has not been to carry out an all-embracing analysis of the organisational restructuring as such or a detailed description of participants' cultural worlds. Rather, I have analysed the empirical material in terms of certain themes concerning how emotions emerged and were handled (see Methodological Appendix). The specific themes of this study are reflected in the three chapters dealing with specific emotional situations in the organisation: negative emotions, anger and building of emotional energy. During the research process, I have included various theoretical perspectives as I sought a wider understanding of the role of emotion in organisational change without necessarily restricting how the observations should be interpreted. There has been a dynamic interplay between theoretical ideas and data, and the aim of such an adaptive approach has been to develop theory and interpretation rather than to confirm particular hypotheses.

Critical perspective: how we feel is a political issue

This study takes a critical perspective on emotion, insofar as it does treat emotion as a merely private phenomenon. The formation of feelings (private emotional experience) into emotions understood, as expression of feelings in social context is a political issue. According to Campbell it is a political issue given that: '(1) People have considerable power over our feeling through their acts of interpretation. (2) Those who already occupy positions of social power will interpret our feelings through emotion categories that serve *their* needs and interests' (Campbell 1997:147). Campbell encourages us to acknowledge these two facts instead of being mystified by the political promise of privacy and authority about what we feel. We are not sovereign beings that determine how we feel and how we can express ourselves. We are dependent on either sympathetic or antipathetic interpreters in order to express our social, common as well as most intimate, local, idiosyncratic and personal feelings (Campbell 1997).

In renouncing the idea that feelings are (or ought to be) personal/private in an allegedly independent sense, we might realise that we have a political option. This option would be to seek control over 'the categories through which we are interpreted and to change the meaning of certain emotion concepts through our revisionary participation in practices associated with these categories' (Campbell 1997:147-148). Proclaiming 'this is how I feel' can often be the end to further discussion rather than the beginning, as we treat others' emotion as synonymous with their unquestionably private individuality (Sturdy 2003:91, Seidler 1994:188). Hearn notes that in discussing emotions there is often a tendency to be accommodating to emotions, to accept their individuality and to some degree accept 'their amoral irresponsibility'. Yet there is no reason why emotions should be less amenable to critical analysis (Hearn 1993:152). Emotion should not be seen as something exclusively personal and somehow beyond moral discussion and possible transformation (Hearn 1993:-152).

One can adopt a critical stance towards the immediately given reality by *distancing* oneself from existing forms of being and feeling and *not* idealising these forms as the only possible and natural ones. A critical perspective can be described with the phrase 're-interpreting the problem' which means interrogating how problems are normally defined and searching for new ways to defining them. The idea of so-called 'negative emotion', for instance, is a common way of understanding certain emotional experience that implies certain ways of acting upon our emotions. However, this interpretation of experience need not be the only possible one. We describe our experience with such categories as being

'sad' or 'negative' but as our experience is developing and creative, there is no reason to treat a particular social definition of an experiential state as the definitive or most adequate one.

I stress the *dynamic* character of emotional experience, which stems from the aforementioned dependency on others as an audience. Our emotional experience is the result of our relations with others. The dynamic nature of emotional experience reflects the fact that emotional experience can be more than emotional expression. I consider that body and verbal language and other cultural representations do not express our emotions in a one-to-one relationship. Our emotions cannot be reduced to how we talk about them, although the ways we talk and go about them partly define our emotions. There can be a dialectical or contradictory relationship between experience (of emotion) and expression of emotion (Layder 1997:74; Craib 1998:112). Alvesson and Deetz reject the idea that linguistic expression should represent a fixed, knowable interior. Focusing on fixed linguistic categories is an inadequate understanding of language and experience. They acknowledge that we sometimes 'respond to unknown elements of experience' and such elements are significant to the communication process (Alvesson and Deetz 2000:179). I agree with such an agnostic position, as I renounce the idea of a clear-cut match between action, language and experience (Alvesson and Deetz 2000:120). In accordance with this position, 'emotion' cannot be and should not be identified with emotional discourse in a broad sense.

A critical perspective can be based on the idea of 'distorted communication' when 'an interactionally determined reduction of certain experiences to other ones' takes place (Alvesson and Deetz 2000:180). Such a notion provides a basis for considering emotions as expressed or non-expressed forms of experience *without* implying or postulating a certain image of a hypothetical authentic self. 'The searching for real motives, needs and interests can structure another privileged discourse' (Clegg 1989 in Alvesson and Deetz 2000:179). It is therefore dubious to critique reality on the basis of certain preconceived notions of the sound (authentic) personality. Deetz and Alvesson describe 'disturbed communication' in the sense of achieved 'premature or flawed consensus', which is consensus based on closure of interpretations so that conflicting voices are no longer heard. In order to reclaim a pre-existing dissensus, one needs historical insight into the processes and discussion before forging consensus. However, one also needs creativity in imaging the discussions that might have taken place (Alvesson and Deetz 2000:180). To show which multiple voices among the members and groups have been articulated before achieving a predominant consensus, one must have access

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to historical material. However, this study is not a historical but a 'snapshot' into how a change process was handled emotionally in a certain moment in time. I mention the idea of flawed consensus only to raise the possibility that a consensus about the ideal of 'not being negative' might have been a premature consensus (see chapter 6 and 9). In sum, the idea of distorted or reduced communication is one way of understanding how manifestly expressed emotions do not pre-empt all emotional experience.

In taking a critical approach to emotion, which maintains that emotional experience is a political matter, we need to know the way in which specific social and cultural forms influence our experiencing and handling of emotion. Without such knowledge, we cannot transform those forms we do not feel happy with. Our handling of emotions is important for several reasons: First, emotions give signals of relevance to the self. We use emotion to orient ourselves in the world. When only limited emotional expression is allowed, we risk a diminished understanding of self and other. Consequently, suppression of emotion can minimise our sense of orientation. Second, limited expression of emotion can restrict learning possibilities, as play and creativity thrive with relatively high degrees of freedom of emotion expression (Huy 1999:340). Third, our emotion culture influences the kind of social support we receive. In modern, Western society, fear and sadness are two 'silent emotions'. This silence determines the likelihood of obtaining support from others, as the person experiences the suffering of fear or sadness while it remains unnoticed by others (Planalp 1999:117). It is morally significant how we cultivate our relation to our emotions. If we stifle our emotional life, this will make us unfit for moral engagement (Bauman 1993:69). Mangham argues that organisational life would generally be better off if it favoured more contact with the emotional dynamics of what is going on in daily work life. Moral practical wisdom is not possible without a developed feel for the emotions of the field in which one is acting and interacting (Mangham 1998:51) That emotion (compassion, empathy, and sympathy) fuels moral engagement does not mean that interpretation and cognition are secondary. Emotion as a 'fuel' of moral engagement never stands alone, as emotion and cognition are separable only in an *analytical* sense. What emotion tells is not *the* truth, and being rational can be understood as being capable of critically examine one's immediate emotionally charged evaluations in the light of knowledge and new interpretations of the concerned situation (Mangham 1998:64).

The point about the moral significance of acknowledging emotion is not identical with supporting the not uncommon idea that we generally

suppress our emotion. The 'cure' would be to express them more spontaneously. Emotions can be both too controlled, and too little controlled. The idea of emotion as most 'normal' when spontaneously expressed does not do justice to the complexity of how we manage our emotions (Lazarus and Lazarus 1994:295).³ There are a variety of 'appropriate' ways to manage one's feelings. Sometimes expressing emotion is preferable, whereas on other occasions it is more appropriate to suppress emotions. How we express feelings is linked to how we perceive the situation: is it meaningful to express one's particular feelings in the particular situation?

In understanding emotion from a critical perspective, I stress that the more we acknowledge emotion the better we can understand how we relate to each other and self. Greater acknowledgement of emotions can enlarge our world of experience and thereby help us transform and transcend our selves. My point is not to vindicate postulated 'authentic', i.e. definitive versions of our selves. I do not want to operate as a 'social therapist' that critiques reality on the basis of preconceived notions of the sound personality. Such a position is elitist and untenable. In sum, understanding our emotions can be a valuable strategy for enriching our understanding of self and other. It all depends on how critically we cultivate our relationship to our feelings and emotions.

Organisation of this study

This study is divided into two parts: the theoretical part consisting of chapters Two, Three and Four and an analytical, empirical part presenting the findings concerning emotion and power in chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight. Chapter Nine forms the conclusion. In order to proceed more directly to the subject matter of this study I have placed a more elaborate discussion of the methodology of this study as an appendix.

Chapter Two reviews the literature on emotion within the organisational studies and power theory. I point out gaps in existing research and thereby further explain the study's character and relevance.

Chapter Three presents three main sociological perspectives on emotion. First, the *emotion management* perspective concentrates on how cultural rules regulate the *activity of managing* emotion according to cultural rules. Second, the *structuring emotion* perspective theorises social structures of power and status condition as structuring emotional experience and expression of emotion. The third perspective I have called *generating and exchanging emotion*, as it centres on how emotional energy

is generated and how principles of exchange operate in the micro-political interaction between individuals. This perspective concentrates on emotion as a motivational force and its effects on social and organisational life with respect to micro-political interaction. The over-all rationale for drawing on these three perspectives in the analysis of handling emotion in organisational change is that they have been under-utilised in the study of emotion in the context of organisational change.

Chapter Four forms the framework for analysing the power relationship between management and employee with respect to the handling of emotions. Moreover, I *develop* power theory on the basis of emotion sociological perspectives, elaborating a concept of power *qua* emotion in order to understand the manager-employee relationship as a *personally engaged* relationship. I argue that the exercise of power can entail influencing others by expressing emotion and generating emotional energy.

Chapter Five describes the organisational change and its background in order to give an impression of the organisational culture. I particularly describe and analyse the corporate values of 'empowerment', 'honesty', 'openness' and 'accountability', as they are pertinent to grasping the managerial ambition of creating an empowered culture. I discuss the implication of the values and point out that the generation of confidence and trust become particularly crucial managerial tasks.

In Chapter Six I argue that certain „negative emotions“ were treated as unsettling and therefore subjected to techniques of emotion management. The suffering of unpleasant emotions was only partly recognised by management, whereas an informal group of colleagues acknowledged the suffering in their way of caring about each other.

Chapter Seven focuses on how one specific emotion, anger, was handled during change. Employees moderated their expression of anger in confronting managers. Anger was privatised rather than expressed directly to those agents seen as blameworthy. This minimised the chance of a possible re-negotiation of the social relationships in which one part felt that he or she has been wronged. This effect is unfortunate, since the risk of escalation of aggression increases if a sense of justice or fairness is not restored (Kast 2001:118).

Chapter Eight analyses the generation of confidence, trust and loyalty (emotional energy) among the organisational members involved in establishing a new department. I focus on processes and factors that contributed to emotional energy through exchange, contagion, interactional ritual, dialogue about departmental values and departmental self-narrative. In particular, I focus on managers' expressive and acknowledging style of interacting with employees.

In Chapter Nine I summarise the different thematic case analyses, reflecting on how the results contribute to our understanding of emotion in organisation. I emphasise the notions of *segmenting* and *diluting* of emotional expression as central in understanding how employees and managers handled emotions. This study contributes to the understanding of organisational emotion by providing new empirical knowledge of emotion in organisational change. For example, I show how other emotions besides the more difficult ones linked to threats and loss were also part of the picture. Summarising the power analysis, I argue that the complexity and contradiction involved in the handling of employees' emotion restricts the realisation of the empowerment programme. I contribute to power theory by developing a thoroughly 'productive' notion of power that emphasises how power works in the expression and generation of emotion.

Concerning practical implications, I suggest different issues for transforming the culture of the work place towards greater acknowledgement of emotion. I argue that genuine empowerment requires that managers work to dismantle the *general* fear that employees have for their superiors, a fear, which is inherent in hierarchical organisations. I also suggest that managers should refrain from understanding employees' responses to change as merely signs of psychological reactions to change. Doing this would enable a more subtle understanding and appreciation of employees' subjectivity.

In the Methodological Appendix, I present the methodology in detail and discuss the possibilities and limits of the chosen methods in gathering data about and what I have learned.

Notes

¹ 'Even hatred is a bond, in the minimal sense that it can make another person an intensely important part of one's own life. From the point of view of interest, other people are essentially fungible. In an emotional perspective, they are not. Objectively, emotions matter because many forms of human behaviour would be unintelligible if we did not see them through the prism of emotion' (Elster 1999:403-404).

² With the 'adaptive theory' approach, Layder seeks to reconcile 'empirical researchers' and 'theoretical researchers demonstrating how one can link theory and social empirical research. The crucial point is to reflect upon how one applies several concepts that refer to different levels of social reality. Thinking in terms of various levels of social reality, or a 'deep ontology', seems particularly attractive considering issues of feelings, emotions and moods, as we intuitively sense that emotion is (also) about inner, unarticulated experience and not always something that is spelled out on a discursive level. Considering emotional phenomena in a broad sense, it is insufficient to refer exclusively to action and meaning. Neither is it sufficient to understand such phenomena exclusively on subjective terms, as systemic and structural conditions play a crucial role, although they may not be seen at the surface of interaction and meaning. A deep ontology framework implies appreciating that social scientific concepts have to be judged in terms of the level of social reality with which the researcher is dealing. Layder distinguishes between four types of concepts: a) behavioural, b) systemic or structural, c) mediating, and d) general. Each type has a particular concept-indicator relation, and puts unequal weight on how close they ought to be situated to the researched subjects' or participants' own categories concerning the conduct and situation.

The aim of behavioural concepts is to describe aspects of participants' action (conduct), attitudes, identity and/or the character of a particular relationship in which the participant is involved. This type of concept need not be defined either by participant or observant but must to a certain extent fulfil the criteria of 'subjective adequacy'. That is, it must be meaningful and close to the perspective of the practice of the studied subjects. Examples of such concepts are certain forms of participation (e.g. sex-tourist, colleague), inter-personal events, face-to-face communication or self-identity. In this study, I have used the notion of 'handling one's emotions' (Danish: at håndtere ens følelser). It seemed meaningful for the participants to talk about how they handled their emotions or some of their emotions that came up in the process of organisational change. The empirical case study presented here did not seek to explicate the participants' own particular cultural categories. My introducing a notion of handling one's emotion in talking with the organisational members was not perceived as the imposition of a strange and peculiar idea. Both researcher and the researched subjects shared this notion, and therefore it was meaningful to use.

Systemic or structural concepts may concern reproducing social relations, forms of practice or positions. They can refer to institutional frames or context of certain form of behaviour such as 'bureaucracy' and 'market'. The systemic or structural concepts refer primarily to historically established conditions that exist relatively independent of the routine-like social interaction such as a meeting in which people are ordinarily engaged. Systemic or societally reproduced conditions are linked to social activity and subjective experience. However, their relative autonomy is crucial to the theoretical status ascribed to such concepts applied in analysis of aspects of social/societal

practice that are larger than purely situational aspects. Such notions do not refer to social conduct as such (action and interpretation), and the 'subjective adequacy' criterion is therefore not important in the assessment of systemic or structural concepts. The usefulness of such concepts is to be assessed in terms of how well they capture the historical but nevertheless objective condition-like dimensions of societal life. Systemic/structural concepts applied in this case would be concepts of organisational form such as 'hierarchy', 'bureaucracy' or 'team work' or concepts of broader societal tendencies such as 'personalisation of work-life' (see Chapter Nine). Such notions help us to grasp what happens in the studied change process that is affected by forces that are not defined by the organisational practice itself.

Mediating concepts point to subjective and inter-subjective and objective, systemic aspects of social reality. One example of this kind of mediating notion is 'career' which refers both to subjective experiential and systemic organisational context of the labour market. Another example is 'emotional labour' referring to the staged emotionality service workers do as part of their work. This concept refers to both subjective experiential contexts and organisational contexts such as for example the labour market. Mediating concepts often refer to how particular kinds of social actors operate strategic positions in ways to influence the effects of the systemic/structural aspects of social life. People often engaged in such mediating activity can be leaders in business, critics, agents, employers or other kind of professionals. Mediating concepts refer both to systemic aspects – situation and context – and to certain aspects of conduct, such as attitudes and engagement of such mediator people. These attitudes and engagements reflect to a considerable degree the systemic aspects of social life – and at times they transform these aspects. Mediating concepts therefore have to operate on both 'subjective adequacy' and analytical/objective criteria to be useful. In my analysis of how managers handled emotions I suggest that the managerial work can be seen as an activity that bridges the institutional context (organisational culture/system) and the situation of interaction. I argue that the observed attentive and caring managerial style contributed to a potential transformation of the existing dominant hierarchical system. General theory refers to social reality and practice in an indirect and more abstract way. Such theory is useful because it can explain certain over-all features of the studied practice and give structure to the empirical research field. This type of theory describes what characterises social activity and social institutions generally but also the links between the various elements or building blocks of the social life. Social theory is therefore not what some calls meta-theory in the sense of theorising about theory. The particular feature of general concepts or theory is that it can be neither confirmed nor rejected by empirical data. It is not really possible to carry out an empirical test of the basic propositions in e.g. Habermas' theory of communicative rationality or Giddens' theory of structuration, as the phenomena referred to in these general notions cannot be. On the basis of the multi-layered conceptualisation of social practice and reality outlined here, one can reflect on the more specific character of the concepts applied in the research process. The point is to recognise the theoretical perspectives applied in the analytical work.

³ 'Despite what has long been thought, suppression - say, of verbal or physical aggression when we are angry - is not necessarily bad for us on any given occasion, though chronic or recurrent suppression might be. But not because a bottled-up emotion might explode. Suppression of the emotions keeps us from learning about

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ourselves. And just because we control the expression of emotion does not mean that we fail to experience it' (Lazarus and Lazarus 1994:295).